

## *Duns Scotus on Divine Substance and the Trinity*

RICHARD CROSS

Oriel College, Oxford

Charting a course between modalism (the belief that there is just one divine person) and tritheism (the belief that there are three divine substances or Gods) has long been the major problem for Trinitarian theology. In what follows, I shall discuss part of the contribution made by Duns Scotus to this problem. I will argue that, with a few small modifications, Scotus presents a coherent account of the doctrine of three persons in one substance, and thus that this doctrine can be coherently defended against both modalism and tritheism. I do not intend to give a complete presentation of Scotus's Trinitarian thought.<sup>1</sup>

The background to the issue I am going to look at here can be found specifically in the condemnation, at Lateran IV, of Joachim of Fiore's claim that the theory proposed by Peter Lombard—according to which, the divine essence is a *thing* (*summa res*)—is heretical. Joachim argued that the unity of the divine essence is no more than aggregative: God is a collection of three persons. This “social” sort of view of the Trinity was condemned at Lateran IV, which canonized instead Lombard's view that the divine essence is one thing that “neither begets nor is begotten, and does not proceed.”<sup>2</sup> One way of understanding this sort of claim would be to adopt the sort of

1. For discussions of Scotus's Trinitarian thought in the literature, see most notably Friedrich Wetter, *Die Trinitätslehre des Joannes Duns Scotus*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967); and, most recently, Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus*, Great Medieval Thinkers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 5.

2. Lateran IV, const. 2 (*The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols. [London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1:231), referring to Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in Quatuor Libris Distinctae* 1.5, nn. 1, 6 (3d ed., 2 vols. Spicilegium Bonaventurianum [Grottaferrata: Collegium Sancti Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971–1981], 1:80, 82). Joachim's worry about Peter Lombard's view is that it results in God's being not a Trinity but a quaternity (of three persons and one substance): on Joachim and the controversy in general, see Fiona Robb, “Intellectual Tradition and Misunderstanding: The Development of Academic Theology on the Trinity in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries” (Ph.D. diss., University College, London, 1993). Arguments against a quaternity have a small but interesting place in the history of Trinitarian thought: see, in addition to the famous example in Augustine (*Epistola* 120.2.7 [CSEL, 34.2:710]), the discussion

theory found almost universally in the later Greek Fathers from Gregory of Nyssa onward. On this theory, the divine substance or essence is what modern philosophers would term an “immanent universal”: one and the same singular object repeated in each of its exemplifications.<sup>3</sup> Another way of understanding the claim would involve denying that the divine substance is a universal. Augustine took this line, claiming that whatever we say about the divine substance, we should not think of it as any sort of genus or species. And his reason for this was that, if we think of the divine substance as a genus or species, we would not be able to block the inference to three Gods—precisely the problem that Gregory of Nyssa felt so strongly.<sup>4</sup>

The second, Augustinian, way of understanding the divine essence was adopted almost unanimously in the West in the middle ages. Access to the Greek theory was limited in effect to the works of John of Damascus, and the most important text from the Damascene needed to see how the divine essence could be thought of as a universal were not available until the Reformation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that Augustine’s theory predominated. Aquinas’s approach, for example, is typical; he expressly rejects the view that the divine essence is any sort of universal, most notably on the grounds that “no universal is numerically the same in the things beneath it,” whereas “the divine essence is numerically the same in many persons.”<sup>6</sup>

in sec. 1 of Richard Cross, “Perichoresis, Deification, and Christological Predication in John of Damascus,” *Mediaeval Studies*, 62 (2000): 69–124.

3. On this, see Cross, “Perichoresis,” sec. 1; and Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, suppl. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 46 (Brill: Leiden, Boston, and Cologne, 2000), chap. 2.

4. See Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.11 (CCSL, 50A:263, esp. ll. 41–52).

5. The text is *Contra Iacobitas* 9–10 (John of Damascus, *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Patristische Texte und Studien*, 22 [Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1981], p. 113). *Contra Iacobitas* was first translated into Latin by Turrianus in 1603; see Kotter’s introduction to his edition of the text, p. 104.

6. Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* [= *In Sent.*] 1.19.4.2 (ed. P. Mandonnet and M. F. Moos, 4 vols. [Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–1947], 1:483). Aquinas concedes that the divine essence is like a universal in the sense that it can be predicated (*In Sent.* 1.19.3.2 ad 1 [1:483–4]), and it could perhaps be argued that the difference here is merely terminological: Aquinas, unlike Scotus, using the term ‘universal’ to mean both the concept and the extramental common nature. But there is certainly a difference in the philosophy, since Scotus holds that *every* universal, including the concept, is “numerically the same in the things beneath it,” and the theological consequence is that Aquinas, as I have just shown, is quite explicit in denying what Scotus wants to affirm, namely that the divine nature is a universal. Aquinas’s theory of universals does not leave the space for this crucial element from the Eastern tradition. For Scotus’s contrasting claim, that the divine essence is a universal, see sec. 1 below. I am very grateful to Isabel Iribarren for discussion on Aquinas and for a thorough sweep of Thomist texts. Iribarren’s important ongoing research into early fourteenth-century Trinitarian theology shows the extent to which even the theories of the Dominican theologians Durandus of St. Pourçain and Hervaeus Natalis polarize into respectively Thomist and Scotist views on this question—a very surprising conclusion, given that the standard presentation of the

Scotus adopts a theory that is much closer to that found in the Greek Fathers. This strikes me as accidental, because I do not see how Scotus could have had access to a clear form of the Greek theory.<sup>7</sup> It is, however, a happy accident as Scotus is able to construct an account of the doctrine of the Trinity that is conceptually compelling and philosophically coherent. This seems to me to be no mean achievement, though, of course, the ultimate success of the theory is—as with all Trinitarian speculation—open to dispute.

Augustine's problem, as is well-known, is how to avoid modalism. Augustine adopts the arguably desperate expedient of claiming that, although there are three persons in the Trinity, this claim is made merely so that we can affirm three "somethings."<sup>8</sup> The problem for the Greek tradition lies in showing how there are not three Gods. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, solves this by the equally desperate expedient of claiming that, just as there are three divine persons but only one God, there are many human persons but, in some sense, only one man, too.<sup>9</sup> As I have shown in a previous paper, "Divisibility, Communicability, and Predictability in Duns Scotus's Theories of the Common Nature" (hereafter *DCP*), Scotus has the resources for a far more nuanced development of the Greek account of the divine essence, since he holds that only the divine essence is a numerically singular immanent universal.<sup>10</sup> All other essences are numerically many, *divided* into parts or instantiations of the same sort.

In this article, I would like to deal with two strictly Trinitarian issues that could not be dealt with in the earlier paper. I shall presuppose the results of my earlier investigation in *DCP* here. The two issues that I shall address are the following: in what sense according to Scotus can we speak of the three divine persons as one *substance* and one *God* (section 2); and what according to Scotus are the theological consequences of accepting his claim that the divine nature is an immanent universal (section 3). However, before I do this, I shall summarize briefly the results of *DCP* (section 1).

---

matter presents Hervaeus (as he presented himself) as criticizing Durandus for his departures from the theology and philosophy of Thomas.

7. Although, see Scotus, *Ordinatio* [= *Ord.*] 2.3.1.1, nn. 39–40 (*Opera Omnia*, ed. C. Balić et al. [Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950–], 7:408; ET in Paul Vincent Spade, ed., *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham* [Indianapolis, Ind., and Cambridge: Hackett, 1994], pp. 66–67), where Scotus shows that he is clearly aware of John's claim that the divine essence is like an immanent universal.

8. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.9 (CCSL, 50A:259).

9. See Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablabium* (*Opera Dogmatica Minora*. Pars 1, ed. Fridericus Mueller [= *Opera*, 3/1], [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958], p. 41, ll. 2–5, 10–12).

10. Richard Cross, "Divisibility, Communicability, and Predictability in Duns Scotus's Theories of the Common Nature," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2004).

## I. UNIVERSALS AND THE DIVINE SUBSTANCE

In *DCP*, I showed how Scotus adopts two different theories of universals: a moderate version, applicable to all categorial items—created substances and accidents—and a more extreme version, applicable to the divine essence. In brief, the distinction is between a nature that is itself divisible into numerically many instances (every created nature) and a nature that is numerically one thing, exemplified in its *supposita* (the divine essence). The reason for this belief about the divine essence is that Scotus accepts both that God is a Trinity, and that there can be only numerically one God. The divine essence is thus a numerically singular or individual object that is communicable to—predicable of—the *supposita* that fall under it—that is, the divine persons. No created nature is numerically one in this way. A created nature in itself has “less-than-numerical” unity, and, as instantiated, it receives the accidental modification of being actually numerically many. For all these claims, see for example the following passage:

What is common in creatures is not really one in the way in which what is common is really one in the divine. For there the common is singular and indivisible because the divine nature itself is of itself a “this.” And it is plain that with creatures no universal is really one in that way. For to maintain this would be to maintain that some created, undivided nature would be predicated of many individuals by a predication that says “this is this,” just as it is said that the Father is God and the Son is the same God.<sup>11</sup>

Created natures are communicable or predicable too, but only under the accidental modification of being mental objects or thought objects: numerically singular objects signifying the individuals that fall under them.<sup>12</sup> Scotus claims that seeing the divine nature as an extramental universal can solve sophistical arguments of the form “This God is the Father, the Son is this God, therefore the Son is the Father”: the solution is to see that the divine essence, referred to as “this God,” is a universal; the sophistical argument gains its force from the false understanding that “the identity of the extremes in the conclusion is concluded as if the medium [viz. ‘God’] were a ‘this something.’”<sup>13</sup>

The crucial claim is that universals—whether merely concepts or extramental objects—are numerically singular and thus *individuals*. Hence the universality of the divine essence, as outlined in the passage just quoted,

11. Scotus, *Ord.* 2.3.1.1, n. 39 (7:408; *Spade*, p. 66), cited with further comment as [11] in *DCP*.

12. See passages [1], [3], and [4] of *DCP*.

13. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.2.2.1–4, nn. 414–15 (Vatican, 2:363–64). The whole passage is cited as [15] in *DCP*, along with a fuller discussion.

entails the individuality of that essence. I demonstrate in *DCP* why we should not think of this seemingly egregious claim as in any sense paradoxical, and I shall return to it in section 2 below, because it has some startling Trinitarian consequences. Scotus's claim is that, generally, communicability and predicability are relations that hold between singulars (individuals): since there are in principle no blocks on the communicability and predicability of an extramental universal, such a universal is an individual.

Martin Tweedale nicely summarizes the Scotist teaching on the Trinity:

Scotus's theory of the Trinity rests on treating the divine essence as having a commonness to the three Persons very much like that a universal has to the particulars under it, even though the essence is an individual. . . . In Scotus's discussion of universals, he recognizes that on the Aristotelian philosophical principles he usually accepts one individual cannot be common to many. To allow otherwise is to fall into the sort of extreme realism Aristotle was anxious to reject. But in the divine Trinity, Scotus proposes, something of this sort occurs.<sup>14</sup>

Because he accepts Aristotle's arguments against extreme realism, Tweedale regards the resultant theological position as confused.<sup>15</sup> (Of course, the sort of realism that is relevant to Scotus's presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity is the view that there are immanent universals, not the more standard forms of Platonism rejected by Aristotle.)

It is far from clear to me that we should think of extreme realism as necessarily confused, however. One way in which extreme realism would be logically incoherent would be if it violated the indiscernibility of identicals. For example, suppose extreme realism is true, according to which there are immanent universals, numerically singular individual objects embedded in many different *supposita*. On this theory, it is true that two *supposita*,  $x$  and  $y$ , are  $\varphi$ , and that  $\varphi$  is numerically one and the same object. But if  $\varphi$  is numerically one, it will follow that  $x$  and  $y$  are numerically one also, which is contrary to the supposition. Extreme realism is, thus, false.

As I have shown in section 2 of *DCP*, Scotus's arguments against extreme realism are not of this sort, however, and the arguments do not attempt to demonstrate that extreme realism is logically incoherent. Rather, the

14. Martin M. Tweedale, *Scotus vs. Ockham—A Medieval Dispute over Universals*, 2 vols. (Lewiston, Queenstown, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press), 2:490.

15. With reference to the Trinitarian theory that I am discussing here, Tweedale comments:

The bizarre mystery of the divine Trinity illustrates what would have to be the case for universality in Scotus's sense to be mind-independent. Those like myself who have no sympathy with this sort of theology, along with those who like Ockham find the Trinity logically paradoxical but still believe it, can say that, if this is what is required, *real* universality is a notion that defies the most basic canons of clear thought. If realism has to hold this, it is refuted already. (Tweedale, *Scotus vs. Ockham*, 2:650)

arguments attempt to show that extreme realism is factually inapplicable to any creaturely essence. The arguments fall broadly into three groups, and I discuss them in section 3 of *DCP*. The first argument is that any immanent universal is infinite, and thus that no finite, creaturely, essence can be an immanent universal. The second is that there are certain accidents that all exemplifications of an immanent universal necessarily share, and the third is that there are certain operations that all exemplifications of an immanent universal necessarily share. By ‘accident’ and ‘operation’ here I mean numerically one and the same accident, and numerically one and the same operation: every exemplification of an immanent universal, for example, will have exactly the same size (if it has size at all) as every other exemplification, and for at least some of its operations will perform exactly the same operations as every other exemplification. Since no creatures are like this, no creaturely essence is an immanent universal. However, the divine essence is an immanent universal, since God is numerically one. There are thus, for the divine persons, some operations that they necessarily share. I will discuss this consequence of the claim that the divine essence is an immanent universal in section 3 below. First, however, I want to show how, on the basis that the divine essence is an immanent universal, Scotus can accept that there is only one divine substance, and only one God, given that there are three divine persons.

## II. SUBSTANCE AND PERSONS IN THE TRINITY

Here, I will look at two issues, one metaphysical, one merely semantic. The metaphysical claim is that God is one *substance*; the semantic issue, which Scotus takes to be a direct consequence of God’s being just one substance, is that there is just one God. That Scotus believes that God is just one substance was made adequately clear in some of the passages quoted in section 2 of *DCP*. I do not want to spend any time on Scotus’s arguments for divine unicity, since that there can be no more than one God seems to me to be fairly easy to establish.<sup>16</sup> But how, if he is convinced that God is three persons, can Scotus hold that God is one substance? The basic answer is simple. Scotus believes that all (non-accidental) individuals are first substances, and all first substances individuals.<sup>17</sup> The (non-accidental) divine essence is numerically singular—an individual—so it is a first substance. Scotus holds further that the divine persons are not individuals, and thus not first substances. Thus, God is one substance.

Scotus uses this insight to deal with Joachim’s objection to Peter Lombard’s view. The objection is that if the divine essence is a thing, God

16. For Scotus on divine unicity, see Cross, *Duns Scotus*, pp. 27–29.

17. Individuals that are not accidents or accidental unities.

will be a quaternity of things: the three persons and the divine essence.<sup>18</sup> Scotus, after citation of Lateran IV's canonization of the Lombard's view, simply notes that the inference to a quaternity would be reasonable only if the divine essence were something really distinct from the three persons: perhaps a further person.<sup>19</sup> Positing that the essence is an immanent universal—a primary substance exemplified by the three persons—and that the persons are not primary substances at all, allows Scotus to block Joachim's inference.

Why should Scotus deny that the divine persons are individuals? The basic reason seems to be that Scotus understands all individuals to be, in principle, communicable, in the sense of being exemplifiable. The divine essence is a numerically singular (individual) object that is exemplified in the divine persons. Scotus holds that individuality is no block on exemplifiability, such that any individual is, *ceteris paribus*, exemplifiable. Given that all substantial individuals are substances, it will follow that not all exemplifications of a substantial nature are substances. It is (of course, by definition) the *incommunicable* that is non-exemplifiable. I will try to show in a moment why Scotus thinks that any individual is, *ceteris paribus*, exemplifiable. I will begin, however, with some evidence to show that Scotus does not accept that the divine persons are individuals or substances.<sup>20</sup>

When discussing the reality of the Trinitarian relations, Scotus makes these various points explicitly. An objector argues that the relations between the divine persons, if real, must be substances—a claim that is inconsistent with the orthodox view that there is only one substance in God, the divine essence.<sup>21</sup> Scotus replies:

When it is claimed further that the relation in the divine is substantial, my reply is this: Although the Philosopher distinguishes first substance from second substance in the *Categories* [5 (2<sup>a</sup> 12–19)] nevertheless in the case at hand the essence functions in both ways in so far as it is related to anything. To the extent that it is common it has the aspect of secondary

18. On this, see fn. 2 above.

19. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.5.1.un., n. 12 (Vatican, 4:16).

20. In his recent study of the Trinity, David Coffey draws attention to the “strange doctrine of Scotus that . . . because of the unity of nature the divine persons are not individuals” (Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], p. 168, n. 24). The doctrine is not strange, though perhaps the terminology is. On Scotus's terminology, any individual is in principle communicable (exemplifiable). What is odd about this is that the persons clearly are such that they cannot be divided into subjective parts, and we would naturally think that indivisibility or individuality were acceptable ways of talking about this feature of the persons. But Scotus resists this, presumably because of the close link in his mind between individuality and exemplifiability.

21. Scotus, *Quodlibetum* [= *Quod.*] 3, n. 11 (*Opera Omnia*, ed. Luke Wadding, 12 vols. [Lyons, 1639]; ET published as Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, ed. and trans. Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter [Princeton, N.J., and London: Princeton University Press, 1975], p. 70).

substance. Not however in the sense that it is a universal, that is, divisible or able to be multiplied, for it is common by a community that is real. . . . It has the characteristic of primary substance, however, to the extent that it is just this being or singular, for the divine essence is singular of itself. I do not say that it is incommunicable being, for this would imply imperfection. But apart from the essence in God, there is no other feature of substance in any sense of the term unless it would be incommunicability. In the divine, however, incommunicability cannot have the meaning of substance *per se*, according to the common opinion. . . . Whatever is there [viz. in God], not only substance but also what is absolute, is communicable. It is clear then that a relation in God does not have the characteristic of substantiality, but only that of incommunicability, which is neither the meaning of secondary substance, nor that of primary substance—so far as its perfection is concerned, which is to be a “this” or individual. For this the [divine] essence has of itself.<sup>22</sup>

The divine essence is communicable (and to this extent like secondary substance).<sup>23</sup> However, the divine essence is indivisible (and, to this extent, it is a primary substance). The divine persons, although they are exemplifications of divine nature, are not substances or individuals, since they are incommunicable (and everything that is individual is *ceteris paribus* communicable or exemplifiable). The only indivisible thing in God is the divine essence.<sup>24</sup>

Given that there is an immanent universal, and that this immanent universal is a primary substance, Scotus may be forgiven for wondering whether it might not be the case that any primary substance could in principle be exemplified. In fact, there is a clear theological case in which a created primary substance is exemplified by a person extrinsic to it: the Incarnation, where, according to Scotus, an individual human substance fails to be a *suppositum* on the grounds that it depends on, or is communicated to

22. Scotus, *Quod*. 3, n. 17 (Wadding, 12:82–83; Alluntis and Wolter, pp. 74–75). This view has the fortunate result of allowing Scotus to block any argument to a quaternity of individuals—the divine essence plus the three divine persons. There simply are not four things in God describable univocally as ‘substances’. (I will show in a moment how Scotus’s position entails that the term ‘God’, predicated respectively of the persons and of the essence, fails to be univocal.)

23. Note that Scotus here uses ‘universal’ to refer to a *divisible* nature: In this sense, the divine nature is not a universal—it is not a Scotist common nature: on the definition of ‘divisibility’ and its distinction from true universality, see section 1 of *DCP*.

24. Doubtless, part of the reason for Scotus’s association of substance with indivisibility as such (rather than with incommunicability) is Aristotle’s association of primary substance with individuality: see Aristotle, *Cat.* 5 (2<sup>a</sup>11–14). But, of course, Aristotle associates individuality with impredicability—which, as I argued in *DCP*, is associated by Scotus most closely with the notion of incommunicability. So Aristotelian considerations are not sufficient to arrive at Scotus’s association of substance specifically with individuality.

(is exemplified by) a divine *suppositum*.<sup>25</sup> (Note that, relative to the divine person, this individual human nature is more like a Platonic universal than an immanent universal: the human nature is extrinsic to the person, and the person exemplifies this nature in virtue of a relation between them that is itself really distinct from both the person and the nature.)<sup>26</sup>

Scotus considers too whether such a substance could be exemplified by more than one divine *suppositum*. Some of Scotus's contemporaries— notably Henry of Ghent and William of Ware—believe that there is no objection to this scenario, because the claim is not that the human nature is in any sense identical with the two divine *supposita* (a claim that would raise problems of a Leibnizian sort), but merely that the nature extrinsically depends on two such *supposita*. Scotus is not so sanguine, since, as he rightly sees, problems of a Leibnizian kind appear to arise whether or not the nature is somehow intrinsic to the persons. For, as we shall see, the exemplification of this divine substance is sufficient for being identified as this God, and, by analogy, the exemplification of this human substance is sufficient for being identified as this man. If two divine persons exemplify one and the same human substance, then they will be one and the same man.<sup>27</sup> As I will demonstrate below, Scotus has the tools to deal with the Trinitarian identity problem, and there is no reason for him not to apply that same solution in the case of the exemplification of a human substance. In fact, Scotus's

25. For dependence, see *Ord.* 3.1.1, n. 3 (Wadding, 7:6); *Quod.* 19, n. 13 (Wadding, 12:502–3; Alluntis and Wolter, 428 [n. 19.40]); for the equivalent relation of communicability, see for the communicability of Christ's individual human nature, see *Ord.* 3.1.1, n. 10 (Wadding, 7:16); *Quod.* 19, n. 11 (Wadding, 12:502; Alluntis and Wolter 427–28 [nn. 19.33–35]). For further details on Scotus's Christology, see Cross, *Duns Scotus*, ch. 9; Maria Burger, *Personalität im Horizont absoluter Prädestination: Untersuchungen zur Christologie des Johannes Duns Scotus und ihrer Rezeption in modernen theologischen Ansätzen*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, NF, 40 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994); and my monograph, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

26. It is for this reason that Scotus claims that divine nature is communicable *ut quod*, whereas the human nature is communicable only *ut quo*—here, as an individual that is extrinsic to the *suppositum* to which it is communicated (by which it is exemplified): see *Ord.* 3.1.1, n. 10 (Wadding, 7:16). According to Scotus, Plato's theory of universals “posits that an idea is a certain substance separated from motion and accidental accidents, containing nothing in itself other than a separate specific nature, as perfect as possible, perhaps having in itself the properties of the species (otherwise nothing would be known of it)”: *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* [= *In Metaph.*] 7.18, n. 14 (*Opera Philosophica* [= *OPh*], ed. Girard, J. Etzkorn and others [St Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1997–], 4:340–41). Not surprisingly, Scotus does not think that such disembodied forms are incoherent, though he does believe that they are generally superfluous to requirements: see *In Metaph.* 7.18, n. 14 (4:341). Clearly, the doctrine of the Incarnation provides Scotus with a scenario in which there an extrinsic universal (Christ's individual human nature) that is not superfluous to requirements.

27. Scotus, *Ord.* 3.1.2, n. 4 (Wadding, 7:33–34).

objection to the multiple exemplification of one and the same human substance turns on the finitude of that substance: as I have noted, and discuss at length in section 3 of *DCP*, Scotus believes that only (intensively) infinite first substances can be multiply exemplified.<sup>28</sup>

We might think that there is a further consequence to Scotus's theory, which is that not all primary substances are property bearers. Some primary substances—specifically, the divine nature—turn out to be ones-of-many: *properties of supposita*. Thus, as we have seen, Scotus is explicit about the status of the divine nature as having feature both of primary *and of secondary* substancehood. (Note that secondary substances here, as understood by Scotus, are *communicable* [predicable], whereas primary substances are *indivisible*: hence anything that is both communicable [predicable] and indivisible will have the characteristics both of primary and of secondary substancehood.) This, however, would be a misunderstanding. Scotus often holds that there is a sense in which the divine substance is a property-bearer. Presumably, he thinks of it as both a property (of the divine persons) and a property-bearer. This is wholly in line with Scotus's general account of immanent universals. When rejecting the claim that created natures are immanent universals, two of Scotus's arguments rely on seeing an immanent universal as the subject of certain necessary properties. As I have discussed this in detail in section 3 of *DCP*, I will not cover the material again here.

What sorts of property does Scotus think the divine nature possesses? According to Scotus, the properties of the divine essence are the divine attributes.<sup>29</sup> Scotus does not mean to suggest that the divine attributes are part of the intension of the divine essence. Neither does he mean that the divine attributes are accidents of the divine essence. He clearly thinks of the divine attributes as analogous to Aristotelian *propria*—necessary but non-defining properties of a substance. Thus, there are two related points being made here: first, the divine substance is the subject of various attributes; second, it is the substance and not the *supposita* that is properly the subject of these attributes. I am not sure what the motivation for either of these beliefs might be. The first of these might be an attempt, given Scotus's theory of univocity, to preserve some sense of divine ineffability. We can know of God's attributes; however, God's substance remains mysterious. In his discussion of the issue, Scotus holds that this is true for *any* substance, created or uncreated: we can know a substance's *propria*, and we can know that it is a being, yet that is all; we cannot know its essence. So, as Scotus notes, God is no more ineffable than anything else, as literally everything is ineffable.<sup>30</sup>

28. On all of this, including discussion of the positions of Henry of Ghent and William of Ware, see excursus 2 of my *Metaphysics of the Incarnation*.

29. On this, see Cross, *Duns Scotus*, pp. 43–44.

30. For the major discussion of the knowability of God's essence or substance, see Scotus, *Ord.* 1.22. un., nn. 5–9 (Vatican, 5:343–46). I am not sure whether

What about the second claim, that it is the divine substance, and not the *supposita*, that is properly the subject of divine attributes? This seems to me a bit more complex. Clearly, one fact that Scotus needs to safeguard is the *numerical unity* of each divine attribute. There is numerically one omnipotent substance. To this extent, talk of the substance as the subject of the divine attributes appears harmless. (As I will demonstrate below, Scotus argues from the fact that the divine essence is a one-of-many that we can legitimately speak of one God even in the face of the Trinitarian doctrine.) In fact, however, omnipotence, as much as the divine substance, is a one-of-many, an immanent universal exemplified by each divine person. So we should not follow Scotus in thinking of the divine substance as the real subject of the divine attributes. What we should allow, at least if we want to follow Scotus's hyper-scientific view of theology, is that the possession of omnipotence is *explained by* possession of the divine substance.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of God, then, there is a distinction between person and substance, such that there are three persons and one substance, one God. On Scotus's account of the divisibility of created natures, there is no such distinction: there are as many human persons as there are human substances (as many human persons as there are human beings).<sup>32</sup> This is because

---

Scotus clings to the undesirable position that essences cannot be known because of worries about the capacity of Aristotelian science to get at what is really there, or because of other unknown theological or philosophical considerations. Puzzlingly, Scotus is perfectly happy to affirm elsewhere that we can know the *ratio quidditativa* of a created essence: see Scotus, *Ord.* 2.16. un., n. 21 (Wadding, 6:774). Since in this passage Scotus claim that 'animality' is contained in the *ratio quidditativa* of 'humanity' in much the same way as a *proprium* is contained in an essence; perhaps Scotus wants to claim that Aristotelian definitions yield no more than the *propria* of an essence.

31. Scotus holds that *theologia in se*, God's knowledge of theological truths is scientific: facts about God are really scientific in the sense that some of these facts are genuinely explained by other facts. See Cross, *Duns Scotus*, pp. 157–58, n. 32 and the literature cited there.

32. This claim is not quite correct, because Scotus sees the doctrine of the Incarnation as furnishing him with a case of a human substance (the assumed human nature of Christ), which is nevertheless not a human person. Christ's human nature is a substance—it is an individual human nature, a division or instantiation of common human nature—but it is not a person, since it is not the ultimate subject of its essential and accidental features. Like the divine essence, this individual human nature is exemplified by a divine person. For Christ's human nature as a substance, see Scotus, *Ord.* 3.1.1, n. 5 (Wadding, 7:10): "the human nature, which is a substance . . ."; and *Ord.* 3.1.3, n. 3 (Wadding, 7:45) (referring to *Ord.* 1.12.1, nn. 45–46 [Vatican, 5:50–51]), where Scotus claims that one divine person assuming more than one human nature would be many human beings, on the grounds that nouns such as 'man' refer to substances, not *supposita*. The claim that persons and *supposita* are ultimate subjects is entailed by their not being in any sense communicable—like Aristotle's πρώται οὐσίαι, they are impredicable. In this sense, the Trinitarian and Christological discussions parallel each other exactly. (There are of course differences: for a common nature to be predicable is a very different thing from an individual

human nature/substance is divided up into its different instantiations: there are as many (divided) instances of such a nature as there are persons or *supposita*.<sup>33</sup>

Scotus describes in some detail the semantics that he believes to be required to support this metaphysical claim. The result of his discussion—though it is not a result that Scotus explicitly states—is that the term ‘God’ is equivocal. There is one sense of ‘God’ used when referring to the divine substance, and another used when referring to a divine person.<sup>34</sup> I will discuss these two different senses first, and then consider more closely Scotus’s claims about the correct way of counting the referents of substance-sortals (substantives picking out a kind of thing—gods, people, cats).

In the first sense of ‘God,’ ‘God’ signifies the divine nature as such,<sup>35</sup> and supposit for (refers to) the concrete substance that is this nature:

‘God’ [in a proposition such as “God is Father, Son, and Spirit”] stands for ‘this God’ in so far as it is a being in virtue of deity, and not for any *suppositum* properly speaking in which the divine nature exists.<sup>36</sup>

---

nature’s being predicable, and for the divine individual essence or substance to be predicable is a very different thing from a created individual nature’s being predicable. Equally, Scotus is rightly reluctant, for theological reasons, to think of Christ’s assumed human nature as a man—so Christ’s human nature is an exception to his claim that substance-sortals refer to substances.) Note that substances in this account are individual natures: either the infinite (and thus indivisible) divine nature, or an individuated (and thus indivisible) created nature (where individuation, for Scotus, is explained in terms of the possession of an indivisible haecceity). So a created substance is a nature plus a haecceity; an uncreated substance is the infinite divine essence.

33. There is a more theologically significant result of Scotus’s position too, which is that he does not need to appeal to any account of the persons as subsistent relations in order to give an account of the unity of the divine substance (given that there is more than one divine person). Scotus himself was fully aware of this consequence, and, at least early in his life, accepted that the absolute-property theory of the Trinity—according to which the divine persons are constituted not by relations but by some other non-relational feature—was theologically preferable to the relation theory. Later, force of controversy led him to profess the relation theory on the grounds of Patristic authority. (For the whole issue, see Cross, *Duns Scotus*, pp. 65–67, and the literature cited there.) I would judge this to be a benefit, since scholastic theories of relations as reducible to monadic properties do not look on the face of it true. This does not, of course, entail that the divine persons cannot be related to each other in all sorts of ways. Neither, crucially from a theological point of view, does it entail that one person could exist without another. Necessary existence is certainly a property of any divine person. All it entails is that these relations are not constitutive of the identity of a divine person.

34. This is not a startling conclusion, since every Trinitarian theology has to accept both that the Father is God and that the Trinity is God.

35. See Scotus, *Ord.* 1.4.1. un., text. int. (Vatican, 4:382, ll. 3–4): “Deus . . . respondet adaequate deitati.”

36. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.4.2. un., n. 11 (Vatican, 4:5–6). On supposition in Scotus, see Costantino Marmo, “Ontology and Semantics in the Logic of Duns Scotus,” in *On*

Scotus draws an analogy with the reference of the concrete accidental term ‘color’ on the supposition—for him, counterfactual—that color is an immanent universal. ‘This color,’ in such a case, supposits for the numerically singular universal accident:

An example: “this” color, a singular existent, does not involve in itself the notion of *suppositum*, for the proper notion of *suppositum* cannot be found in accidents, and although it exists in the *suppositum* of a substance, nevertheless, in so far as it is understood with out that substance in a *suppositum*—existent as this color—it can be the principle of real operation: just as if the same whiteness were to be in three surfaces, its would have one real act, namely, one feature of diffusing [light]. And if you ask me about the truth of the proposition “This color diffuses”—[namely] what ‘color’ stands for—I say that it supposits for its primary significate, for example, for *this* existing color, and not for any color inferior to this color, for example, for this color in this surface or that.<sup>37</sup>

In the second sense of ‘God,’ God signifies the divine nature “as it is made to be predicated of a *suppositum*,”<sup>38</sup> and supposits for any divine *suppositum*: “Terms . . . taken concretely supposit for *supposita*.”<sup>39</sup> As we saw above, it is the second sense of ‘God’ that Scotus uses to block sophistical arguments of the form “This God is the Father, the Son is this God, therefore the Son is the Father”: the divine essence is an immanent universal predicable of the divine persons. It is thus this second sense of ‘God’ that Scotus appeals to in order to block Trinitarian modalism. ‘God’ signifies the divine nature as predicated of a *suppositum*; ‘God,’ accordingly, supposits for a divine person.

In this second sense of ‘God,’ we would expect it to function as a count-noun such that each person is (a) God, and that there are three Gods. In fact, Scotus wants to deny that ‘God’ can function as a count-noun in this way: we can never use substance-sortals to count divine persons. This

---

*the Medieval Theory of Signs*, ed., Umberto Eco and Costantino Marmo, Foundations of Semiotics 21 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989), pp. 168–80. Note that I have up to this point spoken as if God’s substance is his nature; however, Scotus strictly wants to make a distinction here: God’s substance (i.e., the substance *God*) has the divine nature. God is an instance (necessarily the only instance) of the divine nature; persons are exemplifications of this instance. I ignore this rather subtle point in what follows, since it makes no difference to the argument.

37. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.4.2. un., n. 12 (Vatican, 4:6). On the signification of concrete accidental terms in Scotus, see Sten Ebbesen, “Concrete Accidental Terms: Late Thirteenth-Century Debates about Problems Relating to such Terms as ‘Album,’” in *Meaning and Inference in Medieval Philosophy: Studies in Memory of Jan Pinborg*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Synthese Historical Library 32 (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer, 1988), pp. 132–34; also Perler, “Duns Scotus on Signification,” pp. 115–17.

38. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.4.2. un., n. 9 (Vatican, 4:4).

39. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.4.1. un., text. int. (Vatican, 4:382, 1.29). See also e.g. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.5.1. un., n. 17 (Vatican, 4:17): “Deus supponit pro Patre.”

is a semantic point, and it is (for that matter) arbitrary. But there is a metaphysical principle that we can invoke to help make sense of it: namely, that the divine nature, unlike any other extramental nature, is an immanent universal, and thus numerically one object: that is to say, the divine nature is a substance, and it makes some sort of sense to suppose that (in cases where substances and persons diverge) substance-sortals properly refer to substances, not persons. In fact, Scotus seems to claim that the general rule is that substance-sortals refer to substances, not persons: that is, substance-sortals refer to natures, either as *numerically one* or as *divided up between their instantiations* (depending on the sort of nature under discussion). Therefore, numerical terms added to such substantives pick out the number of substances.

Scotus makes all these points when discussing a particularly obscure question. Suppose that the Holy Spirit proceeds from (in technical language, is *spirated by*) Father and Son together. How many spirators are there, and how many *spirantes* are there? (Note that Latin allows the use of “bare” adjectives in a way that English discourages.) The question is obscure in the sense that there is no one substance that spirates the Holy Spirit (not the divine essence, since Father and Son are only two out of three exemplifications of this essence, and not the aggregate of Father and Son, since this is not a substance.) But the answer allows us to see his theory with about as much clarity as he ever presents it.

According to Scotus, Father and Son are one spirator of the Holy Spirit (as I have just noted, ‘spirator’ functions as if it were a substance-sortal here):

When a numerical term is added to a substantive, as if we say “two spirators,” the adjectival numerical term [viz. “two”] immediately has a substantive on which it depends, since an adjective determines that on which it depends. Therefore the significate of its substantive is denoted to be [plurally] numbered.<sup>40</sup>

Because there is only one substance here, Father and Son are just one spirator. Thus, the general rule is that, when we count substances, we do just that: we do not count *supposita* as such. (Of course, created natures always coincide with *supposita*, although the way in which we would define what it is to be a nature will be different from the way in which we would define what it is to be a *suppositum*, such that the divergence is spelled out in terms of a distinction between indivisibility/individuality and incommunicability.)

Contrariwise, the Father and Son are indeed two *spirantes* (spirating persons, persons who spirate):

The [plural] enumeration of a determinable form [in the case of a determinable adjectival term and not of a substantival one is] on account

40. Scotus, *Ord.* 1.12.1, n. 46 (Vatican, 5:51).

of [the adjectival term's] association with a *suppositum*. When [an adjective numerical term—for example, 'two'] is added to a [determinable] adjective, as when we say "two *spirantes*," both [terms] . . . are dependent on a third on which they depend and which is determined by them. In the case at hand, this is 'someones' or 'persons,' as if we were to say "Three creating 'someones,'" or "three [creating] persons."<sup>41</sup>

According to Scotus, there are two divine persons spirating the Holy Spirit, and we can thus talk about two *spirantes*. However, according to Scotus, for example, 'two Gods' would refer to numerically two divine substances, and 'two human beings' to numerically two human substances. Factually, there are (at least) two human beings; so 'two human beings' has a genuine reference. Yet there is necessarily only one divine substance; so 'two Gods' can never refer to anything other than objects in a counterpossible state of affairs—it can never refer to anything in any actual or possible world. 'Person', of course (or at any rate, '*suppositum*'), does not, in an Aristotelian universe, pick out a natural kind.<sup>42</sup>

We can put the point in another way by recalling the equivocal senses of the noun 'God.' In the first sense, 'God' signifies the nature as predicable of a non-personal divine individual. In this sense, if we count gods, we count but one. In the second sense, the term signifies the divine nature as predicable of each divine person. In this sense, if we were to count gods, we would count three. But Scotus wants to block the propriety of this second usage by invoking a general rule about the counting of more than one instance of anything referred to by a substance-sortal. In any case, when we count more than one instance, we count substances, not *supposita*; in cases where the substances and the *supposita* do not coincide, we will thus fail to count *supposita*.

This might seem suspicious, since the divine persons are clearly exemplifications of the divine essence, and we might think that this is enough to make them gods. I think, however, that Scotus's strategy allows him to avoid this. Each divine person is an exemplification of the divine essence, and so each divine person is (a) God—that is what it means to be an exemplification of the divine essence. Yet there are not three Gods, since each divine person is an exemplification of numerically one divine substance. On this view, there is only one substance. The case of human beings is not analogous. Each human person is a human being; however, each human person is an instantiation of human nature in such a way that the nature is itself numerically many in its different instances: human nature in me is numerically distinct from human nature in you. So if we

41. *Ord.* 1.12.1, nn. 45–46 (Vatican, 5:51).

42. On this, see the discussion in the final section of chap. 7 of my *Metaphysics of the Incarnation*.

count human natures, we count many; if we count divine natures, we count one.<sup>43</sup>

43. As I pointed out above, there is no reason to suspect that the extreme realism being presupposed here in itself entails relative identity (although Scotus's semantics here would certainly require him to operate with a different logic from e.g. standard predicate calculus). So Scotus's Trinitarian theology can give an account of the numerical unity of the divine essence without appealing to such accounts of identity. This is so strongly opposed to the received wisdom about Trinitarian theology that it is probably worth discussing in a bit more detail. Richard Swinburne puts the objection with his customary lucidity:

If 'the Father', 'the Son', and 'the Spirit' are to have clear uses, then each must have associated with it a substance-sortal . . . ; they cannot have sortals associated with them which diverge in their subsequent applications. If 'the Father' is the name of a person who is not the same person as the Son or the Spirit, then it cannot also be the name of a God (or substance) who is the same God (or substance) as the Son and the Spirit (Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], pp. 187–88).

For an acceptance of relative identity in this context, see most notably Peter van Inwagen, "And Yet There Are Not Three Gods but One God," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. V. Morris (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), pp. 241–78.

Scotus's account of the sort of extreme realism that allows the divine substance to be numerically one and yet exemplified in the divine persons allows him to block the objections about identity; and his (possibly *ad hoc*) semantic rules for the use of substance-sortals allow him to claim that the Father is (a) God, while denying that we count substances along with persons. There is a sense of 'God' in which the Father is (a) God, but this is not the sense of 'God' that we use for the purposes of counting gods: it is not the sense of 'God' in which there is just one God. Grounding this is Scotus's claim that there is one divine substance: the divine substance is not divided into many gods. 'God' and 'person' are both count-nouns; however, they diverge in what they count, since not all substances are *supposita*, and not all *supposita* are substances. Note however that this divergence does not entail relative identity, but merely that the term 'God' fundamentally refers to a kind, not to a *suppositum*. In fact, I do not see why Scotus could not allow talk of "three (divine) substances" and "three Gods" (on different understandings of what substances are). The crucial Trinitarian claim Scotus makes—namely that the divine nature is an immanent universal, whereas every other nature is a divisible common nature—would sufficiently differentiate the Trinity of persons from instances of any other kind. After all, Scotus's crucial unicity claim is that the divine essence is *indivisible*, and he could reserve use of substance-sortals not for indivisible particulars but for incommunicable particulars. Nevertheless, there is no reason for Scotus to want to make these moves, given that he can provide a clear account of the divine nature—and not the divine persons—as a substance.

Further material is found in Scotus's discussion of the orthodox claim "God generates God"—clearly derived from the Nicene phrase "God from God." Scotus argues that the phrase is true, even though it is not true either that God generates *another* God (presumably such that there would be two gods), or that God generates himself. Scotus makes these claims by the application of his semantic rules about counting: there are not two gods, so "God generates another God" is false, since

In Scotus's account, the crucial difference between substantives such as 'God', 'man', and 'cat', on the one hand, and substantives such as 'person' and '*suppositum*' on the other, is that the former include reference to the *kind* of thing under discussion—hence the association of such terms, in Scotus's mind, with substances. This is perhaps *ad hoc*, but it does not matter that the strategy is such. After all, Scotus might reasonably have regarded the doctrine of the Trinity as a given, and one of his tasks as a theologian as explicating this doctrine. The consequence of his grammatical rule about the correct use of sortal terms for natural kinds is, at least when the domain is restricted to standard philosophical contexts, merely semantic, since substances and persons coincide in such contexts.

### III. TRINITARIAN COROLLARIES

According to Scotus, the divine essence/substance is an immanent universal. As I showed in section 3 of *DCP*, Scotus holds that anything that is an immanent universal is such that (C1) it is infinite, (C2) the *supposita* exemplifying it all have numerically the same quantities, and (C3) the *supposita* exemplifying it all have at least some operations that are numerically the same. Scotus believes that the divine essence is demonstrably infinite for many reasons unrelated to the Trinitarian considerations I have been focusing on.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, he believes that divine infinity entails unicity and thus indivisibility.<sup>45</sup> I do not want to say any more about this now, since, despite its historic interest, I do not think that there is much to say in favor of Scotus's claim that the divine essence is infinite. The divine essence is infinite in the loose sense of being limitless, and I do not think that such a limitlessness claim has much to do with the sort of metaphysical issue I have examined here.

(C2) is far more interesting, not least because there is a counterinstance to it. The incarnate Son is supposed to possess some genuine accidents that the Father and Spirit do not possess. He can be thirsty, for example,

---

'God' here is properly understood as referring to the divine substance; however, "God generates himself" is equally false, since 'God' here is understood as referring to a divine *suppositum*, just as it does in the orthodox proposition ("God generates God") under discussion. For the whole discussion, see *Ord.* 1.4.1.un., text. int. (Vatican, 4:381, l. 20–p. 383, l. 2). In all of these cases, it is clear that Scotus is applying his general semantic rules to allow us to disambiguate orthodox claims. Arguing that the term 'God' is equivocal allows Scotus to preserve orthodox Trinitarian language—and his own philosophically-derived insight that the divine substance is an immanent universal—without having to appeal to relative identity, or having to concede the incoherence of the doctrine: though Scotus will have to concede some new sort of Trinitarian logic if he wants to draw any further inferences in his basic Trinitarian semantics.

44. See briefly Cross, *Duns Scotus*, p. 26.

45. See Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 27, and texts [11] and [12] in *DCP*.

or—thinking of a quantitative accident—grow his fingernails long. Scotus will certainly need to modify his argument to (C2) to allow for this, so I take it that the argument to (C2), *as it stands*, is inconsistent with Christian doctrine. What suggestions can we make? The simplest one appears to draw on the Aristotelian distinction between essences and accidents: an essence consists of those properties that define a *kind*; an accident is any property that is not an essence or part of an essence. Clearly, on this sort of account, the classes of essences and natural kinds are co-extensive.<sup>46</sup> In the Incarnation, one person exemplifies two natures (belongs to two natural kinds), even though one of them is exemplified contingently.<sup>47</sup> Exemplifying such a second nature is sufficient for the possession of accidents not possessed by the divine persons who fail to exemplify such a nature. Given this, the argument to (C2) would need to be rephrased so that its domain includes only those persons who exemplify just one nature. The second person of the Trinity, after the Incarnation, exemplifies two natures.<sup>48</sup>

Scotus is explicit about the consequences of his theory for the question of divine action—that is, to the applicability of (C3) to the divine essence. He offers several arguments to show that the external action of the divine persons is undivided. The most interesting is perhaps the following:

In God the proximate formal ground for causation is intellect or will, or some act of theirs. But the three persons share the same intellect and the same single will, and consequently all have the same act of understanding and of volition and the same object, be it primary or

46. Scotus would not want to think of the divine essence as a natural kind definable in terms of genus and difference (see Scotus, *Ord.* 1.8.1.3, nn. 101–8 [Vatican, 4:200–203]); but he can clearly think of it as analogous to such a kind.

47. See Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N. Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 41: “The Christian who wants to preserve an orthodox theology with a consistent set of metaphysical commitments will reject the view that every nature is an essential property of an individual who exists in that nature.” Notice, too, that within the context of Scotus’s theory, it is only in the case of a *suppositum*’s being contingently something of such-and-such a kind that we can speak of the exemplification of a created substantial nature, rather than its instantiation (although note that, as I pointed out in *DCP*, any accidental nature will be both instantiated and exemplified: instantiated as particular properties, and exemplified by particular substances).

48. Uniquely, according to Christians—but there seems no reason why multiple incarnations might not be possible: see e.g. Scotus, *Ord.* 3.1.3, n. 2 (Wadding, 7:44). There is also a related objection to Scotus’s Trinitarian strategy that could usefully be considered here. Consideration of the objection will allow us to see something of the force of Scotus’s claim that certain accidents will inhere directly in an immanent universal rather than in its exemplifications. After all, there is a well known objection to Trinitarian views such as Scotus’s, and it is that one and the same substance—the divine essence—is the subject of contradictory properties: it is both inherited and not inherited—not inherited by the Father, and inherited by the Son. The solution, of course, is to note that *being inherited* must always be indexed: “inherited by *x*,” “not inherited by *y*.”

secondary. Therefore, the same proximate formal ground for causation is common to all three persons.<sup>49</sup>

Scotus holds (for reasons considered *DCP*) that the conclusion here entails the unified external action of the three divine persons.<sup>50</sup>

The argument to (C3) is, however, open to a Christological objection similar to that raised against the application of (C2) to the Trinity. While Scotus is aware of an objection related to the one I am about to consider, he does not address my objection. The objection that Scotus considers has to do with causing the Incarnation. The objection is that only the Son assumes human nature. However, since assuming human nature is an operation, the Son must be able to exercise some causal power not exercised by either of the other two divine persons.<sup>51</sup> Scotus replies that the efficient power that causes the human nature to be assumed is exercised by the whole Trinity; being the person to whom the nature is assumed (i.e., being incarnate) is not a causal thing at all.<sup>52</sup>

My objection is specifically about Christ's human activity, and is very similar to the objection to the applicability of (C2) just outlined. The second person of the Trinity possesses human activities and operations not possessed by the other two persons. This is equivalent to claiming that the second person of the Trinity causes human activities, activities that are not caused by the other persons of the Trinity. But we can reply to this in a way that parallels the reply to the objection to (C2). We must restrict the scope of (C3) just to those persons that exemplify just one essence. And if we do this, the Incarnation is no longer a counterinstance.

These replies to the objections to (C2) and (C3) might have a dangerously *ad hoc* look to them—strategies invented just to allow for the coherence of the Incarnation. But I do not think this should worry us. Without revelation (or at least the relevant theological speculation), we would have no information about the simultaneous exemplification of two natures in the

49. Scotus, *Quod.* 8, n. 6 (Wadding, 12:205–6; Alluntis and Wolter, 201–2).

50. For other arguments, see e.g. Scotus, *Ord.* 2. 1. 1, nn. 18–19 (Vatican, 7:10–11), discussed in Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 70–71. Scotus's argument to (C3) does not, of course, commit him to denying the possibility of different *internal* actions in the Trinity: the Father generates the Son for example, even though neither the Son nor the Spirit do. The reason is that such causal powers are possessed by the persons in virtue not of the divine essence but of their personal properties. As I noted above, there is no reason at all to suppose that all of the causal powers possessed by a *suppositum* are possessed in virtue of its nature. But any causal powers possessed equally by all three persons look to be candidates for being causal powers possessed in virtue of the divine essence, and thus (like the divine essence) for being *numerically one* in the three divine persons. Such actions, brought about in virtue of such numerically singular powers, are the undivided actions of the Trinity.

51. Scotus, *Ord.* 3.1.1, n. 17 (Wadding, 7:29).

52. Scotus, *Ord.* 3.1.1, n. 18 (Wadding, 7:29). This reply was a commonplace in medieval discussions of the Incarnation.

Incarnation. And without this, we would have no motivation to build the Incarnation into our speculations about universals. In accepting these speculations, of course, we have every reason to want to build the Incarnation into our theories of universals. Equally, the sort of operations that Scotus has in mind are precisely those that belong to something in virtue of its essence. Exemplifying a different nature as well as its essence is sufficient for the thing to have different operations too, over and above the operations that it has in virtue of its essence.

As we have seen, (C3), which identifies causing with the possession of an active causal power, allows us to see all three divine persons as the equal cause of all of creation. I take it that this account of causation, given sufficiently wide application, could allow us to account for the unity of will between the three persons: willing something just requires possession of a will that is active in a certain way. The three persons possess numerically one will; for each of them to will something is just for that will to be directed to a particular object. There is no sense here that the three persons would not be able to *control* their actions. For them to control their actions is just for their (numerically singular) will to be directed to a particular object. On this account, we could even accept the insight of some social Trinitarians that the three divine persons are three centres of consciousness.<sup>53</sup> The crucial thing is that their thoughts and actions would be, for reasons already outlined, *numerically* identical.

I should acknowledge that the feature of the Trinitarian doctrine I am sketching here—that the three persons are the equal causes of all actions *ad extra*—might strike a social Trinitarian as undesirable. Surely it violates Karl Rahner’s widely-accepted stipulation that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity—that is, that there are real distinctions in the actions of the divine persons *ad extra*?<sup>54</sup> Clearly, I can give an account of the unique actions of the incarnate second person of the Trinity. What about the traditional ascription of creation to the Father and (perhaps more notably) sanctification to the Spirit? It is not clear to me that we should prefer Rahner’s attempt to distinguish the actions of each person to the old medieval doctrine of appropriation (according to which creation and sanctification, for example, are operations of the whole Trinity, merely linguistically ascribed to Father and Spirit respectively). According to Rahner, the only reason for believing God to be a Trinity is that the divine persons all have different roles in

53. See Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 125–26, 192–93, and esp. 189, n. 26. I am assuming that talk about “centres of consciousness” is no more talk about natural kinds than talk about “persons” or “*supposita*” is. Thus, three centers of consciousness do not entail three substances. Equally, “being *this* center of consciousness” is a property had in virtue not of the divine essence (since only one divine person can be *this* center of consciousness; another divine person will be *that* center of consciousness), but in virtue of the personal property constitutive of a divine person.

54. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Doncel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970).

interacting with the created order. However, considered purely conceptually (setting aside the contingencies of the historical development of the doctrine) this does not seem to be right. Richard of St. Victor (and many of the other medievals, for that matter) presented arguments that count as considerations in favor of the existence of Rahner's immanent Trinity, setting aside any considerations of the economy of salvation.<sup>55</sup> While I do not think that these arguments could seriously play any role in an *a priori* argument in favor of the Trinity, I do think that they can help us see that the doctrine has intrinsic value even when considered apart from the economy. And, of course, the account of the doctrine that I am outlining here is wholly consistent with the crucial economic claim of Trinitarianism—that the Son alone is the incarnate redeemer.<sup>56</sup>

55. The most famous medieval attempt to show that God is a Trinity is that proposed by Richard of St. Victor. Richard argues that love is most perfectly shown in the love two persons share for a third. Given that God is perfect love, God must be a Trinity of persons. See Richard, *De Trinitate* [= *De Trin.*] 3.19 (ed. Jean Ribailier, *Textes Philosophiques du Moyen Age* 9 [Paris: J. Vrin, 1958], 154); see also *De Trin.* 3.11 (pp. 146–47); for a thorough discussion of Richard's arguments, see Niko den Bok, *Communicating the Most High: A Systematic Study of Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard of St Victor* (†1173), *Biblioteca Victorina* 7 (Paris and Turnhout: Brepols, 1996). See Scotus, *Ord.* 1.2.2.1–4, nn. 248–51 (Vatican, 2:276–77) for similar arguments proposed by Bonaventure, Henry of Ghent, and Richard of Middleton. Scotus, at least in his early *Lectura*, holds that the presence of productions internal to God “can be shown (*ostendi*) by reason, and perhaps [by a reason which is] more demonstrative than many demonstrations in metaphysics are”: Scotus, *Lect.* 1.2.2.1–4, n. 165 (Vatican, 16:167). I hope to explore some of these medieval arguments at a later date. For modern writers who are sympathetic to Richard of St Victor's argument, or something like it, see Swinburne, *The Christian God*, pp. 177–80; Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 90–92.

56. In fact, this theory of divine power could give an account of the separate creative and sanctifying powers of the Father and Spirit by the simple expedient of denying that powers of creation and sanctification are powers possessed in virtue of the divine essence. This would look to be an extremely undesirable move, however, since it comes close to entailing that *only* the Father can create, and *only* the Spirit can sanctify.