
The Metaphysics of the Trinity in Some Fourteenth Century Franciscans

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THE METAPHYSICS OF THE TRINITY IN SOME FOURTEENTH CENTURY FRANCISCANS¹

I. INTEGRATING AUTHORITIES

Thirteenth and fourteenth century philosophical theologians approached the doctrine of God with a double weight of tradition behind them. *Philosophically*, they were mindful of Aristotle's *Categories* as handled by Augustine in *De Trinitate*, as filtered through Boethius, and as developed by their own subsequent metaphysical interpretations. Fundamental to *Categories* metaphysics is the thesis that substance is the first category on which all the items in the other categories depend. Recall how substance itself divides into second substances (genera and species) and first substances or individuals. Second substances *are defined* by genus and differentia. Those here below are in principle sharable by

¹ I am indebted to Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., for calling my attention to this topic. My own interest in it is of a piece with a series of my other studies on the creative interaction between the doctrines of so-called "revealed" theology and thirteenth and fourteenth century developments of Aristotelian hylomorphism: "Relations, Subsistence, and Inherence, or Was Ockham a Nestorian in Christology?" *Nous* XVI (1982): 62-75; "The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in Some Fourteenth Century Franciscans," in *Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1985), 21-57; "Aristotle and the Sacrament of the Altar: A Crisis in Medieval Theology," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume 17 (1991): 195-249; and "The Resurrection of the Body according to Three Medieval Aristotelians: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham," *Philosophical Topics* 20 (1993): 1-33. I have benefitted from colloquium and seminar discussions of this paper at the Catholic University of America, the University of Melbourne, Monash University, the Scuola Normale Superiore at Pisa, and Yale University. Except for section IV and various minor additions and changes, this paper was written in 1999, before Richard Cross's helpful book *Duns Scotus on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) appeared. Plans to include the paper in two successive collective publication projects that have not materialized led to an eight-year delay. All's well that ends well, because I am delighted to have it published in *Franciscan Studies*.

many first substances. Second substances are *said of* first substances and really exist only as the natures of substance individuals (*res naturae*). Primary substance exists *per se* or *subsists*, and so does not depend on items of the other categories for its existence. One usually-drawn corollary is that substance is not individuated by items from other categories; for that would make first substance dependent upon them for its existence. Since items in the other nine categories do not pertain to the essence of substance, they are *accidental* to substance. It is the nature of accidents, not to exist *per se* or to subsist, but to exist in (*in esse*) the substances they modify. Among the nine categories, two — quantity and quality — are *absolute*, while the other seven are *relative*. Relatives presuppose absolutes as their primary foundations, and actions presuppose agents whose actions they are.

Theologically, Western Christians also had many commitments: e.g., to the thesis that there is one and only one God, one and only one Divine essence; that God is omniscient, omnipotent, just, merciful, the creator of everything else; that there are three and only three Divine persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that the Son is begotten by the Father, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Coming together, the power of *Categories*-metaphysics and the weight of Western theological tradition set off a remarkable thought experiment: viz., that of charting the being of God off the being of the *Categories*! Even in the beginning, this should have been *philosophically* surprising. For the explanatory models deployed in philosophical proofs for the existence of God, posited a first cause or explanatory entity that is bound to “misfit” (later scholastics said, “transcend”) the *Categories* by being simple, immutable, and utterly *a se*.² Distinctive doctrines of (what came to be called) “revealed” *theology* set up further obstacles. Yet, in the Latin West, such difficulties could scarcely dampen enthusiasm

² In Scotus, the notion of transcending the categories became so fundamental as to provide a structure for metaphysics. See Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1946).

for the interactive project of characterizing Divine being by beginning with the categories, and of expanding and refining the categories in the light of what has to be said about God.

This research program had many parts and layers. In this paper, I spotlight the issue of how three Divine persons are constituted and distinguished out of one simple Divine essence. Although I want to focus on Franciscan thinkers, I begin with Aquinas because his treatment readily orients us to the problem. Unsurprisingly, it functioned that way for some of them.

II. AQUINAS: PHILOSOPHY ADAPTED TO FORMULATION

In the *Summa Theologica* I, qq.27-43, Aquinas takes his theological conclusion—that the Divine persons are primarily constituted by relations of origin—from a ready reading of tradition. Aquinas stoutly rejects the methodological suggestion (proof-texted from Pseudo-Dionysius) that theological formulation should restrict itself to the *language* of the Bible and the Saints.³ On the contrary, one ought to distinguish between words and their signification; the meaning may be “in play” even where the terminology is not explicitly used.⁴ Accordingly, he spends significant effort refining Aristotelian metaphysical categories to formulate his doctrinal position. With characteristic pedagogical sensitivity, Aquinas does not take the distinction of persons as a given and then ask how it is metaphysically accomplished. Rather he sets out to build a step-by-step case, arguing from real productions to really distinct relations in the Godhead and from there on to a real distinction of three Divine persons.

2.1. Real Distinction in a Simple God: Aquinas has just spent the first twenty-six questions deploying a philosophical explanatory model to establish the existence of God as self-explanatory explainer of being and goodness, and to characterize the Divine essence as pure act—simple,

³ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.3, obj.1.

⁴ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.3, ad 1^{um}.

infinite, immutable, pure and complete perfection, one in the highest degree. Aquinas famously labors to reconcile Divine simplicity with a plurality of positive attributes, by contending that the latter are *really the same but distinct in reason* and that a plurality of positive but analogical concepts can simultaneously apply to one simple thing (*Summa Theologica* I, q. 13). To avoid the Sabellian heresy, however, it is not enough to say that the predicates “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are grounded in something *real* in the Godhead. Unlike Divine power and wisdom and justice, the Divine persons must be *really distinct* from one another, and so it is necessary to find some real basis for this *distinction* in the Godhead as well (*Summa Theologica* I, q. 28, *quod sic*).

Augustine had already pointed to the futility of appealing to the Divine attributes (as if the Father were God *qua* eternal, the Son God *qua* Wisdom, and the Spirit God *qua* Blessedness), since all of these belong equally to each of the three persons. Following Augustine, Aquinas shifts attention to natural operations *ad intra*, among which he recognizes two fundamental kinds — viz., understanding (*intelligere*) and will (*velle*).⁵ Both are *real* actions.⁶ Both are originating and producing, not as efficient causes of something external, but as “processions” to something internal.⁷ Apparently appealing to Divine simplicity, Aquinas infers that since there are two and only two *kinds* of productions *ad intra*, there are two and only two *actions*.⁸ Embracing tradition, Aquinas says it is fitting to call the intellectual production (intellectual power producing a thought or “word”)⁹ “begetting” because “begetting” implies a likeness between begetter and begotten, and thoughts or words are likenesses of the thing understood. But there is a reason against calling the will’s production “begetting” insofar as no likeness between the loving and the beloved is implied.¹⁰

⁵ *Summa Theologica* I, q.27, a.1, c.

⁶ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.1, c.

⁷ *Summa Theologica* I, q.27, a.1, c; a.3, c.

⁸ *Summa Theologica* I, q.27, a.5, c; q.28, a.4, ad 2^{um}.

⁹ Cf. *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.4, ad 1^{um}.

¹⁰ *Summa Theologica* I, q.27, a.2, c; a.4, c.

Having identified *real* “originating” actions, Aquinas turns to explain how these give rise to *real* relations in the Godhead.¹¹ *Categories*-doctrine counts both actions and relations among the accidents that exist in (*inesse*) substance, and so raises the question how either could be found in God. Aquinas’s own philosophical doctrine distinguishes, where the nine non-substance categories are concerned, between *inesse*, which is common to all of them, and the proper *ratio* that marks off each from the other. In the case of quality and action and relation, the proper *rationes* do pertain to a simple God, even though — as Boethius taught — the *inesse* does not.¹² Moreover, the proper *ratio* of relation (= *ad aliquid*) is itself indeterminate and determinable regarding the ontological status of the relation — whether it is real (as when things are mutually ordered by nature) or whether it exists only in the mind of one who compares the relata to one another. Aquinas argues that where real productions of intellect and will are concerned, what is produced and the producer will be on the same ontological level, so that the relations will be real as well.¹³

Given Divine simplicity, real relations in the Godhead (as much as the Divine attributes) will be really the same as and distinct in reason from the Divine essence, so that they have no other *esse* than the *esse* of the essence.¹⁴ Yet, where the “substantialized” qualities such as power, wisdom, and justice are not opposed,¹⁵ Aquinas takes it to belong to the *ratio* of relation that one thing be in relative opposition to another. Likewise by definition, relative opposition includes distinction. Whatever may be the case with reflexive relations such as self-identity (which Aquinas counts relations of reason), relations of origin do involve opposition insofar as they are non-reflexive and asymmetrical: in any given

¹¹ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.1, c.

¹² *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.1, c; a.2, c; q.29, a.4, c; I *Sent.*, d.8, q.4, a.3, c; d.26, q.2, a.1, c. Cf. Mark G. Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford University Press, 1989), ch.2, 13-38.

¹³ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.1, c.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.2, c.

¹⁵ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.3, c & ad 2^{um}; q.30, a.1, ad 2^{um}.

production, *being the producer* and *being the product* of that production are opposed relations. Aquinas' swift conclusion is that there must be real distinction in the Godhead, not so far as the Divine essence is concerned (because it is an absolute thing (*res absoluta*) of maximal simplicity and unity), but so far as relative things are concerned.¹⁶ Thus, the relations of origin are really the same as the Divine essence but really distinct from each other!

Aquinas closes this discussion of really distinct Divine relations by drawing a corollary conclusion about their number. Each instance of production gives rise to a pair of real relations: active production and passive production. If there are two and only two productions in the Godhead, there will be two and only two pairs and hence four real relations. Taking over traditional labels, Aquinas identifies paternity and filiation from the intellectual production, and active and passive spiration from the will's production.¹⁷

2.2. "Personifying" the Godhead: If Aquinas has already noted how accidents get "substantialized" in the Godhead, he next shoulders the task of fitting Divine Being and the category of substance to one another.

2.2.1. Philosophical Terminology, Reviewed and Clarified: In the *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle distinguishes "second substance" or quiddity (genus, species, substance kinds) from "first substance," the subject or supposit that subsists in the genus of substance, the individuals that second substance is *said of* and that accidents *exist in*. Aquinas comments that a first substance is [i] subsistent insofar as it exists *per se* and not *in* another.¹⁸ Corollary to this, Aquinas holds that while accidents *are* individuated by the subjects in which they exist, there is no cross-categorical individuation of substance.¹⁹ Not only does first substance [i]

¹⁶ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.3, c & ad 1^{um}.

¹⁷ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.4, c.

¹⁸ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.2, c.

¹⁹ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, c.

subsist, it is also [ii] *unsharable* the way a common nature²⁰ or a part is shared and sharable,²¹ and [iii] *unassumable* the way the human nature of Christ is assumed and assumable.²² Moreover, Aquinas explains that the term “hypostasis” or “substance” etymologically derives from the *Categories*-idea that it stands under and supports²³ and in consequence individuates²⁴ the accidents as their subject. But its use has been extended to any substance individual.²⁵

Turning to Boethius’s definition of “person” as “individual substance of a rational nature,” Aquinas dismisses the worry that “hypostasis” and “person” should not be definable because common concepts can be abstracted only from quiddities. Singularity should be distinguished from *this* singular. Aquinas insists that singularity can be defined, even if this singular (e.g., Socrates) cannot!²⁶ If subsistence or *per se* existence and intra-categorical individuation are distinguishing features of first substances or supposits generally, Aquinas contends that persons enjoy an even higher degree of self-determination, insofar as they are “lords” of their acts.²⁷

2.2.2. Divine Persons: Citing the maxim that whatever pertains to perfection in creatures is appropriately applied to God in a more excellent way, Aquinas maintains that subsistence in a rational nature is an estate of very great dignity,²⁸ indeed that “person” signifies the maximal perfection of the whole nature.²⁹ He concludes that personhood pertains to God as much as wisdom does.³⁰ How is this notion to be mapped onto simple Godhead with its really distinct relations?

²⁰ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, c; a.2, c.

²¹ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, c & ad 5^{um}.

²² *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, c.

²³ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.2, c & ad 4^{um}.

²⁴ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, c.

²⁵ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.2, ad 2^{um}.

²⁶ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, ad 1^{um}.

²⁷ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, c.

²⁸ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.3, ad 1^{um}.

²⁹ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.3, c.

³⁰ *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.3, ad 1^{um}.

Aquinas understands Church councils to require relation to be included in the signification of “divine person.” As between saying that “person” signifies the Divine essence *in recto* and relation *in obliquo*, or the other way around, Aquinas thinks the right question to ask is what distinguishes the persons from the essence in general as well as from one another? But Aquinas has just argued, it is opposed *relations* that give rise to real distinction in the Godhead. Moreover, relations are not disqualified from distinguishing Divine persons by the ban on cross-categorical “individuation” of substances, because relations are “substantialized” in the Godhead.³¹ That is, while relations in the Godhead are *ad aliquid*, their being is not the *inesse* of accidents but the *subsistere* of substance. He concludes that “divine person” signifies the relation *in recto* — not relation *qua* relation, but relation *qua* subsistent and “under the mode of hypostasis” — and the Divine essence *in obliquo*.³²

2.3. Relations versus Actions: Aquinas does not explicitly ask whether relations are the quasi-person-constituturs in the Godhead. Instead, he poses the question in terms of *the intellect’s consideration*: if the intellect were to abstract relations from persons, would the hypostases remain? His answer rests on some philosophical and theological preliminaries. First and philosophically, he appeals to a Boethian (Aristotelian?) distinction between two modes of abstraction: that of a universal from a particular (e.g., of animal from human being), and that of form from matter (e.g., the form of a circle from its sensible matter).³³ He observes that neither of these is found in the Godhead *secundum rem*. Divine simplicity rules out matter/form composition.³⁴ Nor is the Divine essence related to the persons as universal to particular, because — unlike human nature — it is numerically unmultiplied in many persons. Nevertheless, our words apply only analogically to the

³¹ *Summa Theologica* I, q.28, a.3, c.

³² *Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.4, c.

³³ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.3, c.

³⁴ *Summa Theologica* I, q.3, a.2.

Godhead, because their mode of signifying fits the created case. And for that reason, we can speak of some analogy of the above-mentioned types of abstraction in connection with God. Second, in Western “Augustinian” trinitarian theology, not every real relation in the Godhead is *proper* to a single person: active spiration (based on the will’s production) is common to the Father and the Son.

Returning to the question, Aquinas answers that if relations are abstracted from persons the first way, the hypostasis does not remain. If the second way, the hypostasis does not survive abstraction of its proper but does remain after the abstraction of its non-proper relations.³⁵ Thus, it looks as if in the Godhead proper subsistent relations (viz., paternity, filiation, and spiration) are quasi-person-constitutors, but common subsistent relations (viz., relations of active spiration) are not.

For Aquinas, however, another difficulty must be considered before that conclusion is secure. His own rationale for distinguishing persons within the Godhead begins with real productions or actions. Within his theological tradition there are some older masters as well as contemporary authors who say that the Divine hypostases are distinguished in the first place by their *origin* — e.g., the Father is distinct from the Son insofar as the Father begets and the Son is begotten. Relations are consequent upon these actions and do not so much quasi-constitute as *manifest* distinctions among the persons.³⁶ Moreover, this point of view seems to be underwritten by *Categories* doctrines. Relations *presuppose* their relata; real relations, really distinct supposits.³⁷ Likewise, relations are *posterior in the order of understanding* to their foundations. If paternity is founded on an act of begetting, the latter is *prior in the order of understanding* to the former.³⁸

Laying more of his metaphysical cards on the table, Aquinas declares that origin and relation are *really the same but distinct in mode of signification*: origin (e.g.,

³⁵ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.3, c.

³⁶ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, c.

³⁷ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, arg.4.

³⁸ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.4, arg.2 & c.

begetting) is signified through the mode of act, while relation (e.g., paternity) is signified through the mode of form.³⁹ Aquinas contends that precisely this difference as to mode of signification favors relation over action for the role of quasi-constitutor. For what distinguishes supposit from one another is what is *intrinsic* to each. But origin is not signified as anything intrinsic, but as a way from one thing to another.⁴⁰

For that matter, Aquinas insists, simple appeal to priority relations as charted by the *Categories* — e.g., that relations presuppose their relata and are posterior in the order of understanding to their foundations — will not be decisive. For *Categories* doctrine equally lays it down that actions presuppose the agent-supposit and are prior to the effect-supposit — theses which would disqualify active or passive productions from quasi-constituting either supposit!⁴¹ Aquinas insists the latter theorem applies even in the region of Godhead: origin passively signified is absolutely prior in the order of understanding to the persons and personal properties of the persons produced, while origins actively signified are prior in the order of understanding only to the common relations of the producer (e.g., spirating is prior in the order of understanding to the relation of active spiration in the Father and Son, but not to their relations of paternity and filiation, respectively). By contrast, paternity can be considered two ways — *qua* relation and *qua* person-constitutor. True to the *Categories* “tag,” paternity considered *qua* relation does presuppose and so is posterior to the act of begetting that is its foundation. But paternity considered *qua* constitutor is prior to the act of begetting, in accordance with the *Categories* dictum that the agent-supposit is prior in the order of understanding to its action.⁴² As for the *Categories* rule that real relations presuppose the real distinction of their relata, Aquinas contends, this does not apply to non-accidental subsistent relations that do

³⁹ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, c.

⁴⁰ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, c.

⁴¹ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, c.

⁴² *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.4, c & ad 1^{um} & ad 2^{um} & ad 3^{um}.

not presuppose but bring the distinction of supposits with them.⁴³ Aquinas concludes with the inverse of his opponents' position: "although they [i.e., the Divine persons] are distinct both ways, they are distinguished prior and more principally by relations."⁴⁴

Ingenious as it is, this manoeuvre is just as available to those who hold that Divine persons are distinguished by origin. Why not instead consider actions two ways — *qua* action and *qua* constitutor? Begetting *qua* constitutor is prior to the Father, while begetting *qua* action presupposes the Father as agent-supposit. Relations could then presuppose their supposits and foundations as usual, in accordance with the *Categories*-doctrine.

3. Summary: Aquinas's treatment is systematic, pedagogically apt, and resolutely headed towards his conclusion — that Divine persons are distinguished and quasi-constituted by relations of origin. His polemical context allows him almost to ignore Praepositinus's argument from Divine simplicity that Divine persons cannot be constituted at all but must be distinguished in and of themselves.⁴⁵ Likewise, Aquinas rejects the suggestion (apparently espoused by William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste) that Divine perfection requires the most perfect of person-constitutors, while *Categories*-doctrine assures us that relatives are less perfect than absolutes. Aquinas quickly turns the latter on its head: because Divine perfection is maximal unity, Divine persons ought to be constituted by what is metaphysically slightest and so renders them least distinct!⁴⁶

Recurrent in Aquinas's discussion are his philosophical theses that what is/are really the same, may be [i] distinct in reason, [ii] considered under different aspects, and/or [iii] signified together with different modes; and that such distinctions are sufficient to license contradictory predications of what is really one and the same thing, and to rule out

⁴³ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, ad 4^{um}.

⁴⁴ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, c.

⁴⁵ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.1, c.

⁴⁶ *Summa Theologica* I, q.40, a.2, ad 3^{um}.

applications of the Transitivity of Identity. Thus, paternity both presupposes and is prior to the action of begetting, even though paternity is really the same as itself and really the same as begetting, because paternity and begetting may be considered and signified in different ways. Likewise, the Father/paternity is really the same as the Divine essence, and the Son/filiation is really the same as the Divine essence, but the Father/paternity and the Son/filiation are not really the same as each other, because there is a distinction of reason between the essence and each person/relation.

At the same time, the real identity of Divine actions and relations with the Divine essence is supposed to be enough to preserve Divine simplicity. Moreover, if *Categories*-doctrine forbids created relations to function as person-constitutors on the ground that they are accidents, the Divine relations avoid this metaphysical disqualification because their real identity with the Divine essence “substantializes” them into subsistents. Thus, Aquinas’s considered opinion is that the Divine persons are distinguished and constituted precisely because they *are* subsistent relations!

III. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS (*LECTURA* AND *ORDINATIO*): DIVINE PERSONIFICATION AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PERPLEXITY

If Aquinas appears to embrace the theological majority report — that Divine persons are constituted by relations of origin — with equanimity, and to find philosophical adjustments in the *Categories*-doctrine easy to make and ready to hand, Scotus’s *Lectura*- and *Ordinatio*-discussions all find him in the grips of philosophical perplexity, repeatedly weighing the pros and cons of absolute- versus relation-constitution of persons. In these works, his verdicts are variable: if he never gives absolute-constitution his unqualified written endorsement, he nevertheless finds it “the more defensible” position in his *Lectura*.⁴⁷ By the time

⁴⁷ *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 6; *Vaticana* XVII.337; d. 28, q. 3, n. 70; *Vaticana* XVII.387-88.

he wrote *Ordinatio* III, Scotus found relation-constitution “more consonant with the authorities,” “not absolutely to be asserted but to be believed,” while *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u. catches him teeter-tottering mid-stream!⁴⁸

3.1. Constituted Simplicity? If Aquinas rushed by, Scotus sets the stage with Praepositinus’ argument that since simplicity characterizes not only the Divine essence but the Divine persons, the Divine persons must be distinguished from one another in and of themselves. Consequently, it makes no sense to ask *by what* they are distinct and *by what* they are constituted. Simples are not *constituted* by anything. Once again, they are distinct in and of themselves.⁴⁹

Scotus’s reply is entirely predictable from his understanding of the problem of universals. Recall how Scotus begins with his conviction that created substance natures are *common in reality*; that is, they possess a real unity less than numerical unity insofar as they exist in reality in numerically distinct substance individuals. But if numerically distinct co-specific substance individuals are thus “something-the-same” entities, Scotus reasons, they must also have constituents that they do not share, by virtue of which they are distinct from one another. Moreover, such “distinguishers” must be positive entities, because they are that by which the individual receives a higher degree (viz., numerical) of unity. Not just theological consensus, but the Saints and Ecclesiastical determinations specify that Divine persons are “something-the-same” entities: all share (numerically the same) Divine essence⁵⁰; Father and Son share active spiration.⁵¹ Scotus concludes that Divine persons

⁴⁸ Carl Balic, *Adnotationes ad Distinctiones Vigessimam Sextam et Trigesimam Nonam*, in *Opera Omnia*, Vaticana VI, 1*-26*, esp. 25*-26*. See *Ordinatio* III, nn. 207, 210, quoted by Balić, op.cit., 26*.

⁴⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 6-7; *Vaticana* VI, 2. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 7-9; *Vaticana* XVII, 318-19.

⁵⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 9; *Vaticana* VI, 3. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, nn.10-11; *Vaticana* XVII, 319.

⁵¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 11; *Vaticana* VI, 3. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 12; *Vaticana* XVII, 319.

must also have something else that makes them distinct; “the question remains, *by what* are they distinct?”⁵²

3.2. Relative Simplicity? Henry of Ghent agrees that “something-the-same” entities must be distinct in something. But he draws on his own understanding of *Categories*-doctrine to argue that “relation-constitution” does not really compromise Divine simplicity the way absolute-constitution would. (1) First, absolute added to absolute makes for composition. When Socrates becomes white, Socrates changes: a really distinct quality of whiteness comes to exist in (*in esse*) Socrates when it did not before, and thereby makes composition with Socrates. By contrast, Henry contends, when white Socrates becomes similar to Plato by virtue of Plato’s becoming white, nothing new and really distinct is added to Socrates that was not there before. The *in esse* of Socrates’ similarity to Plato is really the same as the *in esse* of its foundation — viz., the whiteness that exists in Socrates. Neither does the *esse ad* of Socrates’ similarity add anything over and above his whiteness. Just by virtue of what it was, the whiteness was “ready and waiting” to make its subject “be towards” another, should that other also come to be white. So, too, neither the subsistence nor the *esse ad* of the Divine relations would add anything really distinct from their foundations, and so would not compromise Divine simplicity.⁵³

(2) Again, Divine simplicity makes the Divine essence incapable of numerical multiplication into numerically many Divinities in numerically distinct supposits. There is no problem with an unlimited thing’s being at once the foundation of many relations to numerically distinct supposits.⁵⁴ But in his *Commentary on Porphyry*, Boethius contends that a nature is numerically multiplied in numerically distinct co-

⁵² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 9; *Vaticana* VI, 3.

⁵³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn 24-25; *Vaticana* VI, 6. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u; *Vaticana* XVII, 320.

⁵⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn 26 & 30; *Vaticana* VI, 6, 9.

specific absolute supposits, because what is “contained” in one cannot be simultaneously “contained” in the other.⁵⁵

(3) Again, Divine simplicity excludes being the subject of accidents. But if Divine persons were constituted by absolutes, the relations would become quasi-adventitious and accidental.⁵⁶

Finally, in a different vein, (4) because correlatives cannot exist one without the other, relation-constitution can *explain* the metaphysical impossibility of one Divine person’s existing without the others. But if the first person of the Trinity is constituted by an absolute, the first person will be understood as perfectly constituted prior to and independently of the second person, so that the second person’s existence will not be required for the existence of the first, and the disposition of the first person to the second will not be a *real* relation but only a relation of reason.⁵⁷

As for how what is really one and the same thing (i.e., the Divine essence) could be both absolute (*ad se*) and relative (*ad aliud*), Scotus reformulates the majority-report answer in terms of his own metaphysical framework. The Divine essence and the relations are *distinct formally*, because their formal *rationes* are distinct, prior to and independently of any activity of the intellect. But because the Divine essence is infinite, it draws into real and perfect identity with itself not only every absolute perfection but any reality that is compossible with it.⁵⁸ Thus, the Divine relations “cross over” into real and perfect identity with the Divine essence, while retaining their formal non-identity with it.⁵⁹

3.3. Relative Drawbacks: However fortified with arguments and the weight of tradition “relation-constitution” is, Scotus identifies and catalogues four sets of considerations

⁵⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 26; *Vaticana* VI, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 27; *Vaticana* VI, 6-7. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 18; *Vaticana* XVII, 321.

⁵⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 27; *Vaticana* VI, 6-7. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 18; *Vaticana* XVII, 321.

⁵⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 66; *Vaticana* VI, 26-27.

⁵⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 31; *Vaticana* VI, 9-10.

against it: two from “Aristotelian” relations-theory, one from the very nature of what it is to be a supposit-constitutor, and the fourth from authority. (1) *Comparing Relation to Relatum*: [a] The relatum, not the relation, is what is said to be primarily and properly related. But for something to count as a relatum presupposes [i] the relation as a form, [ii] what is related as a quasi-subject, and [iii] their union. Moreover, the relation as form presupposes its quasi-subject, so that the latter is prior to the former. Since the Divine essence is not the quasi-subject which — by receiving the form — comes to be related, Divine relations must presuppose something else — viz., the Divine supposits — as quasi-subjects, and therefore must not be the primary constitutors of the Divine supposits.⁶⁰

[b] Again, a real relation *presupposes* a real distinction of extremes. That is why Aristotle denies that self-identity is a real relation. But what real relation presupposes, it does not *produce*. Therefore, the Divine persons are not primarily distinguished and constituted by real relations in the Godhead.⁶¹

(2) *Comparing Relation to Origin*: [a] *Categories*-theory teaches that nothing is relative at bottom. Consequently, for a relation to originate, something absolute must already have originated — whether as a relatum or as a term. But the Divine essence itself is neither the producer nor the product in Divine productions, and so neither what is referred nor the term of Divine production relations. Therefore, the origination of the relation must presuppose something else that is absolute — viz., the supposit.⁶² [b] Absolute-constitution allows room to distinguish between supposita — *a* and *b* — and supposita *qua* informed by relations — *Ra* and *R'b*, where *R* and *R'* are correlations (e.g., paternity and filiation), and so can recognize a sign or instant of nature at which the supposita are not informed by the relations, and a subsequent sign at

⁶⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 33-34; *Vaticana* VI, 10-11. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 26; *Vaticana* XVII, 322.

⁶¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 36-37; *Vaticana* VI, 12. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 28; *Vaticana* XVII, 323.

⁶² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 38; *Vaticana* VI, 13.

which they are. It then allows the relation to originate from *a* and terminate in *b* (i.e., from the supposita in the earlier sign or instant of nature), rather than originating in *Ra* (e.g., the Father) and terminating in *R'b* (e.g., the Son) (i.e., in the later sign or instant of nature). By making *R* a constituent of *a* and *R'* a constituent of *b*, relation-constitution erases this distinction, so that there is no instant of nature or origin at which the thing that is the Father can be understood without the Son or without being understood to have a Son.

Thus, relation-constitution seems to take the priority and posteriority out of origination and to reduce origination to correlation. Because correlatives are naturally simultaneous, the “originating” supposit will not be prior to the “originated” supposit after all.⁶³ Moreover, as Henry himself observed in touting up alleged philosophical advantages of relation-constitution, the coexistence of correlatives is metaphysically necessary. But if origination is reduced to correlation, then both productions will have to be natural and necessary. Yet, proponents of relation-constitution themselves appeal to the contrast between natural (intellectual power producing a thought) and voluntary (the will producing an act of love) to locate two sorts of production in the Godhead.⁶⁴ Again, the natural simultaneity of correlatives combines with the further *Categories*-doctrine of the natural priority of the agent-supposit to its action, to generate a *reductio ad absurdum*: by the latter the Father must be naturally prior to begetting, but by the former the Son is naturally simultaneous with the Father, so that the Son is naturally prior to His begetting, too!⁶⁵

(3) *From the Proper Ratio of Supposit-Constitutors*: Turning from relations-theory to the nature of supposit-constitutors, Scotus cites three arguments — two metaphysical and one corollary epistemological or cognitive-psychological — against relation-constitution.

⁶³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 40; *Vaticana* VI, 14. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 30; *Vaticana* XVII, 323.

⁶⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 41; *Vaticana* VI, 14.

⁶⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 43-44; *Vaticana* VI, 15. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 31; *Vaticana* XVII, 323.

[a] The first rests on the controversial if characteristically Scotist thesis that whatever constitutes something in some being and in the unity corresponding to that being, is of itself and as a whole primarily repugnant to the distinction opposed to that unity. Thus, Scotus holds (as above) that if human nature is common in reality and so possesses a real unity less than numerical unity, what individuates human nature into *this* human nature as opposed to *that*, and so confers the higher degree of numerical unity upon it, must be of itself *this* and so of itself incompatible with being shared by or numerically multiplied in numerically distinct individuals. Analogously, person-constitutors in the Godhead must be fundamentally unsharable. Put otherwise, Aristotle declares in the *Categories* that second substance signifies the quiddity of first substance. Therefore, first substance does not involve any further quiddity.⁶⁶

Paternity seems not to meet this criterion, however. As a quiddity, paternity is not unsharable.⁶⁷ To be sure, the Divine essence, although a quiddity and sharable, is of itself “this.” But that is because the Divine essence is formally infinite and so includes as really identical with itself whatever is compossible with it. By contrast, Paternity as a quiddity is not formally infinite and so not of itself “this.”⁶⁸ Arguably, the same goes for the other Divine relations. For — assuming that opposite relations are disposed to sharability or unsharability the same way — since active spiration is sharable (and shared by the Father and the Son), passive spiration will be sharable as well.⁶⁹ Reasoning from impossible *positio*, if will were prior to intellect, active generation would be shared instead of active spiration. Therefore, active generation is sharable, too.⁷⁰

[b] *Categories*-doctrine lays it down that the primary supposit-constitutor must combine with the nature to make

⁶⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 45; *Vaticana* VI, 15-16.

⁶⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 46; *Vaticana* VI, 16. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 34; *Vaticana* XVII, 324-25.

⁶⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 47; *Vaticana* VI, 16.

⁶⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 48-49; *Vaticana* VI, 16-17.

⁷⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 50; *Vaticana* VI, 17.

something one *per se*. But relations and absolutes are of different categories and so cannot combine to make anything one *per se* in creatures (cross-categorical person-constitution, like cross-categorical individuation, is impossible). Therefore, cross-categorical person-constitution is ruled out in the Godhead as well.⁷¹

[c] Finally, if the ultimate person-constitutors are neither quiddities nor sharable, it will be impossible to abstract any quidditative concept common to all of them. But the concept 'relation' is an abstract quidditative concept that is common to paternity, filiation, and spiration. Therefore, they must not be ultimately constitutive of the Divine persons.⁷²

(4) *From authority*: Here Scotus cites proof-texts to show that some of the same authors — Augustine, Boethius, Richard of St. Victor — who seem at times to speak in favor of relation-constitution, at other times appear to sponsor absolute-constitution of Divine persons.⁷³

3.4. Absolute-Constitution: A Live Option? Scotus finds the case against relation-constitution powerful. Philosophy compels, counter-balancing authorities permit serious consideration of the alternative hypothesis that persons are constituted by absolutes. Such an opinion was attributed to doctors of older generations (i.e., to Robert Grosseteste and William of Auvergne)⁷⁴ and Scotus reaches back to a Franciscan source, to Bonaventure's *Sentence-commentary* for a summary, in three theses:

[T1] The Divine persons are *constituted in personal being* and distinguished from one another through some absolute realities.

⁷¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 53; *Vaticana* VI, 20. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 38; *Vaticana* XVII, 326.

⁷² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 51-52; *Vaticana* VI, 18-19. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 35; *Vaticana* XVII, 325.

⁷³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 53-55; *Vaticana* VI, 20-22. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 40-41; *Vaticana* XVII, 327.

⁷⁴ Carl Baliç, *Adnotationes ad Distinctiones Vigessimam Sextam et Trigesimam Nonam*, in *Opera Omnia*, *Vaticana* VI, 10*-22*.

[T2] The Divine persons are distinguished by their origins, not formally, but as *quasi-principles or quasi-efficient causes*.

[T3] The Divine persons, thus constituted by absolutes, are relatable by the Divine relations which *manifest* their distinction.⁷⁵

3.4.1. Congruence with Primary Authorities? In *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u. Scotus takes pains to document how this theological minority report contradicts neither Scripture nor the official doctrinal determinations of the Church. Turning to the Bible, Scotus acknowledges references to “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” in the Savior’s Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) and in the Vulgate’s “there are three that bear witness in heaven — the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit” (I John 5:7), but insists that these passages take no position on the metaphysical constitution of persons and make no claims about what sort of forms primarily constitute and distinguish them. What they do imply — that there are three persons; that the persons are related by paternity, filiation, and spiration; that one person receives its essence from another — is affirmed by “absolute-” as much as by “relation-constitutors”! If the New Testament thus uses relative names for the Divine persons, Proverbs 30:4 implies that they are not fundamental, when it mentions the “Son” of the Holy One and asks for his name. If the Second Person were constituted by filiation, “Son” would be his first and proper name and no further question would arise!⁷⁶ As for official doctrinal pronouncements, Scotus finds, neither the Apostles’ nor Nicene creeds, neither the Trinitarian decrees of Fourth Lateran held under Innocent III, the pronouncements of the Council of Lyons under Gregory X, nor the edicts of any other councils, take a stand on the metaphysics of person-constitution.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 57-59; *Vaticana* VI, 23-24. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 54; *Vaticana* XVII, 332.

⁷⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 67-70; *Vaticana* VI, 27-29.

⁷⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 70; *Vaticana* VI, 28-29. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 55; *Vaticana* XVII, 332.

Scotus's reasons that "if Christ did not teach nor the Church declare that persons are primarily distinguished by relations," then the latter is not an article of Faith "that teachers are bound to assert" "as certain truth." Scotus cautions that it would be unwise for the Church to "over-define" doctrine by restricting believers to one determinate mode of understanding from a variety of philosophically and theological controversial interpretations. To do so would erode the epistemological standing of articles of Faith, which are passed down as trustworthy because "certain."⁷⁸

3.4.2. Philosophical Rebuttals: With objections from primary authorities thus neutralized, Scotus turns to show how adherents of absolute constitution could reply to the philosophical arguments (laid out in section 3.2 above) against their position. (R1) If relation-constitution causes troubles with *Categories*-metaphysics, absolute constitution is supposed to compromise Divine simplicity. Against the latter, Scotus's "bottom line" is that — whatever may be the case with creatures — absolutes will not make composition *with the Divine essence* any more than relations would, presumably because the infinity of the Divine essence would draw either sort of person-constitutor into perfect real identity with Itself. Turning to analogies, Scotus's understanding of real relations *in creatures* is at odds with that of Aquinas and Henry. For the Subtle Doctor holds that wherever it is logically possible for the foundation to exist without the relation (e.g., Socrates' whiteness can exist without Plato's whiteness and hence without similarity to Plato), relation-things are really distinct from, and hence make composition with, their foundations; only where the foundation cannot exist without the relation (the way Socrates' similarity to Plato cannot exist without being similar to Plato's similarity to Socrates) are the relation and the foundation really the same and distinct only formally.⁷⁹ By contrast, although the attributal perfections seem to be absolute and not relative,

⁷⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 71; *Vaticana* VI, 29.

⁷⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 80; *Vaticana* VI, 36-37. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 58; *Vaticana* XVII, 334.

they do not make composition with the essence even though they are not formally the same as the essence. Scotus insists, if one attributal perfection were really distinct *from another*, that would be a function of their formal *rationes* and would in no way complicate the relation of either *to the Divine essence!*⁸⁰

(R2) Divine infinity also explains why the Divine essence would no more be numerically multiplied by absolute than by relative person-constitutors. On Scotus's understanding, the implied analogy with the individuation of created natures breaks down. According to him, it is because created natures are finite that they are not "this" of themselves, but common of themselves (*de se*) and in reality. They are "contracted" to numerical unity by "contracting differences." And — as Boethius suggests — "contraction" is metaphysically isolating. Thus, it is impossible for *numerically* the same created nature to combine with many thisnesses simultaneously; rather, the created nature is numerically multiplied thereby. By contrast, the Divine essence is infinite, and so "this" of itself. It cannot be contracted by anything, and hence not by person-constitutors of whatever kind.⁸¹

(R3) To the charge that absolute-constitution would make the Divine relations adventitious and turn them into accidents, Scotus counters *ad hominem* that many adherents of relation-constitution are committed to a distinction between the quasi-adventitious and the accidental. For many hold the Father to be constituted by paternity, the Son by filiation, prior in the order of explanation to their active spiration of the Holy Spirit. They thereby make the relation of active spiration quasi-adventitious to Father and Son. Nevertheless, active spiration is no more accidental than the others, because all of the Divine relations among the persons exist by natural necessity.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 81; *Vaticana* VI, 37. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 59; *Vaticana* XVII, 334-35.

⁸¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 82; *Vaticana* VI, 37.

⁸² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 83; *Vaticana* VI, 37-38. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 61; *Vaticana* XVII, 335.

3.5. Defending the Majority Report, *Categories-Doctrine Readjusted*: Scotus is well aware that *Categories*-doctrine was not formulated with Divine Being in mind. Nevertheless, he finds that — as with theological authorities — the Philosopher's wax nose softens to be turned one way by absolute-constitution and another by relation-constitution theories, allowing each its philosophical counter-defense. (R1) *Relation and Relatum, Re-compared*: [Ra] It is with horizontal gaze fixed on things here below that the *Categories* teaches us to think of relations as accidents that inhere — by way of their foundations — in subsistent subjects. Thus, for example, the foundation (e.g., whiteness) exists in the subsistent subject (e.g., Socrates), and the foundation is informed by the relation (e.g., whiteness by similarity) prior in the order of explanation to the subsistent subject's being so informed (prior to Socrates' being similar).

Scotus thinks that a successful relation-constitution theory should deny that this model and its attendant priority assessments apply. We should not — *pace* Aquinas and Henry of Ghent — think of paternity as a quasi-form that comes to the Divine essence as its foundation and thereby to a Divine person as its supposit, the way similarity comes to whiteness as its foundation and thereby to Socrates. We come closer to the truth if we hearken back to the model of substance-individuation, turn the analogy upside down, and think of the person-constitutor (according to them, the subsistent relation) as quasi-subject and the Divine essence as the quasi-form and act by which it is God.⁸³ Once again, it would not be correct, strictly speaking, to speak of essence and relation in the Godhead as “parts” of a Divine person, because the infinity of the Divine essence draws everything compossible with It into perfect real identity with It. But relation-constitution can still — if it likes — give something to the intuition that the union of parts is prior to the whole, by endorsing a somewhat more complicated claim: viz., “where there are neither parts nor quasi-parts but the perfect identity of those that otherwise would be parts but for the

⁸³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, nn. 84-85; *Vaticana* VI, 39-45. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 69; *Vaticana* XVII, 338.

infinity of one of them, it is not necessary for their *union* to be understood prior to the whole, but rather the *perfect identity* of one to the other.”⁸⁴

[Rb] What about the theorem that a *real* relation presupposes a *real* distinction of extremes? While acknowledging that it is generally true *among creatures*, Scotus stresses the importance of understanding *why* it is true. Among creatures, relata and/or the foundations inherent in them function as *external* efficient or material causes of relations. Only *real* causes have *real* effects; and, by definition, where the causes are absent, so are the effects. Scotus denies, however, that what *makes* a relation real (or a relation of reason) is the fact that its relata are real (or beings of reason). Rather whether or not a relation is real (or a relation of reason) is a primitive feature that belongs to the formal *ratio* of the relation itself.

... formally, a real relation is real in and of itself, and a relation of reason is merely such in and of itself ... [I]dentity is a relation of reason because it is identity, and there is no other formal “reason why” it is a relation of reason. [Likewise,] paternity is a real relation because it is paternity, and there is no other formal reason why....⁸⁵

Because Divine paternity is — by nature — a real relation, and because Divine paternity does not depend on anything external as its efficient or material cause, Divine paternity can be a real relation even if it constitutes rather than presupposes its real relatum.

(R2) *Relation and Origin, Accepting the Consequences:* So far as comparisons between relation and origin are concerned, relation-constitution has to be prepared to “bite” some “bullets.” [Ra] It has to deny that *relatives* cannot be the primary term of originating acts. The reason is that the *supposits* (i.e., the Son and Holy Spirit) are the terms

⁸⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 86; *Vaticana* VI, 45.

⁸⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 88; *Vaticana* VI, 46-47. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 70; *Vaticana* XVII, 338.

of Divine productions. Both producer and product are suppositis. Relation-constitution makes the Divine suppositis relatives.⁸⁶ But relation-constitution can concede something to the objector's intuition by affirming that *relations* (e.g., filiation and passive spiration) cannot be the primary terms of such acts. Likewise, neither relatives (in this case, Father and Son) nor relations (in this case, Paternity and Filiation) are the *formal* term of acts of origination; rather the absolute Divine essence is.⁸⁷

[Rb] Likewise, relation-constitution will have to concede that for the Father to originate the Son is for the Father to have the Son as a correlative. But — Scotus thinks — it can still insist that the correlation is a relation of *origin*. There is no contradiction in X and Y being naturally simultaneous and yet X being prior in origin to Y.⁸⁸ Scotus thinks, however, that relation-constitution will find it difficult to deny that both productions — the begetting of the Son by the Father and the spirating of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son — are naturally necessary.⁸⁹

(R3) *Reconsidering the Ratio of Supposit-Constitutors*: In his *Lectura* treatment, Scotus confesses that he does not know how to resolve the arguments under this heading against relation-constitution.⁹⁰ In *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, he comments that relation-constitution should find these counter-arguments “difficult” but “resolvable,” and he proceeds to “pass the buck” to “anyone who knows how.”⁹¹ In *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, however, Scotus shoulders the responsibility of cataloguing replies that relation-constitution could make to the above worries. [Ra & c] Scotus distinguishes the issue of whether we have univocal abstract quidditative *concepts* common to God and creatures, from whether there is some *formal reality*

⁸⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 89 & 92; *Vaticana* VI, 48-49.

⁸⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 89; *Vaticana* VI, 48. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 71; *Vaticana* XVII, 339.

⁸⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, nn. 90, 95-99; *Vaticana* VI, 48, 156-58. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 72; *Vaticana* XVII, 339.

⁸⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 91; *Vaticana* VI, 48-49. Cf. *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 73; *Vaticana* XVII, 339.

⁹⁰ *Lectura* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 75; *Vaticana* XVII, 339-40.

⁹¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 93; *Vaticana* VI, 49.

or nature common to God and creatures, determinable one way in Godhead and another way in creatures. We do have univocal abstract quidditative concepts common to Divine wisdom and Socrates' wisdom, on the one hand, and to Divine paternity and Socrates' paternity, on the other. But God and creatures share no univocal formal *realities*.

By contrast, not only does our abstract quidditative concept 'human being' apply univocally to Socrates and Plato, there is a common formal reality — human nature — that they share. Human nature is common of itself and indeterminate and determinable with respect to individuation by many individuator-entities. Human nature of itself is also naturally prior to its individuation. Thus, Socrates' humanity and Plato's humanity are each constituted by two formally distinct realities — common human nature and Socrateity or Platonicity — but Divine wisdom and Divine paternity are not. Each of the latter gets its existence ("springs forth") from the Divine essence, but there is no earlier instant of nature at which the quiddity — wisdom or paternity — is somehow indeterminate and determinable followed by a posterior instant of nature at which it is rendered determinate. Rather each is as fully determinate as possible from its first instant of nature. Thus, from its first instant of nature, the formal reality that is Divine wisdom is infinite wisdom. And from its first instant of nature, the formal reality that is Divine paternity is unsharable.⁹²

Surprises multiply. (i) If there is no instant of nature at which Divine paternity fails to be determinately unsharable, it follows that the formal reality that is Divine paternity is unsharable of itself. Relation-constitution will thus have to contend that *not every quiddity is sharable*, but only quiddities that are absolute perfections (e.g., infinite wisdom and infinite justice) or quiddities that are divisible (i.e., numerically multipliable in numerically distinct supposits the way human nature is). Divine paternity is neither.⁹³ (ii)

⁹² *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, nn. 232, 234-235, 238-240; interpolated texts, quoted in *Vaticana* VI, 49-52.

⁹³ *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, n. 236; printed as interpolated text in *Vaticana* VI, 51.

Nor is the premiss — that opposed relations are related the same way to sharability and unsharability — compelling. Active spiration is of itself sharable with two suppositis, while passive spiration is of itself unsharable. (iii) Nor is the argument — that active generation is sharable because if it were not the first but the second Divine production it would be sharable the way active spiration is now — a legitimate application of impossible *positio*. Where F and G cannot exist separately for reasons having to do with something other than the formal definition of F, it may be of interest to explore what follows from F alone by positing that — *per impossibile* — F exists without G. But when one posits F and something that contradicts the formal definition of F, all one gets is a fruitless contradiction from which impossibles follow. It is contrary to the formal definition of Divine generation not to be the first but rather the second Divine production. So the argument involves an impossible *positio* of the disallowed type.⁹⁴

[Rb] As to the argument — that cross-categorical suppositing would produce a supposit that is one *per accidens* — Scotus distinguishes the metaphysician's from the logician's understanding of "*per accidens*." Following Aristotle in *Metaphysics* V, the metaphysician counts as a being *per accidens* one that includes things (*res*) from two different categories. Scotus says that what makes the union *per accidens* rather than *per se* is that the things of different categories are absolutely non-identical (e.g., Socrates and his whiteness). In the Godhead, however, even though the Divine essence and Paternity are distinct formally, they are the same by identity. Therefore, metaphysically speaking, their union is not *per accidens*.⁹⁵

By contrast, the logician says that a *proposition* is *per accidens* when the subject does not contain the explanation of the inherence of the predicate (e.g., "Socrates is white"), and a composite *concept* is *per accidens* when neither of its

⁹⁴ *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, n. 238; printed as interpolated text in *Vaticana* VI, 51.

⁹⁵ *Ordinatio* III, nn. 227, 229; printed as interpolated text in *Vaticana* VI, 52-54.

components is *per se* determinative of the other (e.g., “white Socrates” as opposed to “rational animal”). Scotus concedes that the proposition “Paternity is Deity” will be *per accidens* by the logician’s criterion. Likewise, “God the Father” is a *per accidens* concept, because neither of “God” nor “Father” *per se* determines the other in its genus. Neither is the concept “Father” one *per se* the way the concept “Socrates” is. Scotus concludes that the proposition “the Father is God” is not *per se* the way the proposition “Socrates is human” is either.⁹⁶

(R4) *Malleable Authorities!* In *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, Scotus cuts short his review with the general observation that since “authorities are commonly drawn to one sense or another,” the troublesome citations “can be expounded differently” in the case at hand!⁹⁷

3.6. Summary: So far as the *philosophy* of absolute-versus relation-constitution is concerned, Scotus finds some *Categories*-considerations easier to handle than others. On his understanding, Divine infinity draws everything compossible with It into perfect real identity, and so neutralizes worries that absolute-constitutors might introduce composition or numerically multiply the Divine essence. Perfect real identity also erases the idea that any relations (whether proper or common) are quasi-accidental to Divine persons. Divine aseity and simplicity could likewise be invoked to explain why “relations presuppose really distinct extremes” does not apply in the Godhead, where Divine relations require and find neither efficient nor material cause in their extremes.

Possibly more problematic are the adjustments that relation-constitution demands in *Categories*-understandings of active- and passive-production. First, relation-constitution has to replace the doctrine that *relatives* cannot be the primary term of originating acts with the claim that *relations* cannot, and to minimize the damage by insisting that the absolute Divine essence is the *formal* term even if the relative supposit is the *whole* term of the production. Second, relation-

⁹⁶ *Ordinatio* III, n.232?; printed as interpolated text in *Vaticana* VI, 54-55.

⁹⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u, n. 94; *Vaticana* VI, 49.

constitution has to deny that there is any natural priority of producer to product within the Godhead. Rather origination implies to correlation in which the extremes (producer and product) are naturally simultaneous.

IV. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS: PARISIAN REFLECTIONS

In his *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 1, Scotus quits equivocating. He announces that he accepts that the Divine persons are constituted by relations of origin, not because he finds the philosophical arguments mounted in favor of relation-constitution decisive, but “only because of the authorities of the Saints who speak of and name the [Divine] persons by relative names alone.”⁹⁸ Having conceded the majority-report conclusion, Scotus spends four questions rejecting philosophically confused versions of relation-constitution and working out the implications of a more promising formulation. Then, finally, in the fifth question, he considers two arguments not canvassed in his *Lectura* and *Ordinatio*, that there must be an absolute supposit in the Godhead after all.

4.1. *Per Se* Unity? In this work, Scotus elaborates his *Ordinatio*-III response to the objection that relation-constitution turns the Divine persons into *per accidens* unities. This time, Scotus distinguishes the metaphysician’s

⁹⁸ My thanks go to Oleg V. Bychkov, who supplied me with the text of *Reportatio* I-A, d. 26, in volume II of *John Duns Scotus: The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture, Reportatio I-A*, ed. and trans. by Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., and Oleg V. Bychkov (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 2008), hereafter Wolter and Bychkov. This reference is to *Reportatio* I-A, d. 26, q. 1, n.26, Wolter and Bychkov, 71. This quote leaves me unable to agree with Richard Cross’s contention that “by book 1 of the *Reportatio* Scotus finds not only authority but also reason in favour of the traditional view that the persons are subsistent relations” (*Duns Scotus on God*, ch.14, 201). Scotus does recognize arguments in favor of relation-constitution, and rebuttals to arguments critiquing relation-constitution. But he does not say that they are sufficient to settle the dispute in favor of relation-constitution on rational grounds.

and the logician's understandings of both "*per se*" and "*per accidens*." For the metaphysician,

[MDef 1] X and Y make one *per se*, if and only if {[a] X and Y are of the same genus and [b] either X is *per se* and essentially in potency to Y or Y is *per se* and essentially in potency to X}.

[MDef 2] X and Y make one *per accidens*, if and only if {[a] X and Y are quidditatively different and [b] X and Y include quiddities of different categories and [c] either X is somehow in potency to Y or Y is somehow in potency to X}.

Thus, animal and rational satisfy [a] and [b] of [MDef 1] to make one *per se* (viz., human nature), while human and white satisfy [a]-[c] of [MDef 2] to make one *per accidens* (viz., white human being). But in the Godhead nothing is in potency to anything: even where X and Y are not formally the same (as with Divine Wisdom and Goodness), neither is in any way in potency to the other. Thus, even where X and Y are not formally the same in the Godhead, condition [b] is not satisfied in [MDef 1] and condition [c] is not satisfied in [MDef 2]. It follows that — in the metaphysician's sense — they do not combine with each other either to make anything one *per se* or to make anything one *per accidens*!

So far as metaphysical unity is concerned, Scotus here says that reflection on the Godhead encourages us to posit "a quasi-intermediate unity" between "formal unity by which one quiddity is formally the same as another (e.g., the quiddity of human and the quiddity of animal)" and "unity *per accidens* by which one quiddity is neither formally nor really the same as the other (e.g., the unity of human and white)": viz., a quasi-intermediate unity "by which one quiddity is really the same but not formally the same as another."⁹⁹

Scotus admits that this might seem novel from a philosophical point of view, because "in creatures" "there is never a real unity that is not also formal (e.g., human and animal)." Taken literally, this is a claim that Scotus cannot

⁹⁹ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, n. 73; Wolter and Bychkov, 88-89.

consistently make, because he believes that common nature and contracting difference are really the same but formally distinct in created substance individuals (e.g., that human nature and Socrateity are really the same but formally distinct in Socrates). Evidently, Scotus means to be restricting his attention to created *quiddities* (where contracting differences are not quiddities). All creatable *quiddities* are finite, and no finite quiddities can be really the same without being formally the same. By contrast, the Divine essence is infinite and so draws everything that can combine with it into real and perfect unity. Therefore, in the Godhead, the Divine essence (a quasi-substance) and relation-constitutors could be really the same without being formally the same.¹⁰⁰ (This is the move that Scotus offered proponents of relation-constitution in his earlier discussions.)

Logicians apply the *per se/per accidens* distinction, twiceover: to propositions on the one hand and to concepts on the other.

[LDef 1] A proposition is *per se* when the subject is the cause of the inherence of the predicate.

[LDef 2] A proposition is *per accidens* when the subject is not the cause of the inherence of the predicate.

[LDef 3] A composite concept XY is *per se* when [a] X and Y are in the same genus and [b] either X is apt to determine Y in that genus or Y is apt to determine X in that genus.

[LDef 4] A composite concept XY is *per accidens* when [a] X and Y are not in the same genus and/or [b] X is not apt to determine Y in its genus and Y is not apt to determine X in its genus.

Thus, by [LDef 1] “human beings are animals” is true *per se*, while by [LDef 2] “A human being is white” is true *per accidens*. By [LDef 3] “rational animal” is one *per se*, while by [LDef 4] “white human being” is one *per accidens*. (q. 2, n.74) But [LDef 3] the Divine essence and a constitutive relation cannot be conceived by a concept that is one *per se*, because neither condition [a] nor condition [b] is satisfied.

¹⁰⁰*Reportatio* I, d. 26, q. 2, n. 73; Wolter and Bychkov, 88-89.

Scotus concludes that — from a logical point of view — “The Father is God” is less *per se* than “Socrates is human,” “because Socrates is a proper determinate of human and is of the same genus, but not so paternity with respect to the essence.”¹⁰¹ Once again, it is not the *per se*-relation, but the real identity between the infinite Divine essence and the person-constitutors that underwrites the truth of “The Father is God” and “God is the Father.”¹⁰²

4.2. Unsharability, a Non-Perfection? Older masters (e.g., William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste) had argued for absolute-constitution on the ground that the person-constitutor would have to add perfection. Aquinas also speaks as if an individual substance nature’s being a supposit is a perfection that it would be unbecoming of God to take away. In *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, Scotus counters that the role of the suppositer-entity in the Godhead cannot be to add perfection, first because the Divine essence is of infinite perfection already, and second because any perfection would be sharable among all three persons.¹⁰³ Rather — Scotus here contends — *the role of the suppositer-entity is to confer unsharability, and unsharability is not of itself a perfection!*

Where supposits are concerned, Scotus again invites us to compare the Divine with the created case. Creatable substance natures are not “this” of themselves but are common of themselves — of themselves determinable by each of (infinitely?) many unsharable properties. Since only individuals really exist, creatable natures can really exist only when made “this” through combination with an unsharable property, its “last actuality.” But because creatable natures are finite, they cannot combine with many or all such unsharable properties without being “contracted” and “divided” into numerically many substance individuals. Created substance individuals are aptitudinally and — if not forced by Divine power to depend on “alien” supposits (the way the individual human nature of Christ does) — actually

¹⁰¹ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, n. 75; Wolter and Bychkov, 90-91.

¹⁰² *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, n. 76; Wolter and Bychkov, 91.

¹⁰³ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, n. 71; Wolter and Bychkov, 87-88.

self-suppositing. Thus, a created substance-supposit satisfies three conditions.

[1] A created substance-supposit has existence *per se* through its individuator-entity.

[2] A created substance-supposit has *ultimate* (numerical) *unity* through its individuator-entity.

[3] A created substance-supposit is unsharable.¹⁰⁴

By contrast, the first two of these conditions — existence *per se* and ultimate unity — pertains to the Divine essence Itself.

[1'] The Divine essence is maximally actual and has in and of itself its ultimate actuality, because it is incompatible with infinite actuality to be further perfected.

[2'] The Divine essence is “this” and maximally singular of itself, and therefore has ultimate unity of itself.

For Scotus, the reason is obvious: ultimate actuality and ultimate unity are absolute perfections, and any and every absolute perfection is essential to Godhead.¹⁰⁵

The third condition — unsharability — does not pertain to the Divine essence, however. Scotus explains that actual, or at least aptitudinal unsharability pertains to individual created substance natures by virtue of their limitation. Because they are not “this” of themselves, they cannot get their *per se* existence or ultimate unity without being contracted by an individuator-entity, which “divides” the common nature into numerically many individual substance natures, each of which is naturally apt to be its own supposit. The Divine essence is “this” of Itself and so has real *per se* existence and ultimate unity of Itself. No division — and hence no actual or aptitudinal unsharability — is required for its real *per se* existence and ultimate unity.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, nn. 67, 69; Wolter and Bychkov, 85-86.

¹⁰⁵ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, n. 68; Wolter and Bychkov, 85-86.

¹⁰⁶ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, n. 69; Wolter and Bychkov, 86.

Scotus reasons that unsharability of itself must not be an imperfection, because the Divine persons have it. But it must not be a perfection either or else it would pertain to the Divine essence of Itself. Moreover, unsharability is common to substance and to accidents. Therefore, unsharability of itself is neither a perfection nor an imperfection, but something indifferent to each. Thus, the person-constitutor does not function as a perfection-amplifier, but merely confers unsharability on the substance-supposit.¹⁰⁷

4.3. Priority Puzzles: Returning to the worry that relation-constitution takes the priority out of origination, Scotus tries at greater length to enforce a distinction among kinds of priority that will break natural priority and priority of origin apart. 'X is prior to Y and yet simultaneous with Y' is not contradictory if there are two orderings of different kinds: e.g., X can be *naturally* prior to Y and yet simultaneous with Y in *time or duration*. Here Scotus explains,

[SDef 1] X is naturally simultaneous with Y if and only if it is impossible for X to exist without Y and impossible for Y to exist without X.

[SDef 2] X is prior in origin to Y if and only if X is that by which another exists (on which it essentially depends for its existence).

Evidently, Avicenna and Averroes rely on this distinction when they posit a hierarchy of intelligences, with the first necessarily and eternally emanating the second, the second necessarily emanating the third, etc. By [SDef 1], the first is naturally simultaneous with the second, because — since the first acts necessarily and eternally — it is impossible for the first to exist without the second, and vice versa. Nevertheless, by [SDef 2], the first is the efficient cause of the existence of the second, and the second essentially depends for its existence on the first, and not vice versa. Scotus wants to say, so also with the Trinity. Father and Son are naturally simultaneous, but the Son depends upon the Father for His

¹⁰⁷ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 2, nn.70-71; Wolter and Bychkov, 86-88.

existence the way a product depends upon its producer. What has to “give” in this attempted solution, is the intuition that producer-supposita are also *naturally* prior to their actions and to their products!¹⁰⁸

Even if constitution by relations of origin would not keep the Father from being prior in origin to the Son, Scotus admits that it does keep the Father from being prior in origin to His generation-action. Aquinas insisted that the relation of Paternity and the productive actions can be conceived in many different ways with the result that Paternity qua person-constitutor is prior but Paternity qua relation is posterior to generation-action. Scotus counters that no matter how they are conceived, there is no distinction between Paternity and generation-action in reality: in reality they are one maximally singular property and neither is prior or posterior to the other, no matter which kind of priority and posteriority is understood. Since the Father is constituted by that property, the Father cannot be prior to it. Rather the reverse: Paternity/generation-action is prior to the Father the way a constitutive form is prior to what is constituted by it.¹⁰⁹

4.4. *An Absolute Divine Supposit After All?* In *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, Scotus turns to some arguments that he did not consider in the *Lectura*- and *Ordinatio*-discussions — arguments mounted by older masters that, whether or not there are relative Divine supposita, there must be an absolute Divine supposit as well. Scotus presents their case in the form of two difficulties. *The Argument from Subsistence*: In *De Trinitate* VII.9, Augustine declares, “the substance of the Father is not that by which the Father is *Father*, but that by which the Father primarily *exists*.” This authority seems merely to apply the philosophical principle that to each formal entity in the genus of substance there corresponds a being (something or someone) that exists through that formal entity. To the formal entity *bovinity* there

¹⁰⁸ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 4, nn. 141-144, 148; Wolter and Bychkov, 118-19, 121-22; cf. n. 128.

¹⁰⁹ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 4, nn. 149-150; Wolter and Bychkov, 122-23.

corresponds a concrete individual bovine substance that exists through bovinity. To the formal entity humanity there corresponds a concrete individual human substance that exists through humanity. Likewise, in the case of Divinity, there corresponds a concrete individual that exists through Divinity — viz., this God. But if the corresponding entity is individual of itself (the way this God is) and so exists *per se*, won't it also be an absolute supposit.¹¹⁰

Arguments from Essential Action: Two further arguments take off from the “Aristotelian” dictum that ...

[P] every action primarily belongs to a supposit.

[a] The first has an epistemological twist. Scotus and others agree that cosmological arguments lead back to causal action in the form of understanding and willing. Natural reason also knows that understanding and willing are essential acts of an intellectual nature, and [P] that natures do not act but rather supposits subsisting in those natures do. What — all agree — natural reason does not know (because it is an article of faith) is that there is a Trinity of Divine persons constituted by relations of origin. Because natural reason cannot conclude to a relative supposit, it must recognize the causal action as belonging to an absolute supposit. Therefore, unless we are prepared to say that the deliverances of natural reason are wrong even in the state of innocence, we have to grant an absolute supposit in the Godhead to whom the essential actions belong.¹¹¹

[b] Theologians distinguish between *essential* actions that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all share, and *notional* actions such as begetting and spiration-action. Some infer that just as the notional acts pertain to some relative Divine supposits and not others — begetting to the Father alone, spiration-action to the Father and the Son but not to the Spirit — so

¹¹⁰ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, n. 159; Wolter and Bychkov, 125.

¹¹¹ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, n. 159; Wolter and Bychkov, 125.

the essential actions must pertain to some absolute supposit common that the three relative supposits share.¹¹²

Terminological Clarification: All of these arguments would leave the Christian theologian claiming that besides three relative supposits — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — there is an absolute supposit that the relative supposits all share. Scotus explains how this conclusion doesn't make sense in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century contexts in which Scotus was disputing. True, Boethius had defined "person" as "an individual substance of a rational nature." So understood, the Divine essence (which is self-individuating and *per se* extant) and separate intellectual souls (which exist *per se*) would qualify as persons. For that reason, Richard of St. Victor had "precisioned" Boethius' definition by defining "person" as "an unsharable substance existence." In this question, Scotus mentions two kinds of sharability: the way a form is sharable with matter, and the way a universal is sharable with particulars. (Elsewhere he adds the standard third type: the sharability of a part with its whole.) Richard's usage — which Scotus, his contemporaries and near predecessors had adopted — rules out both kinds of sharability. Nothing sharable either way qualifies as a person or supposit in Richard's sense. Richard's definition makes the notion of a sharable supposit — whether absolute or relative — self-contradictory.¹¹³

Reply to the First Difficulty: So far as the argument from subsistence is concerned, Scotus replies that the concrete individual substance corresponding to Divinity is "this God" — i.e., the Divine essence Itself, which is self-individuating and *per se* extant. Scotus, therefore, agrees that "this God" is absolute, but he denies that it is a supposit on the ground that it is necessarily sharable among the three relation-constituted persons.¹¹⁴

Reply to the Second Difficulty: So far as the arguments from essential action are concerned, Scotus boldly rejects [P].

¹¹² *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, pro-arguments 4-5, nn. 154-155; Wolter and Bychkov, 124.

¹¹³ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, n. 161; Wolter and Bychkov, 126.

¹¹⁴ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, n. 161; Wolter and Bychkov, 126.

Supposits are not the *primary* subjects of actions, because supposits are denominated from actions only by reason of *the form* that is *the principle of action*. Thus, the form or the principle of action is what is *primarily* denominated from actions. And if the form exists in a supposit, then the supposit is remotely denominated from the action. Thus, vision is attributed first to the visual power or sensory soul and ultimately to Beulah the cow who exists by that form and sees through the visual power operative in her eyes. Likewise, understanding is attributed first to the intellectual soul and ultimately to Socrates. By definition, the supposit isn't shared with anything else the way the form is: i.e., nothing else exists or acts through the supposit the way the supposit exists and acts through the form. Therefore, when the form that is the principle of action exists in a supposit, the supposit is not only remotely but *ultimately* denominated from the action: it is the ultimate subject to which the action is attributed.¹¹⁵

Scotus considers, what if the form or principle of action existed *per se*? He concludes, in that case, the form or principle of action would act *per se* and it would be the ultimate subject of the action. To convince us, Scotus offers two examples: the *post-mortem* intellectual soul existing separately from the human body, and the post-consecration eucharistic quantity existing without inhering in the eucharistic bread after the latter has ceased to exist. Neither the separate intellectual soul nor the separate quantity is a supposit, because each is sharable the way a form is sharable. Indeed, each has a natural tendency to be shared that way. Nevertheless, when each exists *per se* — separately from what it has a tendency to inform — each acts just as much as their supposits act when they are not separate. The separate soul still understands and the separate quantity still supports and extends the qualities that inhere in it. And because they are *separate*, they would be the ultimate subjects: no further subjects would be denominated from their actions.

For Scotus, the truth that [P] mistakes is ...

¹¹⁵ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, n. 164; Wolter and Bychkov, 127-28.

[P'] action presupposes a form or principle of action that either exists *per se* or informs something that exists *per se*.

Only what really exists acts. So there will be real action only if there is a real principle of action, and there will be a real principle of action only if either the principle of action itself exists *per se* or the principle of action (proximately or remotely) informs something that exists *per se*.

(Ra) Returning to the first argument from essential action, Scotus replies that the cosmological arguments mounted by natural reason can move via [P'] from the causal *actions* of understanding and willing to the *principle(s) of those actions*, and from the principle(s) of those actions to a *per se* extant and hence individual subject of those actions. But natural reason alone will not be able further to determine whether that subject is a supposit or a *per se* extant principle of action. By cosmological arguments, natural reason can arrive at a first efficient cause, but it cannot tell further whether that first efficient cause is sharable or unsharable. Accordingly, natural reason has to rest with an indeterminate conclusion and does not compel us to recognize any absolute supposit in the Godhead.¹¹⁶

(Rb) As for the pro-arguments, that notional actions pertain to relation-constituted persons but essential actions to an absolute supposit common to the three, Scotus brings us back to the point that an action pertains *primarily* to the form or principle of action. Therefore, the difference between essential and notional actions must be principally due to some difference in their elicitive principles. The form or principle of action for essential actions is something essential and absolute: viz., this God, the self-individuating, self-extant Divine essence. But the form or principle of action for notional actions is not this God *simpliciter*, but this God qua existing in the only supposit(s) to whom the notional action belongs. For example, the form or principle of Divine generation is not Divine power *simpliciter* or the Divine intellect *simpliciter*, but Divine power or intellect insofar as it is exercised and exercizable by the Father alone. Once essential and notional acts are primarily attached to different elicitive principles,

¹¹⁶*Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, nn. 165-166; Wolter and Bychkov, 128-29.

the relation-constituted Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will do perfectly well as the ultimate subjects of those actions. No intermediate — *per impossibile* shared — absolute supposit, is required.¹¹⁷

V. John Bassolis (†1347): Scotistic Variations

A so-called “faithful disciple” of Scotus, John Bassolis¹¹⁸ shows himself familiar with arguments mounted by Scotus in his Parisian discussions (as recorded in *Reportatio* IA) but not found in his *Lectura*- and *Ordinatio*-treatments. Nevertheless, Bassolis imposes a different organization on the material to consider not one but three versions of the “absolute-constitution” hypothesis and to challenge them, now with Scotus’s, now with his own distinctive philosophical ideas.

5.1. “Infidel Fiction and Error”! Scotus was focussed on philosophical formulations of Christian faith in a Trinity when he considered whether the Divine persons are constituted by absolute entities. But the most obvious supporters of absolute-constitution are “infidels” who insist that there is and can be one and only one Divine supposit.¹¹⁹ Bassolis retails four arguments on their behalf. (1) Arguing first from Divine perfection, they infer that, since unity pertains to absolute perfection, maximal unity will pertain not only to the Divine essence but also to the Divine supposit. Because any relative has a corresponding correlative, any nature supposed by relatives will have more than one supposit, and any nature supposed by a single supposit must be supposed by an absolute.¹²⁰

(2) Again, God is the “One over many.” But what is absolutely first in a given order is maximally absolute and one. Just as God is first, absolute, and one in the order of

¹¹⁷ *Reportatio* IA, d. 26, q. 5, nn. 169-170; Wolter and Bychkov, 130-31.

¹¹⁸ *Sentence Commentary* I, d. 26, qq. 1-2 (Paris: Francisco Regnault and John Frellon).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. CLI ra.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. CL vb.

beings, so in the order of supposits there must be a first supposit — viz., the Divine supposit — which must likewise be maximally absolute and single.¹²¹

(3) Third-cited is a version of the “argument from subsistence” (cf. sec. 4.4 above), that whatever is simple and non-multipliable has, corresponding to it, something one and absolute with respect to its entity. But what is one in an intellectual nature is a supposit. Therefore, the simple and numerically non-multipliable Divine essence has, corresponding to it, an absolute supposit.¹²²

(4) Likewise, the fourth adapts the first “argument from essential action” (cf. sec. 4.4 above), that natural right reason leads only to the truth and brings humans to knowledge that the Divine nature subsists in a supposit. But natural right reason does not allow us to demonstrate a trinity or even a plurality of Divine persons; *a fortiori*, it does not license the conclusion that there are relative supposits.¹²³

Unsurprisingly, Bassolis thinks these arguments must be rebutted and their conclusion repudiated. (R1) Against such infidels, Bassolis argues first from his own understanding of the nature of unity. Scotus often explains unity in negative terms — as *incompatibility* with certain kinds of multiplicity. But where Scotus metaphysically grounds increases in unity (e.g., from specific to numerical) in additional positive entity (e.g., the individuator-entity), Bassolis reasons that since unity is formally a matter of negation, it cannot pertain to absolute perfection.¹²⁴ Therefore, the inference—from God’s absolute perfection to there being only one Divine supposit — fails.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid., f. CL vb.

¹²² Ibid., f. CL vb.

¹²³ Ibid., f. CLI ra.

¹²⁴ Stephen Dumont notes how some of Scotus’s students rejected the Subtle Doctor’s own account of individuation in favor of Henry of Ghent’s claim that individuation is by negation only, while others attributed individuation — not to a distinct formal entity — but to an intrinsic mode. Cf. “The Univocity of the Concept of Being in the Fourteenth Century: II. The *De Ente* of Peter Thomae,” *Medieval Studies* 50 (1988): 186-256; esp. 189-90, 201-02.

¹²⁵ Ibid., f. CLI rb.

(R2) Bassolis agrees that God is first in many orders, and that — One over many — what is first in any order is one. But he denies that the first is invariably absolute. Thus, Bassolis is willing to identify God the Father as one and first in the order of supposits, but thinks it does not follow further from these considerations alone that God the Father is an absolute rather than a relative supposit.¹²⁶ (R3) Against the third, Bassolis follows Scotus, insisting that what corresponds to the simple, absolute, numerically unmultipliable Divine essence, is not one supposit but *one God*, the concrete Divine essence that is self-existent and “this” of Itself. (R4) Scotus replied to the first essential action argument by saying that cosmological arguments get — via [P] — to a principle of action, but not necessarily to a supposit and hence not to an absolute supposit. By contrast, Bassolis agrees that cosmological arguments in the order of dependence and eminence do arrive at a supposit: they establish that there is *at least* one Divine supposit but do not reach further to prove that there is *at most* one Divine supposit. Likewise, the deliverances of natural right reason are indeterminate and indeterminable as to whether the Divine supposit(s) is (are) absolute or relative.¹²⁷

5.2. Sharable Absolute Supposit? Having dispatched the infidels, Bassolis turns to the older masters’ hypothesis that [a] there is a single absolute supposit that is [b] sharable by three relative Divine persons, [c] who are one God.¹²⁸ (1) The first argument Bassolis cites in their favor is the “epistemological essential action argument” summarized by Scotus (cf. sec. 4.4 above).¹²⁹ (2) The second depends on the Anselmian philosophical principle that when some possess *F* in greater, lesser, or equal degree, there is something — *F-ness* — through which they are *F*. But subsistence is common to the relative persons, and subsistence does not pertain to the Divine essence. Therefore, there must be an absolute

¹²⁶ Ibid., f. CLI rb.

¹²⁷ Ibid., f. CLI rb.

¹²⁸ Ibid., f. CLI ra.

¹²⁹ Ibid., f. CLI ra.

supposit common to them and through which they all have subsistence.¹³⁰ (3) A third appeals to Boethius and Anselm who maintain that what pertains to the perfection of created natures ought not to be denied of God. But it pertains to the perfection of a created nature that its supposit be absolute. Therefore, it should not be denied that there is an absolute supposit in the Divine nature.¹³¹

Following Scotus, Bassolis first points out how the notion of a shared supposit could seem coherent only to thinkers working with Boethius's definition of "person" as "an individual substance of a rational nature." For late thirteenth and early fourteenth century theologians who follow Richard of St. Victor's definition of "person" as "unsharable subsistence," the notion of a shared supposit is contradictory. Standard by Bassolis's time was the observation that what keeps the numerically unmultipliable Divine essence from being Itself a supposit is that It is sharable among the three Divine persons.

Even on the assumption that the older doctors were working with a different definition of "person," Bassolis finds their position theologically inadequate. Drawing on Scotus's philosophical machinery, Bassolis asks how the absolute and the relative supposits would be related. Either as really distinct — in which case, there would be a quaternity in the Godhead — or as distinct formally — in which case the three persons would be really the same as the absolute supposit, and there would be only one Divine supposit after all! Against such polemics, the older doctors might rise again to apply their own distinction between sharable and unsharable individuals of a rational nature: in effect, creeds, ecclesiastical definitions, and theological tradition, lay it down that there are three and only three *unsharable* supposits, but define nothing about *sharable* supposits. Confronted with Bassolis's dilemma, they would doubtless reject real distinction, holding relatives to be related to the sharable absolute supposit the way others say relatives are related to the sharable absolute Divine essence.

¹³⁰ Ibid., f. CLI ra.

¹³¹ Ibid., f. CLI ra.

From Bassolis's point of view, such a reply shows up the philosophical redundancy of the putative sharable supposit. (R1) Bassolis borrows his reply to the epistemological essential action argument from Scotus. Rejecting the Aristotelian theorem [P] — that action presupposes an agent supposit — Bassolis explains that [P'] actions pertain immediately and properly to *the principle of action*, while supposits are the last to be denominated from the action. The principle of Divine essential functions and actions *ad extra* — viz., intellect and will-power — belongs to the Divine essence, which is shared by the three Divine persons, each of whom is thereby said to act.¹³² There is no need to turn the Divine essence into a supposit as well. (R2) To the argument that — “One over many” — there must be a single sharable source of subsistence, Bassolis opposes Scotus's contention that “unsharable subsistence” names no quiddity or common positive property in which all unsharable supposits participate. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Socrates the philosopher and Brownie the donkey are all truly denominated by the same *negative* descriptions — “not sharable the way a common nature is,” “not sharable the way a part is,” “not sharable the way an accident is.” But it is one more philosophical confusion to explain this by positing some *positive* feature univocal to them all.¹³³

5.3. Personification and Perfection: Much of what Bassolis says about the pros and cons of absolute-constitution travels over ground Scotus has already surveyed. But Bassolis does draw on his own and on Scotus's philosophical insights to make some further points. All parties to the discussion concur that personification involves a higher degree of unity and unsharability than individuation does. Disputes arise when some sponsor the generalized assumption that higher degrees of unity and unsharability entail higher degrees of perfection. Scotus himself reasons that since common nature enjoys only a real unity less than numerical unity, the “contracting difference” or individuator must itself be a positive entity thereby to endow the creatable nature with greater unity,

¹³² Ibid., f. CLI va.

¹³³ Ibid., f. CLI va.

unsharability, and perfection. Both ancient authorities and contemporary sponsors of absolute-constitution assume an analogy between individuation and personification, and so forward the thesis that person-constitutors must be perfection-enhancers as well. They conclude that absolutes are better suited to the job than relatives because the former have and so are in a position to confer more positive entity than the latter.

Bassolis agrees that created substance suppositis are absolute rather than relative beings. But this is not because they are constituted by absolute-suppositors. On the contrary, Scotus's own theory of personification — developed in connection with the doctrine of the Incarnation — denies that created individual substance natures can be suppositised by the addition of any positive entities whatever.¹³⁴ For either such suppositor entities would be really distinct from the individual substance natures they supposit, in which case God could create the latter without the former and it would be metaphysically possible for substance natures to exist in reality without being the natures of any supposit at all — which he counted absurdly unAristotelian. Or else suppositor entities would be really the same and distinct formally from the individual substance natures they supposit, in which case it would be impossible for an individual substance nature (e.g., this human nature) to be suppositised by something else (e.g., the Divine Word) as the doctrine of the Incarnation requires. Scotus concluded that created individual substance natures were suppositised by a “double negation” of aptitudinal dependence and actual dependence: individual created substance natures have a natural aptitude for independent existence and so for being their own supposit; when this aptitude is not actually obstructed by Divine power making it to be suppositised by an alien supposit (as happens in the Incarnation), the individual substance nature will be its own supposit. Thus, Scotus's theory cuts off any analogy with created personification on which an argument for the absolute-constitution of Divine persons might rest.

¹³⁴ Ibid., ff. CLIII vb, CLV rb, CLVI va.

More fundamentally, Bassolis joins Scotus (in *Reportatio* IA) in contending that personification is not in itself perfection-conferring. First, primary unsharability is itself a negation (in creatures, a double negation), and — as above — negations do not formally pertain to absolute perfection. Second, primary unsharability does not satisfy Anselm's *Monologion*-criterion — whatever is in general better than what is not it — because the Divine essence is sharable and yet maximally perfect.¹³⁵ Because real identity with the maximally perfect Divine essence will make each of the Divine persons maximally perfect, neither absolute nor relative person constitutors would be able to add to their perfection.¹³⁶ So far as person-constitution is concerned, the debate over whether absolutes are more perfect than relatives is a red herring!

Divine persons require to be constituted by positive entities, not to enhance their perfection, but to accomplish their differentiation as “something-the-same” entities. But the fact that created individual substance natures are not supposed by positive entities, is a marker of their less than maximal perfection as finite beings. Divine infinity draws in everything compossible with it and so can be really the same as many person-constitutors at once. As finite, created individual substance natures cannot be shared by many “internal” supposits at once. Likewise, it is metaphysically impossible for Divine aseity to be assumed or supposed by an alien or “external” supposit. But it is a mark of creaturehood that even individual substance natures are in obediential potency with respect to existing in or being supposed by something else. These metaphysical possibilities — that created individual substance natures be their own supposits, that they be supposed by external supposits, and that the very same created individual substance nature be first externally and then internally supposed, or vice versa — mean that created individual substance natures cannot be supposed by the addition of positive person-constituting entities at all.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid., f. CLIII vb.

¹³⁶ Ibid., f. CLI va.

¹³⁷ Ibid., f. CLVI va.

When all is said and done, Bassolis embraces Scotus's position in *Reportatio* IA — that relation-constitution is more defensible and that there are no absolute supposits in the Godhead¹³⁸ — not because there are effective arguments to prove this conclusion,¹³⁹ but because of the Saints and authorities.¹⁴⁰ To the end, Bassolis insists that the *definition* of “person” is philosophically neutral on the absolute vs relation-constitution question.

VI. FRANCISCUS DE MAYRONIS (†AFTER 1328): PERSONIFICATION AND PRIORITIES

Yet another — “independent-minded” — Scotist, Franciscus de Mayronis ponders the question of absolutes and relations in the Godhead at considerable length. Like Bassolis, he considers the philosophers' hypothesis of one and only one absolute Divine supposit, as well as arguments for absolute-constitution from the Divine nature as intellectual substance and spirit.¹⁴¹ Like Bassolis, he mounts Scotistic comparisons and contrasts between created substance natures and the Divine essence, with respect both to individuation and personification.¹⁴² Like Bassolis, he joins the mounting theological consensus in favor of relation-constitution, “convinced more by authority than by arguments.”¹⁴³ Among Mayronis's interesting (if sometimes less than perspicuous) discussions, I turn to his reconsideration of the priority problems that preoccupied Aquinas about person-constitution by actions or relations.

6.1. Actions versus Relations: Where Aquinas appealed to distinctions of reason or of modes of signification, Mayronis draws on Scotus's formal distinction, which is a distinction

¹³⁸ Ibid., f. CLIII rb.

¹³⁹ Ibid., f. CLIII ra-rb.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., f. CLIII ra.

¹⁴¹ Franciscus de Mayronis, *In Libros Sententiarum* I (Venedig, 1520: Minerva GmbH, Frankfurt/Main: Unveränderter Nachdruck, 1966), q. 26, a.1, f. 81 va M- 81 vb P.

¹⁴² *I Sent.*, d. 26, q. 3, 82va I, M-N.

¹⁴³ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 3, f. 82 va L-M.

a parte rei prior to and independent of any activity of the intellect and so prior to and independent of modes of signifying within human language. Consider the relation/production pairs: paternity and active generation; filiation and passive generation. Mayronis maintains that in each case relation and action are really the same but distinct formally and quidditatively.¹⁴⁴ He then suggests that *Categories*-doctrine aims to chart comparisons among quiddities, which remain the same whether their instances are really distinct or really the same. In *Reportatio* IA, Scotus had insisted that in the Godhead no priority of any kind is to be found between active generation and paternity (cf. sec. 4.3 above). But Mayronis reverts to the more intuitive view that production is prior to relation — active generation to paternity, passive generation to filiation — and concludes that action is more constitutive of the Divine person than relation is — active generation more constitutive of the Father than paternity, passive generation more constitutive of the Son than filiation. Both are constitutive, but action is first and relation derivative — the very opposite of what Aquinas claimed!¹⁴⁵

6.2. Relation-Constitution — Which and How?

In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas claims that it is the opposition of the relations *to one another* that gives rise to distinction among the persons. Mayronis follows Scotus in rejecting this, and takes a page from Aquinas himself: person-distinguishers are internal whereas the opposition of the relations to one another is external to the persons. Rather, the relations are constitutors in comparison with their foundations (in this case, within the Divine essence Itself).¹⁴⁶ Being a constitutor does not pertain to relations *per se* the first way, because its formal *ratio* is to be *ad aliud* [sic: Aristotle says *ad aliquid*] and relations are not constitutors insofar as they are compared to something external to the person constituted. Rather — like the passive power of matter and the active power of substantial form to

¹⁴⁴ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 ra A-C.

¹⁴⁵ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83ra C-D.

¹⁴⁶ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 ra D.

unite to make something one *per se* — being a constitutor is a *passio* of person-constituting relations.¹⁴⁷ Pulling the necessary conditions together, Mayronis contends that to be person-constituting a relation must be [i] formally internal (*insistens*) rather than formally adventitious and external (*assistens*), [ii] subsistent (the way accidental relations are not), [iii] proper (the way sharable and shared relations — such as equality, similarity, and identity — are not), and [iv] first (the way active spiration is not in comparison with the Father and the Son who are already constituted by paternity and filiation, respectively).¹⁴⁸ As to whether paternity as a quiddity satisfies condition [iii], Mayronis takes up Scotus's startling reply in *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, that not every quiddity is sharable (cf. sec. 3.5 above). Mayronis follows with the corollary caution that we use the word “paternity” in this context not with reference to a common concept but rather to a specific *ratio* that is found only in the Godhead and that is essentially unsharable.¹⁴⁹

6.3. Presupposed Supposits? Action-constitution and relation-constitution both seem to run afoul of *Categories* doctrines that actions presuppose agent-supposits and real relations presuppose really distinct relata. Acknowledging that both actions and relations presuppose something, Mayronis follows Scotus's contention (cf. sec. 4.4 above) that *supposits* are required in neither case. Separate souls are not supposits because they are incomplete beings. But it is metaphysically possible for them to be the subjects of beatific acts of enjoying God even before the general resurrection.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, two separate souls could be the really distinct relata of real relations.¹⁵¹ Reformulating for precision, Mayronis declares that action presupposes not [P] the being of the supposit but [P'] the being of the active principle, while

¹⁴⁷ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 rb E.

¹⁴⁸ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 rb G.

¹⁴⁹ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 va I.

¹⁵⁰ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 vb Q.

¹⁵¹ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 vb O.

relations necessarily presuppose *formally distinct* extremes (but not always supposita).¹⁵²

Thus, in the Godhead, Divine memory is the foundation of paternity, and the Divine essence is its term, and the Divine essence and Divine memory are distinct formally. Mayronis confronts the worry that identifying the Divine memory and the Divine essence as extremes of the begetting-relation will turn the Divine memory into the Father and the Divine essence the Son. Precisioning again, he explains that the common *dicta* — “every form confers its formal being on that in which it principally inheres” or “the proximate subject of the form is denominated from it” (e.g., the surface is called “white” from the whiteness inhering in it) — are only “rough and ready.” Where relations are concerned, sometimes the foundations and terms are denominated from them, sometimes only the supposits, sometimes both. Divine paternity and filiation fall into the second category and denominate supposits only. Thus, Mayronis concludes, the Divine essence isn’t Itself said to be generated, because it is only the *formal* term but not the *whole* term of the relation. The Son is said to be generated, because the Son is the *whole* term of the relation.¹⁵³

Likewise, the explanatory circle of actions presupposing the supposits that they constitute, is avoided. For the fertile Divine memory is naturally prior to the activity of conceiving understanding (and so to both active and passive understanding), while the action is naturally prior to the supposits (Father and Son). Once again, this analysis may surprise, insofar as the supposits (Father and Son) turn out to be naturally simultaneous, with the result that the Father is not *naturally* prior to the Son. But — as Scotus insisted (cf. secs. 3.5 and 4.3 above) — the Father can still be said to be prior *by origin*, insofar as the supposits are denominated from active and passive generation, and from the relations of paternity and filiation, respectively.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 vb Q.

¹⁵³ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 vb O.

¹⁵⁴ *I Sent.* d. 26, q. 4, f. 83 vb Q.

VII. STREAMLINING WITH OCKHAM (1285-1347)

Like Bassolis and Mayronis, William Ockham is heavily influenced by Scotus in his thinking about Divine person-constitution. Like them and like Scotus in *Reportatio* IA, Ockham is moved by authorities to give a decisive “yes” to relation-constitution in the end. Yet, in comparison with Bassolis’s and Mayronis’s, Ockham’s disagreements with Scotus about philosophical issues germane to Divine person-constitution are many and deep. [i] By contrast with Scotus, Ockham is a nominalistic-conceptualist about universals and denounces the idea that anything is common in reality as “the worst error of philosophy.”¹⁵⁵ [ii] Ockham rejects Scotus’s notion that there may be formally distinct entities within what is really one and the same thing, where formal distinction is taken as sufficient to license the predication of contradictories with respect to entities that are distinct formally but really the same.¹⁵⁶ [iii] Ockham dismisses Scotus’s distinction of instants of nature within a single instant of time (or the now of eternity), and of natural priorities and posteriorities within what is really one and the same thing.¹⁵⁷ [iv] Ockham argues extensively and repeatedly that it is contrary to Aristotle’s philosophy to posit relation-things really distinct from substance and quality.¹⁵⁸ These philosophical differences *do* shape Ockham’s account of how Divine persons are distinguished and constituted, but in ways less predictable than one might think.

7.1. Praepositinus, Rejected: Off hand, one would expect [i] Ockham’s nominalistic conceptualism to make him receptive to Praepositinus’s proposal that the Divine

¹⁵⁵ *Expos. Periherm.* I, Prooemium (OPh II, 363). Cf. Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), chs. 2-4, 13-141.

¹⁵⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, q. 1 (OTh II, 4-21); cf. Adams, *William Ockham*, ch. 2, 16-29.

¹⁵⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 35, q. 4 (OTh IV, 468-69); *Expos. Praedicam.*, c. 18 (OPh II, 326-28). Cf. *William Ockham*, ch. 24, 1044-50.

¹⁵⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 30, q. 1 (OTh IV, 281-319). Cf. *William Ockham*, ch. 7, 215-76.

“persons are distinguished in and of themselves.”¹⁵⁹ After all, Ockham has insisted against Scotus that human nature need not be common in reality because one of a pair of co-specific individuals (e.g., Socrates) can, in and of itself and by itself as a whole, really agree with and really differ from the other (e.g., Plato). There is no need to posit in them any metaphysical composition of some item in which they agree (e.g., human nature) and another (e.g., their contracting differences or haecceities) which they do not share. Doesn’t Praepositinus in effect simply apply Ockham’s nominalistic conceptualism to the Divine case?¹⁶⁰

Yes, Ockham recognizes, but inappropriately so, because there is a decisive disanalogy between Divine and created cases. Socrates and Plato are really distinct from one another in every respect, but the Divine persons share the Divine essence which is numerically unmultiplied in the three persons. Since the Divine persons cannot be distinguished from one another by what is the same in each, Ockham concludes, they cannot be distinguished from one another in and of and by their *whole* selves. Thus, Ockham’s *first concession* is that each Divine person must be metaphysically constituted by “something-the-same” (i.e., the Divine essence) and something by which it is distinguished from the other two.¹⁶¹

7.2. Real Identity, Problematic and Problem-Solving: Recall how Ockham rejects the “common” opinion about universals because of its alleged inability to give any adequate account of the relation between the sharable nature on the one hand and its individuator on the other. So far as the Divine essence and the Divine person-distinguishers are concerned, the thinkers we have been discussing took the answer to be fixed by ecclesiastical consensus: each person-distinguisher (and accordingly each constituted person) is really the same as the Divine essence and really distinct from the other person-distinguishers (and hence the other

¹⁵⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 144).

¹⁶⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 144).

¹⁶¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 145).

persons), so that — and this is Ockham's *second concession* — *tres res sunt una res*. Scotus sought to eliminate the philosophical scandal in this apparent contradiction of logical laws (alternatively, of the Indiscernibility of Identicals or the Transitivity of Identity) by appealing to his formal distinction. Neither the Divine persons nor their person-constitutors are in every way the same as the Divine essence; they are really the same but distinct formally. Only where *a* and *b* are in every way the same as *c*, do the Indiscernibility of Identicals or the Transitivity of Identity apply. For Scotus, this claim had explanatory value, because he believed the non-identity of formalities could dissolve apparent contradictions either by distinguishing their subjects or by relativizing their predicates. But Ockham argues that Scotus's formal distinction is bogus and devoid of explanatory underpinnings.¹⁶² In his discussion of the Trinity, Ockham sometimes deploys the term "formal distinction" or "distinct formally" simply as shorthand for what he regards as "unique and beyond understanding":¹⁶³ that in the Trinity, *tres res sunt una res*!¹⁶⁴ For Ockham this is a *big* miracle; his warning against eager Scotistic appeals to formal distinction, the stern rebuke not to multiply miracles beyond necessity!

Once this "real identity" thesis is accepted as a fixed point, however, many *Categories*-generated difficulties about person-constitution are rendered moot. Real sameness erases the worry that absolute-constitutors would introduce composition into the Divine persons, because composition presupposes real distinction.¹⁶⁵ Nor would there be any priority of parts to the whole (e.g., of the Divine essence or person-constitutors to the persons), because real identity would erase any composition.¹⁶⁶ Again, the real identity of each and every person-constitutor with the Divine essence is sufficient to guarantee the logical inseparability of the

¹⁶² *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, q. 1 (OTh II, 14-17).

¹⁶³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, q. 6 (OTh II, 175).

¹⁶⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, q. 1 (OTh I, 19); d. 2, q. 11 (OTh II, 374); *Summa Logica* II, c. 2 (OPh I, 253-54).

¹⁶⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 153, 155-56).

¹⁶⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 158-59, 162).

Divine persons, no matter whether absolutes or relatives are invoked to do the job.¹⁶⁷ Concern that cross-categorical person-constitution would threaten unity dissolves because real sameness is the strongest version of *per se* unity.¹⁶⁸ Likewise irrelevant is the dispute over whether the putative minimal entity of relations is a disadvantage or an advantage (à la Aquinas); for whatever may be the case with creatures, the entity of Divine relations is — by virtue of their real identity with the Divine essence — maximal!¹⁶⁹

Moreover, Ockham's rejection of Praepositinus notwithstanding, the "real identity" thesis lessens the distance between Divine personification and what Ockham understands to be the ordinary case. For, presumably because he denies formal distinction any explanatory power, Ockham insists that real identity is *just as great* an identity as real identity plus formal identity. Thus, the Divine essence is the same as the Father by just as great an identity as it is the same as itself, but not by every sort of identity, because the sort of identity does not add greatness or greater perfection [to the identity].

And in general, each Divine person is just as identical with its essence as Socrates is with his human nature, although the Divine person will not be the same as the Divine essence *in every way* that Socrates is with his human nature.¹⁷⁰ This is important because — as Praepositinus insisted — paradigmatic unity should be a feature of the Divine persons as much as the Divine essence.

7.3. The Ease of Absolute Constitution: Ockham's own philosophical distaste for relation-constitution arises from another quarter, however: viz., that — in his estimation — "it is *so* difficult to understand that a relation is a certain thing and that it is really distinct [from the absolute things] in a creature."¹⁷¹ This philosophical bias leads him to distinguish

¹⁶⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 156, 164).

¹⁶⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 164-65).

¹⁶⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 166).

¹⁷⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 164-65).

¹⁷¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 153).

two versions of absolute-constitution. Ockham characterizes the one considered by Scotus (the “third” opinion, both in Scotus and in Ockham) as the view that [a] the Divine persons are constituted or distinguished by absolute properties *first*, and [b] by relations *quasi-consequently*.¹⁷² With this Ockham contrasts an unattributed alternative (the “fourth” opinion) more suited to his own philosophical proclivities, that [a] the Divine persons are constituted by absolute properties, and [c] that there is nothing at all imaginable in God except absolutes, so that “there would not be any relations or origins in God in any way distinct from absolute things.”¹⁷³ This “fourth” opinion does not deny statements such as “the Father begets the Son” or “the Father and the Son breathe the Holy Spirit.” Rather, it treats relations among the Divine persons the same way Ockham treats intrinsic relations in creatures:

just as — given this whiteness and another whiteness, everything else imaginable circumscribed — these two whitenesses are similar; likewise — given God and the absolute that is a stone, everything else circumscribed — still the stone really depends on God and God is really the cause of the stone; so ... — given three such absolute persons, one of the persons would be from one and one would be from two, and the one would be Father, another Son, another Holy Spirit, without anything else imaginable [being posited].¹⁷⁴

Like Scotus, Bassolis, and Mayronis before him, Ockham insists that — theological majority reports aside — [a] absolute-constitution (the ground common to the third and fourth opinions) is an adequate metaphysical interpretation of “three persons are one God.” Unsurprisingly, Ockham adds that absolute-constitution is philosophically easier to uphold than relation-constitution.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 147).

¹⁷³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 152).

¹⁷⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 152).

¹⁷⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 153).

7.4. Relation-Constitution, the “More Difficult” but “Truer” Way! Despite philosophical reservations, Ockham joins the theological consensus¹⁷⁶ — and this is his *third concession* — that the Divine persons are constituted and distinguished by really distinct relations, because

the authorities of the Saints seem explicitly to posit relations in the Godhead — not only that some relative concepts are truly predicated of Divine persons, as when we say that Socrates is similar and that Socrates is father and son, but that there are [in the Godhead] true and real paternity and filiation, and that there are two simple things of which one is not the other.¹⁷⁷

If the role of person-constitutors is to distinguish “something-the-same” entities from one another, Ockham argues, Divine paternity can function in that role insofar as it is a *res* that is [a] unsharable and “this” of itself, [b] really distinct from the other persons, and [c] united with the Divine essence to make one *per se*.¹⁷⁸ And if really distinct relations are person-distinguishers and constitutors, Ockham thinks it would violate his famous Razor to posit absolute-distinguishers and constitutors as well. Neither Scripture nor the Saints require it, and it is contrary to natural reason to suppose that three absolute things could be really the same as one thing — i.e., to multiply cases in which *tres res sunt una res*.¹⁷⁹

For Ockham, the most difficult remaining philosophical obstacle to relation-constitution is that real relations seem to presuppose and so would not be in a position to constitute their *relata* or extremes.¹⁸⁰ This theorem would be firmly entrenched in the theory of relations Ockham attributes to Aristotle, according to which Socrates’ being similar to Plato

¹⁷⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 153, 154).

¹⁷⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 154, 156-57).

¹⁷⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 157, 162-63).

¹⁷⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 157).

¹⁸⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 158-59).

is a matter of *how* Socrates and Plato are, and posits nothing really distinct from, e.g., Socrates and his whiteness and Plato and his whiteness. But it is equally rooted in Scotus's theory, which treats Socrates' similarity to Plato as a thing (*res*) really distinct from both its extreme (Socrates) and its foundation (Socrates' whiteness).

Ockham treads well-worn paths when he admits — and this is his *fourth concession* — that this theorem is counter-exemplified in the Divine case: e.g., that Divine paternity constitutes the supposit that is referred by it (i.e., the Father).¹⁸¹ Likewise, not every relation will have an absolute supposit as its primary term (e.g., neither Divine paternity nor Divine filiation will).¹⁸² The term of a relation (e.g., of Divine paternity) will not be its correlation (e.g., Divine filiation) either, but rather the supposit constituted by its correlation (e.g., the Son).¹⁸³ Ockham *does* find it a general truth that relations presuppose their foundations, and Ockham identifies the Divine essence as the foundation of all of the Divine relations. Yet, the Divine essence is not Itself referred by any of these relations, but only the supposits are.¹⁸⁴

Ockham merely follows Scotus's lead when he acknowledges that relation-constitution makes persons constituted by the correlations (e.g., Father and Son) naturally simultaneous, and so takes the natural priority out of origination or production.¹⁸⁵ Because — *pace* Scotus — Ockham recognizes naturally necessary productions of the will, the More than Subtle Doctor has no trouble admitting that the Son and the Holy Spirit are both naturally produced.¹⁸⁶

Scotus's *epistemological* objection to relation-constitution — that the ultimate person-constitutors wouldn't be "something-the-same" entities from which any general concept

¹⁸¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 158-59).

¹⁸² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. u (OTh IV, 159).

¹⁸³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 160).

¹⁸⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 176-77).

¹⁸⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 159-60).

¹⁸⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 161); cf. d. 7, q. 2 (OTh III, 141-44); d. 10, q. 2 (OTh III, 335-41).

could be abstracted, whereas “relation” is a quidditative concept common to Divine paternity, filiation, and spiration — is countered by Ockham’s contrary contention — that abstract quidditative concepts can apply to numerically many things (e.g., “human” to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) even if they do not have a common metaphysical constituent.¹⁸⁷

7.5. Invidious Distinctions, Spurious Priorities: By the time of Scotus, “*tres res sunt una res*,” the summary tag from Fourth Lateran, functioned among other things to rule out any idea of there being more than three *res* in the Godhead. But if there are three and only three *res* to work with, the semantics of whatever is said about the “inner” Trinity will have to be mapped onto these three, each and all of which are really identical with one. Recall how Aquinas begins with two real productions or originating *actions* — active/passive intellectual production and active/passive production by the will — which give rise to two pairs of *relations* — paternity and filiation from the first; active and passive spiration from the second. Henry of Ghent distinguishes four aspects within the first person — generative, able-to-generate, generator, and Father. The “third” position reviewed by Scotus and Ockham posits *absolute* person-constitutors as well as relations in the Godhead. However many distinctions they posit, these thinkers still operate within the confines of Fourth Lateran, and do not take themselves to be adding to the number of really distinct things with which the Divine essence is really identical. Thus, Aquinas voices the consensus that origins are really the same as the relations. All agree, too, that if active spiration were really distinct from each of the other Divine relations — paternity, filiation, passive spiration — there would be a quaternity in God. Their solution is to hold that just as the Divine essence is really the same as each of three really distinct things, so active spiration is really the same as each of two — viz., paternity and filiation.¹⁸⁸ Although summaries of the “third” opinion do not explicitly address the issue, presumably its adherents would want to

¹⁸⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 163).

¹⁸⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, l. 3 (OTh IV, 190).

regard the Divine relations as really the same as the absolute constitutors.

Yet, having agreed to work with the three and only three *res*, these thinkers still want to identify among features that are really the same which characteristics are prior and which posterior, which fundamentally constitutive and which quasi-adventitious. Thus, Aquinas contends, it is relations not origins that do the person-constituting; Mayronis, that it is primarily origins and secondarily relations; the “third” opinion, absolutes but not (or only “consequentially”) relations; Henry of Ghent, “generative” aspect, but not “able-to-generate” or “generator.” Many who hold to relation-constitution insist that active spiration does not constitute but is quasi-adventitious insofar as it “comes to” persons “already” constituted by paternity or filiation, respectively. The articulation of such claims require the philosophical machinery of some sort of distinction among entities that are really the same. Thus, Aquinas appeals to real distinction versus distinction of reason; Henry of Ghent to distinction *secundum rem* versus distinction *secundum vocem*; Scotists, to real versus formal distinction.

7.5.1. Distinctions of Reason, Modes of Signification:

In *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, qq. 2-3, Ockham takes up these issues with a particular focus on Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, and presses an interpretation of their positions that attends more to the letter of their works than to the spirit of their intentions. (1) First, Ockham charges that to speak, e.g., of generation and paternity as really the same and distinct in reason is a category mistake. For, strictly speaking, real sameness or distinction obtains between real beings and not between beings of reason, while sameness or distinction of reason obtains between beings of reason and not between real beings. *Pace* Scotus, it is the ontological status of the relata that makes it to be a case of real sameness or distinction on the one hand, and sameness or distinction of reason on the other. Since Divine generation and paternity are *real*, they are not the kind of entities that can be distinct in reason. (2) In the same vein, Ockham contends that only words or signs have modes of signification; non-signs do not. But the

question is not whether words or signs constitute the Divine persons, but whether the origins or the relations that are really in the Godhead, do. Moreover, a distinction of reason between concepts or a distinction of modes of signification belonging to a word cannot *effect* any distinction in real things. For, as Aquinas himself insists, nothing external to a thing can make it to be the same as or distinct from anything else. But the concepts or words “generation” and “paternity” are external to Divine generation and paternity, respectively.¹⁸⁹ Ockham’s conclusion is that distinctions of reason and of modes of signifying leave origins and relations,¹⁹⁰ as well as such aspects as generative, able-to-generate, generator, and Father,¹⁹¹ altogether the same *a parte rei*, with the result that the Indiscernibility of Identicals applies.¹⁹² Therefore, it is impossible for any of those that are altogether the same *a parte rei* to be either prior or posterior to each other¹⁹³ or for one to be a person-constitutor and the other not.

Ockham proceeds to spell out how this consequence “makes hash” of Aquinas’s treatment of origins and relations in the Godhead. For if they are altogether the same *a parte rei* origins will be just as internal to the person as the relation.¹⁹⁴ Generation will be in no way either prior or posterior to paternity.¹⁹⁵ Active production or origination will not always presuppose but in some cases (viz., at least in the Godhead) may constitute the agent supposit, just as much as the relation does. Passive origination will not be “a way” and hence prior to the originated person, but in some cases may be really and formally constitutive (and not merely a quasi-efficient cause) of the supposit.¹⁹⁶ Likewise, Henry of Ghent’s attempts to distinguish immediate from intermediate among

¹⁸⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 170-71).

¹⁹⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 173).

¹⁹¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 178).

¹⁹² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 170, 178-80).

¹⁹³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 171-72, 181).

¹⁹⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 171).

¹⁹⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 173-74).

¹⁹⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 173, 181).

characteristics that are altogether the same *a parte rei*, will have no metaphysical basis.¹⁹⁷

7.5.2. Really the Same, Distinct Formally: Scotus and his followers agreed with Ockham in that distinctions of reason and/or of modes of signification, were inadequate to this formulative task. They insisted that Scotus's own formal distinction was a superior tool, among other things, because it *does* posit a distinction *a parte rei* prior to and independently of any and every act of intellect. As we have seen, Scotists grounded putative priority claims, such as Aquinas and Henry have made, by positing formal distinctions within what is really one and the same thing.

Presumably, Scotus's own interest in the "third" opinion — that persons are constituted primarily by absolutes, while relations supervene on these — presupposes its potential development within the full resources of his philosophy. Thus, taking a page from Scotus's theory of relations, adherents might claim that the absolute person-constitutors are the foundations of the Divine relations; and that since such foundations cannot exist without being thus related, the relations are really the same as but distinct formally from their foundations. Inevitably, wherever the absolute person-constitutors are, the relations will be there, too. Taking a page from Mayronis, adherents might nevertheless hold that formal distinction allows us to treat such absolutes as naturally prior to the relations they found, and so to see the absolutes as the primary person-constitutors in a way that the relations would not be.

Against this, one might have expected Ockham to rehearse his case against Scotus's formal distinction and doctrine of instants of nature, both of which are supposed to license the predication of contradictories of what are really one and the same thing (*res*). But while the More than Subtle Doctor does allude to his rejection of instants of nature, in connection with his denial that the Father is naturally prior to the Son, he does not take out after Scotus's formal distinction in

¹⁹⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 175).

these questions. Instead, he turns to critique from a different angle.

7.5.3. Constitutive versus Adventitious? Reasoning by analogy with *Categories*-metaphysics, many — both objectors to and promoters of relation-constitution — reasoned that if Divine relations “came to” already constituted persons they would be quasi-adventitious or quasi-accidental. Ockham contends, on the contrary, that real sameness is sufficient to cancel these claims, because real sameness is the strongest form of *per se* unity.

Thus, against the “third” opinion’s insinuation that the absolutes would constitute but the relations would not or would do so only “consequentially,” Ockham counters that it is “altogether irrational.” For where metaphysical items combine to make something *per se* one, no matter how distinct they are, all of them equally are constituents of the *per se* unity. If the Divine essence, the absolute-constitutor, and paternity are all present, Ockham insists that paternity will be neither a quasi-efficient cause nor merely a manifestation of a distinct Divine person but rather *formally* constitutive of the resultant person.¹⁹⁸

Ockham uses the same reasoning against the suggestion by Henry of Ghent among others that active spiration is not a constitutor of the Father or the Son. (1) *Categories*-metaphysics itself will tell you, whenever items constitute something one *per se*, none of them has the aspect of accident with respect to another. But the Divine essence, paternity, and active spiration all constitute something one *per se* — *a fortiori*, since they are altogether the same *a parte rei* and so more united to one another than are prime matter and substantial form in a hylomorphic *per se* unity. Therefore, none of them can be quasi-adventitious with respect to any other.¹⁹⁹

(2) Again, the only reason there could be for regarding one of the relations as quasi-adventitious would be that it is somehow posterior to the others. But — Ockham contends

¹⁹⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 153-54).

¹⁹⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 3 (OTh IV, 186).

— mere posteriority doesn't keep something from being a supposit-constitutor. For example, given the assumption of a plurality of substantial forms in human beings, the intellectual soul comes to ("advenes on") a composite already constituted by matter and one or more lower-level substantial forms, but that does not keep the intellectual soul from uniting with it to make something one *per se*. Again, returning to the level of Godhead, active spiration is prior to paternity by the priority of consequence (i.e., the existence of active spiration necessarily implies the existence of paternity), but no one thinks this keeps paternity from being a person-constitutor.²⁰⁰

(R2) Here, Henry and others might agree that not just any posteriority is disqualifying, but point to disanalogies in the case at hand. After all, the composite to which the intellectual soul comes is an "incomplete" being. But the suggestion under consideration was that the Divine essence and paternity are sufficient to constitute a *complete* supposit. Again, priority and posteriority of consequence are irrelevant because they in fact are the inverse of the metaphysical priorities to which Henry and others intended to point. Thus, the existence of *a* necessarily implies the existence of *b*, often because *a* is somehow metaphysically dependent upon and so metaphysically posterior to *b*.

(RR2) Ockham's point is that he doesn't think they can identify any such metaphysical dependence between active spiration on the one hand and the Divine essence together with paternity or filiation on the other. The principal relevant difference between active spiration and the other relations has to do with its role, not in constituting but in *distinguishing* the Divine persons. In this discussion, Ockham finds, "constitutor" is taken two ways: [i] broadly, for whatever pertains to the essence or quiddity in such a way that the essence cannot exist without it; [ii] strictly, for whatever pertains to the essence or quiddity in such a way as to distinguish it from every other. The first way, active spiration is as much a person-constitutor as the essence and the other relations are; the second way, it is not, because it is

²⁰⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 3 (OTh IV, 186-87).

common to the Father and the Son and so does not distinguish them from one another.²⁰¹

Against the suggestion that active spiration comes to an already constituted supposit, Ockham poses his definition of a supposit as [a] a complete being that [b] does not constitute any being one *per se* and is neither [c] apt to inhere in another or [d] apt to be sustained by another. The Divine essence together with paternity do not succeed in constituting a supposit all by themselves, because they fail to satisfy condition [b], insofar as they combine with active spiration to make something one *per se*. Indeed, there will be as much reason to say that any of the two suffice to constitute a person insofar as any two are really the same and as little insofar as any two unite with the third to make something one *per se*.²⁰² Consequently, it is not the case that if active spiration (or for that matter, the Divine essence or paternity) were circumscribed, the supposit would remain. True, if the Son did not spirate (as the Eastern Church holds), active spiration would not be a constitutor of the Son. But this is an impossible *positio*. By parity of reasoning, one could say that if the Father did not generate but did spirate, the Father would be really distinct and a distinct supposit from the Holy Spirit, but paternity would not be a constituent of the Father. But neither of these touches the fact of the matter, that the Divine essence, paternity, and active spiration all qualify as constitutors according to Ockham's first definition.²⁰³

7.5.4. Origins and Relations: Like Scotus in *Reportatio* IA but contrary to Mayronis, Ockham maintains that because Divine origins and relations are in no way distinct *a parte rei*, both constitute and distinguish the Divine persons. Once again, he appeals to the Razor, and argues that “everything that can be saved by positing a distinction between

²⁰¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 3 (OTh IV, 186-87). Elsewhere — in *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 1 (OTh IV, 163), and *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 3 (OTh IV, 189) — he borrows his opponents' language to contrast being a constitutor (parallel to [i]) from being an *ultimate* constitutor (parallel to [ii]).

²⁰² *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 3 (OTh IV, 187-88).

²⁰³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 3 (OTh IV, 189-90).

generation and the relation, can be saved by supposing them to be in every way the same.”²⁰⁴ He identifies three contrary considerations within his predecessors’ reasoning. [a] One might imagine that origins and relations need to be distinct in order for the former to be the foundations of the latter. [Ra] Ockham agrees that it is impossible for relations to exist without their foundations, but holds (as above) that the Divine essence is the foundation of Divine relations in every case.²⁰⁵ [b] One might hold that paternity presupposes generation as a mean between the producer and the product (cf. Aquinas’s talk about generation as “the way” to the Son). [Rb] Ockham counter-examples with his own analysis of the metaphysics of causal activity: when God creates, creation-action is not anything really distinct from and in between God the producer and the creaturely product. *A fortiori, pace* Aquinas, generation is not anything in any way distinct from the Father, Divine paternity and the Divine essence, on the one hand, and the Son, Divine filiation and the Divine essence, on the other.²⁰⁶ [c] One might argue *Categories*-style, that [P] actions presuppose their agent-supposits and hence whatever constitutes them. Thus, Aquinas contended that paternity *qua* constitutor was presupposed for the action of generation. [Rc] Ockham re-affirms what Aquinas admits: viz., that according to *Categories*-metaphysics, relations and actions are alike in presupposing their supposits. Concluding that there is no good reason to distinguish Divine origins and relations in any way *a parte rei*, Ockham insists that they are alike constitutors and distinguishers.²⁰⁷ And, just as Divine relations do not presuppose but constitute their extremes, so Divine origins do not presuppose but constitute their producer- and product-supposits.²⁰⁸

7.6. Summary: *Prima facie*, it is Ockham’s reading of Aristotle’s *Categories* that is most challenged by the doctrine

²⁰⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 176).

²⁰⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 176-77).

²⁰⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 177).

²⁰⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 178-79).

²⁰⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 26, q. 2 (OTh IV, 181).

of the Trinity. In response, Ockham *does* make a series of substantial concessions: first, against his understanding of individuation, that numerically distinct supposits of the Divine nature are constituted by “something the same” and something distinct; third, that the Divine persons are constituted by really distinct relations; and fourth, that relations do not invariably presuppose but sometimes constitute their relata. Ockham expands this common turf with his second concession that *tres res sunt una res*, and argues that given the real identity of persons and person-constitutors with the Divine essence, his interlocutors are able to preserve less of *Categories*-metaphysics than they think. Drawing on his own views of identity and distinction, Ockham argues that there is no distinction *a parte rei* within a Divine person between origin and relations on the one hand or between proper and shared relations on the other. His opponents’ appeals to distinctions of reason or modes of signification or formal distinctions to maintain *Categories* analyses of natural priorities are inefficacious.

VIII. CONCLUSION

These late thirteenth through first third of the fourteenth century treatments of Divine person constitution are philosophically and theologically remarkable in many ways. In closing, I wish to focus attention on three. (1) First, they bear witness to *the power of Categories-metaphysics to maintain prima facie normative status* even in the region of Divine being, where there are philosophical as well as theological reasons to think that Godhead transcends the categories. Even in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, all of our authors feel a burden of proof to justify any departures from *Categories*-metaphysics — in particular, from the theses that substances are not constituted by non-substances (no cross-categorical individuation or “personification”); that substances are distinguished from one another by what is intrinsic to each; that absolutes cannot combine to make anything one *per se*; that relations are posterior in the order of understanding (order of nature) to their foundations; that the agent-supposit is prior (in the order of understanding,

naturally) and the product-supposit posterior to the action; that relatives cannot be the primary terms of originating acts; and that real relations presuppose really distinct extremes. *Prima facie*, absolute-constitution seems at odds with Divine simplicity; relation/origin-constitution, the enemy of *Categories*-metaphysics.

(2) Second, these discussions evidence *the mounting power of the theological majority report to win assent* even from those who found it *not* to be defined by the primary authorities and *not* to be supported by compelling arguments. For Aquinas, the assignment is to craft a theological formulation that is congruent with theological tradition, which speaks both of origins and relations. The philosophical challenge is to adjudicate the roles of these two. It is Scotus who brings the case for absolute-constitution to prominence, and is initially inclined to favor it. But by the end of his career, although the arguments have not changed, he has tipped his preference to the other side. Both Bassolis and Mayronis endorse, but add that it is not the weight of arguments that convinces them. For Ockham, philosophical considerations weigh heavily against relation-constitution, but he concedes all the same. Scotus, Bassolis, Mayronis, Ockham all yield to the authority of the many even when they do not seem philosophically wiser.

(3) Third, these texts show *the power of philosophical options to command attention* even where the answer to the *quaestio* is forgone. For Bassolis, Mayronis, and Ockham, assent to relation-constitution is outwardly unequivocal. Yet, both Bassolis and Mayronis expand Scotus's already substantial coverage of absolute-constitution. Ockham takes time to formulate an alternative and (to his mind) more coherent version. Like Scotus, all three review the *Categories* pros and cons. It would be wrong to take this as a sign of insincerity in their joining the theological consensus. On the contrary, it is the heart of the scholastic method to develop ideas by questioning and disputing, by pitting them against their opposites, by weighing up arguments on both sides. Our authors understood how it is impossible to appreciate the costs and benefits of one position without thoroughly examining the strengths and weaknesses of its competitors. In my judgment, their continued extensive coverage of

absolute-constitution is a sign of how philosophical theology
had become!

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