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John Duns Scotus, Franciscan theologian philosopher, a thinker for our times: in place of a biography

Abstract: An overview of the life and intellectual legacy of the Franciscan theologian-philosopher John Duns Scotus (died 1308), sometimes called Scotland's greatest philosopher, draws on the most recent historical scholarship and treatments of his thought. From his origins in Duns, Scotland, to his influential tenure in Paris and death in Cologne, Scotus's life is considered alongside his important doctrines: the univocity of being, which reshapes metaphysical discourse, and the Immaculate Conception of Mary, a cornerstone of his theological impact. This discussion clarifies the context and significance of the 'charge of heresy' sometimes linked to Scotus, and considers modern engagements with Scotus's thought – both positive and critical – which point to his enduring relevance.

Keywords: John Duns Scotus, univocity, *haecceitas*, Immaculate Conception of Mary, Franciscan.

Introducing Scotus: a philosophical life
'Scotia me genuit, Anglia me suscepit, Gallia me docuit, Colonia me tenet' ('Scotland begot me, England reared me, France taught me, Cologne holds my remains').[1] So reads the inscription on the beautifully

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[1] Aspects of the research for this article informed my contribution to the forthcoming Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to be offered by the University of Glasgow. The work presented here also relates to a paper I delivered at a conference celebrating the work of Professor Alexander Broadie, 'The vital spark: Alexander Broadie and the Scottish intellectual tradition', which took place at the University of Glasgow, 14 March 2023. The article also reworks aspects of my earlier publications, 'Between medieval and modern beholding: Heidegger, Deleuze and the Duns Scotus affair', in *Heresy and the Making of European Culture: Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Andrew P. Roach and James R. Simpson (Farnham: Ashgate), 413–28, and, 'Duns Scotus's concept of the univocity of being: another look', *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 18 (2007), 129–46. I have taken the opportunity that preparing this article has afforded me to both update aspects of my earlier published work, and to present some initial results of work in progress. I would like to express my gratitude to Andrew Roach and James Simpson, to the editors of *Pli*,

ornate catafalque containing the mortal remains of Blessed John Duns Scotus in the Conventual Franciscan Church of the Immaculate Conception (*Minoritenkirche*, *St Mariä Empfängnis*) on the *Kolpingplatz* in Cologne, a fitting resting place given his championing of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

The designation 'Blessed' (*Beatus*) bestowed upon him means that John has been 'beatified'. Beatification is the first step towards canonisation in the Roman Catholic Church, when a person renowned for their holiness becomes a saint. Scotus was beatified by the Pope, John Paul II, on the twentieth of March 1993. John's family name was Duns. This is also the name of the town in the Scottish Borders where he was born. The name 'Scotus', which he seems to have been called during his student days in Paris, had come to mean 'from Scotland' by his time. Earlier, the name 'Scotus' had signalled that those so named – such as the earlier philosopher theologian John Scotus Eriugena ('Eriugena', literally, 'born in Ériu [Ireland]. *c.* 810–877) – were from Ireland (*Scotia major*, as it was known in the Middle Ages) rather than Scotland (*Scotia minor*). The Latin word *Scoti* (or *Scotti*) was a name for the Gaels.

In the middle ages Scotus earned the honorific title *Doctor Subtilis* (the subtle doctor) and became famous as the father of the school of scholastic philosophy known as Scotism. Blessed John was a 'scholastic philosopher', with 'scholasticism' being the name given to the style of intellectual activity most prominent between around 1250 and 1500 in the medieval universities. The larger project of scholastic philosophers was the synthesis of faith and reason and the synthesis of the theology of Saint Augustine of Hippo with the philosophy of Aristotle. Scholasticism probably reached its highest point in the thirteenth century. There were several doctrines that unified the great scholastic philosophers, sometimes collectively referred to as the 'schoolmen', and these have been neatly summarised by Thomas Ward in his recent introduction to Scotus, *Ordered by Love*. I summarise. Collectively the scholastic philosophers and theologians held that there is an objectively real world and that it is possible to achieve knowledge of that world. They held that philosophy could demonstrate the existence of God and God, it is argued, is the highest good. Human flourishing depends upon both knowing and loving God. There is an objective morality, and human beings can know a lot about it – and just as well because the morally upright life is the happiest life. Human beings are not reducible to lumps of matter nor to 'ghosts in a meat machine'. The entire human family shares one human nature. All living things are more than the sum of their parts: goodness and beauty

characterise everything, and evil is the privation of goodness.[2] To this we might add the following remarks about Scotus, by way of summary following Allan Wolter: Scotus was a philosophical realist who pioneered the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary; and who argued that the Incarnation of Jesus was not contingent upon human sin; and for whom will is superior to intellect, and love superior to knowledge, and heaven is characterised by beatific love rather than the 'vision of God'.[3]

John Duns Scotus has been called 'Scotland's greatest philosopher', which is not to say that he was Scotland's first philosopher.[4] Notable earlier figures hailing from Scotland include Richard of St Victor (Ricardus de Sancto Victore Scotus *c.* 1123–1173), Adam Scot (Adam of Dryburgh *c.* 1140–1212), and Michael Scot (*c.* 1175–*c.* 1235), all of whom had made a significant impact on the intellectual world of their times.

Often it is the case that medieval figures, such as Scotus, are thought of less as members of national communities, such as Scotland, but more so as members of a universal Church and as representatives of a universal approach to thinking about theological and philosophical questions. The later Scottish philosopher and theologian, John Mair (1467–1550), bucks this trend and sought to emphasise the fact that Scotus was a real person with origins in a real time and place. As Alexander Broadie has noted, Mair made a lot of Scotus's 'Scottishness', even referring to him as his *conterraneus*, 'my compatriot'. Mair appropriated Scotus for Scottish

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[2] See Thomas M. Ward, *Ordered by Love: An Introduction to John Duns Scotus* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 2022), 8.

[3] Allan Bernard Wolter, 'Blessed John Duns Scotus', *Encyclopedia Britannica* (4 November 2024), on line at https://www.britannica.com/biography/Blessed-John-Duns-Scotus (accessed 18 December 2024).

[4] Alexander Broadie, *Why Scottish Philosophy Matters* (Edinburgh, 2000), 7. In Richard Cross's estimation, there is little doubt that Scotus 'was the most philosophically talented of all the medieval theologians'; Richard Cross, *The Medieval Christian Philosophers: An Introduction* (London, 2014), 163. Cross continues: while Scotus does not 'have the range of Aquinas, and certainly not the systematicity [… most likely because of his early death – as Cross notes – he is nevertheless] a more original and creative philosopher, and the sheer power of the arguments he comes up with in defence of his (usually novel) positions is astonishing. What is most notable about his contribution is its global reach: he aims at theories of maximal generality, which for him means including God and creatures under the scope of the relevant theories' (*ibid.*, 164.). We will see in our discussion below that there are those who think that Scotus's approach is mistaken. Such readers, for Cross, might very well have little time for philosophy, and not just Scotus. On the point about Scotus's lack of systematicity vis-à-vis Aquinas, Cross notes that, despite some areas of his work (his philosophy of mind and theory of cognition and perhaps too his ethics) were 'fully worked out and integrated into a systematic whole – most notably, his metaphysics' (*ibid.*), which would go some way to explaining his later reputation.

intellectual culture while also positioning of himself alongside the late great Scot.

Regarding Scotus's life, Mair had this to say:

> When [Scotus] was no more than a boy, but had been already grounded in grammar, he was taken by two Scottish Minorite [i.e. Franciscan] friars to Oxford, for at that time there existed no university in Scotland. By the favour of those friars he lived in the convent of the Minorites at Oxford, and he made his profession in the religion of the Blessed Francis.[5]

According to Mair's biography, Scotus left Scotland as a boy of around 12 years old. He was never to return. Mair places him in Oxford by the late 1270s. This biography has, however, recently been decisively challenged. In what is the most up to date account of Scotus's life Stephen Dumont implies that Scotus could well have been in Scotland, or the North of England, well into his teens.

What we have been able to establish about Scotus's life derives entirely from the Franciscan educational system that he entered.[6] The Franciscans had arrived in England in 1224, just fifteen years after their foundation as an order. 1224 was the same year that Saint Francis (c. 1181–1226) received wounds on his body that were interpreted as the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ. Franciscan friars had crossed into Scotland from the north of England by at least 1231. The Franciscan Friary church in Dumfries (founded some time before 1266) would provide the scene for the fatal stabbing of John Comyn by Robert Bruce on 10 of February 1306, just two years before Scotus's death at Cologne in 1308. Scotus's uncle Elias (who also hailed from Duns in the Scottish Borders) was head of the Friary in Dumfries, and in the past it was suggested that the young Scotus might have been under his jurisdiction there, but it must be remembered that this biographical detail is more than can be known with certainty.

Scotus shared the commitment of Franciscans to 'go through the world as a pilgrim and stranger'.[7] Young entrants to the Order would be

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[5] John Mair, *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, ed. and transl. Archibald Constable, Scottish History Society 10 (Edinburgh, 1892), 206; quoted in Alexander Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 2009), 7.

[6] Stephen D. Dumont, 'John Duns Scotus's life in context', in *Interpreting Scotus: Critical Essays*, ed. Giorgio Pini (Cambridge, 2022), 8–43, at 11.

[7] Allan B. Wolter, 'Introduction', in *John Duns Scotus' Political and Economic Philosophy*, ed. by Allan B. Wolter (New York, 2001), 1–21, at 21. In fact, political matters were never so far away from Scotus's life that he could afford to be indifferent to them. He had spent the earliest years of his life in the contested Scottish border lands and, as we shall see, he was to be expelled from France in 1303, along with many other

educated within their local convent or custodial school. At this time in the middle ages the Franciscan convents in Scotland came under the jurisdiction of the English province. Independence of the Scottish friars seems only to have come under Robert Bruce in 1329. A Scottish province would be established in 1483. Young entrants were placed within the Franciscan *studia*, its educational network. This network consisted of schools at a local level (*studia particularia*) and at a provincial level (*studium generale*). An able student like Scotus would have accessed the University of Oxford only as a result of his participation in this system. It is possible that Scotus's education would have commenced in Dumfries. But it could have occurred somewhere else in the south of Scotland or north of England.

What we can safely say about Scotus's life, now that material from the spurious eighteenth-century chronicle, the *Monasticon Scoticanum*, by Marianus Brockie is being expunged from accounts of his life, is that he was born in Duns in the Scottish Borders, possibly in 1266. This dating is based on the view that he must have reached the minimum age of twenty-five by the time he was ordained on 17 March 1291. By this time Scotus would have been progressing in his studies towards the award of a mastership in theology. This occurred in Northampton and was conducted by Bishop Oliver Sutton. In what is the most up-to-date account of Scotus's life, Stephen Dumont has pointed out that the register of ordination indicates that Scotus was potentially born as early as 1263. If so, this would make him twenty-eight years old at the time of his ordination. If so, this would make him potentially eleven years older than Robert Bruce (born in 1274). It also means that he might have been closer to age forty-five at the time of his death in Cologne, on 8 November 1308.[8]

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internationals, because of his refusal to support Philip the Fair in his dispute with Pope Boniface VIII. In June of that same year Sir John Moubray and Sir William Wallace would be on the offensive against English garrisons in Caerlaverock and Dumfries, the latter being a possible site where Scotus might have spent some considerable time, and where he might still have had family. Scottish political matters would also reach France: both William Lamberton, chancellor of Glasgow Cathedral and then bishop of St Andrews, and William Wallace himself led diplomatic missions to the French court (the former in 1301, the later in 1300). Scotus may have had views on the situation in Scotland at that time, and he could have potentially spent thirty-five years in total, in generous estimation, in the British Isles, certainly long enough for a 'lively and rational' (*vivax et rationalis*) character, as he is described by Adam Wodeham, recalling life in the Franciscan House in Oxford, to form an opinion on the political turmoil of the day (see Cross, *The Medieval Christian Philosophers*, 164). For a discussion of Scotus in connection to political matters in Scotland, see Alexander Broadie, 'The Declaration of Arbroath in the shadow of Scotus', in *Scotland and Arbroath 1320–2020: 700 Years of Fighting for Freedom, Sovereignty, and Independence*, ed. Klaus Peter Müller (Berlin, 2020), 75–90.

[8] John Mair's *History of Great Britain* (1521) was the other great historical source of information on Scotus's early life. To recap, Mair's account suggested that having shown

Exactly where and when Scotus entered the Franciscan Order is not known. Current scholarship suggests that it would have been around 1280, when he had reached the minimum age of fifteen. If, however, he had been born in 1263 he could have entered the order in the late 1270s. The only extant document from the Franciscan educational system that is specifically concerned with Scotus is the letter of 18 November 1304 when he is commended to the Guardian and masters of the Paris convent, selecting him as the next Master of Theology there. This letter was authored by the Franciscan Minister General, Gonsalvus of Spain, who notes that Scotus's reputation has by this time 'spread everywhere'.[9] This is an important point since, according to Richard Cross, the nineteenth-century view that places the Dominican, Saint Thomas Aquinas reputationally ahead of Scotus as the principal thinker of the high middle ages would have been unrecognisable to Catholic theologians and philosophers in the fourteenth century, just as it would still have been in the seventeenth century. In connection to this it is worth quoting the Spanish Cistercian Bishop of Prague, Johannes Caramuel y Lobkowitz, who would say in 1664 that, 'The School of Scotus is more numerous than all the other schools taken together'. By any standard, John Duns the Scot, was a 'towering genius of the post-patristic era'.[10]

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considerable promise, Scotus was taken south to Oxford at around the age of twelve years to be educated there, since there was no university in Scotland at this time. Stephen Dumont has recently argued that Mair's account is essentially as unreliable as the Brockie account. He points to the fact that there is no evidence that the Franciscan convent in Oxford had a school for young boys in the thirteenth century, and that it is very unlikely that the Order would have considered Scotus, when still a young boy in grammar school, for what was a rare and elite course of study toward a university degree. Given this, and the attested practice of educating youngsters in local convents, Dumont suggests that Mair's remark about the lack of a university in Scotland at this time is just irrelevant and based on a lack of appreciation for Franciscan educational practice in the thirteenth century. Further, the only known near contemporary reference to Scotus's early career states that he went to Oxford as an adult (as *floruit* not *puellus*) and that his arrival there followed a spell of teaching in Cambridge. The current chronology for Scotus's early life now looks like this: he was born 1263×66. He is somewhere in Britain, firstly in Duns, then possibly in Dumfries, until his first spell in Paris from 1283 to 1287, following which he was in Cambridge from 1287 to 1290, before arriving at Oxford in 1290/91. He returned to Paris in 1302, only to be expelled in June 1303. He would return to France in 1304, perhaps after spending the intervening months in Oxford. Given this chronology, Scotus could have been in Scotland and/or the North of England for twenty years, from as early as 1263 to 1283, before leaving for Paris. See Dumont, 'John Duns Scotus's life'.

[9] Gonsalvus, quoted in Dumont, 'John Duns Scotus's life', 35.

[10] Richard Cross, 'Duns Scotus', in *The History of Scottish Theology Volume I: Celtic Origins to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. D. Fergusson and M.W. Elliott (Oxford, 2019), 69–80, at 69. For a discussion of Scotus's legacy from the sixteenth century to the work of Gilson in the twentieth, see R. Trent Pomplum, 'John Duns Scotus in the History of Medieval Philosophy from the Sixteenth Century to Étienne Gilson (†1978), *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale 58* (2016), 355–455. Pomplum notes some of the accusations

The univocity of being
The doctrine of univocity upholds the idea that the term being is applied to all that it is applied to with the same identical meaning. That is, the

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levied against Scotus include 'formalism, nominalism, skepticism, fatalism, pantheism, voluntarism, individualism, modernism, Spinozism, Kantianism and radical Islamism' (*ibid.*, 355). Pomplum notes that the authority standing behind many of these accusations is the French philosopher Étienne Gilson and the 'genealogy of modernity' that his work is associated with. Pomplum's study shows how many of the charges against Scotus associated with Gilson (and other commentators, such as Maurice de Wulf and Cornelio Fabro) arose, in much the same terms, much earlier amongst Lutheran philosophers in the seventeenth century. Much of the recent debate, arising out of Gilson's work, centres around Scotus's account of univocal being. The charge against him being that he re-thinks the metaphysics of participation and moves away from the analogy of being towards the univocity of being, and that the doctrine of univocity prepares the way for atheistic secular modernity. To quote Kevin Hart, 'Scotus's view – or, let us say, a subtle misunderstanding of it – is the one that Hans Urs von Balthasar believes to have inaugurated modernity' (Kevin Hart, *Postmodernism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, 2004), 167). Hart continues: the ultimate consequence of the misreading of Scotus's position was the abandonment of the idea of infinite being in favour of a view of reality as composted of just finite beings. The concept of being usurps God. Being is the first object of the intellect, not God, and God is determined on the basis of a concept of being that is abstract, universal, neutral and indeterminate. For von Balthasar, on Hart's reconstruction, and somewhat in anticipation of Gilles Deleuze's notion of a secret history of philosophy' that includes Scotus, this version of Scotism survived the Middle Ages and Renaissance and had a 'subterranean yet vast influence on later thought'. Universal, indistinct, neutral being 'is rethought, refocused and massively elaborated by the Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) in his *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (1597)', which served as 'the encyclopedic work from which most European philosophers learned their trade throughout the seventeenth century'. Suárez's work would have influenced Descartes while he was at La Flèche, and it is possible that he was influenced by Ockham's use of Scotus's notion of intuitive cognition, which is a 'direct act of intellection within […] the human mind' (William A. Frank and Allan B. Wolter, *Duns Scotus, Metaphysician* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1995), 174). The idea that being is univocial and indistinct (*ens*) and the first object of intellect, so basic to human cognition that it enables natural knowledge of God, may even have influenced Descartes's account of clarity and distinctness (this point is made by Harry M. Bracken, *Descartes: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, 2010), 22). Hart continues: Suárez's *Disputationes* also influenced both Leibniz and Spinoza, and then later Kant, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger: for both Descartes and Kant 'being' is a concept graspable by reason and, if being is a concept then, as Hart reminds us, 'it belongs to a subject'. This being so God, subordinate as He is to the concept of being, must be situated with respect to the categories of the human mind. From here on this trajectory, beginning as it does in a misreading of Scotus, it 'is only a couple of short steps from Scotus to Kant'. There is, of course, much more to be said about this, but I cannot do that here. See also Daniel P. Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity: A Critical Account of Radical Orthodoxy and John Duns Scotus* (Minneapolis, Minn., 2014).

things referred to by the term being have the same nature, definition, essence, and reference[11].

The Condemnations of 1277 play an important role in the contemporary reading of Scotus that has him marked out as a key figure in the genealogy of the modern separation of faith and reason, theology and philosophy. To take one example, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. This doctrine had been taken to be a demonstrable truth by most theologians in the time of Thomas Aquinas, before the Condemnations, afterwards it ceases to be so.[12] After the

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[11] I follow the definition of univocity in Bernard Wuellner, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* Milwaukee, Wis., 1956), 128. A univocal concept of being is aligned with the modern view of existence taken by some philosophers in what has come to be called the 'analytic' tradition of philosophy, which represents probably the majority school of philosophers writing today. Here, the term 'being' means the same as 'existence'. Peter van Inwagen has summed up the view of existence that many philosophers in this tradition would hold: i) being is not an activity (being is not something that beings do, like walking or sleeping); ii) being and existence are the same thing (there are no un-actualised possible beings; or alternatively put, existence is not a property of a class of things within being); iii) existence is univocal: the concept of existence has the same meaning whenever it is applied and to whatever it is applied. There might be different kinds of beings (concrete and abstract, for instance), but they exist in the same sense. The difference between concrete things and abstract things is in their properties or natures but not in the way they exist; iv) the univocity of being or existence is captured adequately by the existential quantifier in the notation of first-order predicate logic as in statements of the kind 'there exists an x such that' ($\exists x$); v) the parties in ontological disputes should examine the implications of what they want to affirm exists and they should attempt to do so in the quantifier-variable idiom . See Peter van Inwagen, 'Meta-Ontology', *Erkenntnis* 48 (1998), 233–50, and 'Being, existence, and ontological commitment', in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, ed. David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford, 2009), 472–506. See also Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction* (Oxford and New York, 2014). This version of univocity is commensurate with philosophical naturalism, which we can think of as the general outlook that holds that philosophy be consistent with contemporary scientific accounts of reality. My article, 'Duns Scotus's concept of the univocity of being: another look', *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 18 (2007), 129–46, presents an interpretation of Scotus's doctrine of univocity that I draw on and develop here. I'm grateful to the editors of *Pli* for permission to reproduce aspects of that earlier work. This earlier work is also available for download from my academia.edu site.

[12] I follow here Rik van Nieuwenhove's discussion in *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, 2012), 227. Van Niewenhove has recently published an expanded second edition of this work (2022). In pagan antiquity philosophy was charged with providing its readers and hearers with meaning and purpose in life. Philosophy ought to reconcile them with the inevitability of death. While providing consolation during challenging times it was also tasked with being a rational inquiry into knowledge, reality, and the good or worthwhile life. In a Christian context, however, it was the task of religion to provide answers to these existential questions. A division between philosophy and religion was institutionally recognised in the universities by the establishment of separate arts and theology faculties. As Ebbesen has put it, this division left 'the artists with the obligation not to offer their own way to salvation [… while granting them] a freedom to do

Condemnations Scotus and others will rely on revelation and faith more than upon reason to defend theological theses. For Scotus, theology and metaphysics have different subjects. The subject of theology is God; the subject of metaphysics is being, and Scotus will argue that there is a concept of being that can be applied to both God and creature, infinite and finite being in a logical sense because he saw that, as Van Nieuwenhove points out, univocity makes 'our God-talk possible'[13].

In the thirteenth century the Aristotelians held that the term 'being' was not univocal but analogous. Analogy was regarded as the middle way between univocity and equivocity. If the term being were univocal

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penetrating research in a wide spectrum of disciplines, unfettered by demands that their insights be relevant to the achievement of existential satisfaction' (Sten Ebbesen, 'The Paris Arts Faculty: Siger of Brabant, Boethius of Dacia, Radulphus Brito', in *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume III, Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J. Marenbon, (London and New York, 1998), at 269. This division between theology and the arts was undermined by the gradual translation of pagan and non-Christian works into Latin during the twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth centuries. William of Moerbeke (died 1286), for example, worked on translations of Aristotle's works that enabled his Dominican brother, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), to write his important commentaries on them. The newly translated non-Christian works that began to be taught in arts faculty classes dealt with matters of ethics, cosmology, and natural theology. In Paris, the works of Aristotle were an established part of the curriculum from the middle of the thirteenth century. The first official reaction to this encroachment of philosophy into theological territory came on 10 December 1270, when the Bishop of Paris Etienne Tempier issued a condemnation of thirteen propositions on the basis that they opposed the Christian faith. The main issues at stake in this condemnation included the issue of 'monopsychism' (the view arising out of Averröes's commentaries on Aristotle that there is only one divine intellect or soul and that all individual human souls are manifestations of it) and its consequences, such as the denial of individual immortality; the denial of free will; the view that the world was eternal; and the denial of God's Providence (God's knowledge of individual things). The initial condemnation did not have much of an impact. In 1272 the arts faculty undertook not to meddle in theological matters. Still, Tempier requested that matters in Paris would be scrutinised in more depth. The result being a further condemnation on 7 March 1277 (three years to the day after the death of Thomas Aquinas). This stated that certain unnamed members of Paris's arts faculty had 'overstepped the limits of their competence'. A list of 219 erroneous propositions (such as 'That there is no more excellent state than to study philosophy', and 'That the only wise men in the world are philosophers', and 'That the Christian law impedes learning') were identified. Not only did the condemnation attack individual theses (associated with Aristotle, Averroes, and Aquinas *et al.*) it also attacked 'this-worldliness' and the perceived threat of the new Aristotelian science to Christian faith in the truth of Scripture. The Condemnations of 1277 contributed to 'a different theological climate, in which there was a growing awareness of the limitations of philosophy in its dialogue with theology, thereby reinforcing a growing separation of faith and reason, theology and philosophy' (Van Nieuwenhove, *Introduction*, 227). Indeed, it is possible to read Tempier's condemnations as part of a campaign that would culminate in the post-mortem condemnation of Thomas Aquinas.

[13] Van Nieuwenhove, *Introduction* (2nd edn), 316.

then it would maintain the same meaning (*ratio*) across all its instances. If it were equivocal then its meanings would be totally diverse, without connection whatsoever. As analogous, being has different but nevertheless related meanings: the term applies primarily and properly to God and secondarily (or, by extension) to creatures. Analogy maintains God's transcendence and enables natural knowledge of him derived from our knowledge of creatures (God's wisdom is to God as our wisdom is to us); univocity collapses God's transcendence (God is in the same sense as a creature) and equivocity renders natural knowledge of God impossible (God's being has nothing in common with our being).

If being were univocal, so the argument goes, God could not be said to properly transcend a creature since his being and the being of the creature would carry the same meaning. This would imply that they belong to the same metaphysical order. Against equivocity, analogy maintains that God is naturally knowable, since by analogical reasoning it is possible, however imperfectly, to reason from creature to God. If being were equivocal such reasoning would be impossible precisely because of the lack of commonality between the senses of being. If God's being *is in no sense* like that of creatures, then *in what sense* can we be said to know anything about Him?

Scotus argued that there must be a notion of being (and of the other transcendentals) that is univocal to God and creatures, and also to the ten categories, at a logical level. This logical account of univocity would provide an intellectual ground for a metaphysical account of being as analogical. Although Scotus's philosophy can be read in relation to the Thomistic philosophy of analogy the critical bent of his work was aimed primarily at Henry of Ghent (1217–93). Henry was a neo-Augustinian critic of Aquinas and the most important theologian of the preceding generation. In large part Scotus takes Henry's positions as his point of departure and Scotus's thesis of the univocity of being can be read as a critical reaction to Henry's distinctive interpretation of the doctrine of the analogy of being. Scotus's qualification of Thomistic philosophy is a by-product of his attack on Henry. In essence, this qualification is not that analogy is wrong; it is that (metaphysical) analogy presupposes (logical) univocity. Henry's version of analogy, for Scotus, made explicit the problems facing the doctrine in accounting for the human being's natural knowledge of God. The problem is how do we maintain the possibility of attaining at least some knowledge of God's divine nature from our knowledge of creatures while at the same time maintaining His absolute transcendence of them. In order to preserve God's absolute transcendence, it is important to stress that His divine nature has nothing creaturely about it. God has no reality in common with creatures. The problem then becomes, how can any knowledge of God be gained from the creature?

Henry and Scotus both held that natural knowledge of God was possible. Henry's attempt to account for the creature's natural knowledge of God was bound up with his revised version of the analogy of being. According to that doctrine, being and the other transcendentals apply to God in a primary sense and to creatures in a related secondary sense. Henry says:

> Being therefore does not belong to God univocally…nor purely equivocally […] but in a middle way, namely, by analogy, because it signifies one thing primarily and principally and the other as in some way ordered, related, or proportional to what is primary […] And in this way, being in the most common sense primarily signifies God […] secondarily creature.[14]

The primary instance of being, the focal reference or meaning of the term to which everything else is related by analogy is a being of a particular kind, God.

Scotus argued that being and the other transcendentals were univocal, not only when applied to substance and accident, but also when applied to God and creature. On his view, only univocity could establish the creature's natural knowledge of God. Henry argued that the concept of being ultimately reduced into two completely separate notions (*rationes*). First, infinite being that is proper to God and second, finite being or the universal concept of being proper to the categories and to creatures. These two concepts exhausted being, there could be no third notion (*ratio*) distinct from finite being and infinite being that would be univocal to God and creature because univocity would collapse God's transcendence. In opposition to this, Scotus argued that a univocal concept of being is necessary if any claim to natural knowledge of God is to be justified. He says:

> I say that God is conceived not only in a concept analogous to the concept of a creature […] but even in some concept univocal to Himself and to a creature.[15]

Scotus argued that Henry could not consistently hold that being resolved into two discrete notions with no conceptual community between them and at one and the same time that natural knowledge of God could be

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[14] Henry of Ghent (*Summa*, a.21 q.2 (ed. 1520, I, fol. 124r), quoted in Stephen D. Dumont, 'John Duns Scotus', in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. J. E. Gracia and T. B. Noone (Oxford, 2003), 353–69, at 299.

[15] John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings. A Selection*, transl. Allan Wolter (Indianapolis, Ind., 1987), 19.

deduced from creatures. Of the arguments he has for univocity the most famous is his argument from certain and doubtful concepts. He says:

> in this life already a man can be certain in his mind that God is a being and still be in doubt whether He is a finite or an infinite being, a created or an uncreated being. Consequently, the concept of 'being' as affirmed of God is different from the other two concepts but is included in both of them and therefore is univocal.[16]

This argument rejects Henry's view that there could be no univocal concept of being and that being resolved into two analogous notions, one proper to God, the other to creatures. Scotus's point is that since it is possible to doubt whether God is finite or infinite while still being certain that he is a being, the concept of being is not simply reducible to Henry's two notions. Rather, the concept of being is not confused (as it had been for Henry) but distinct, it is distinct from the concepts of infinite and finite being, which Scotus will argue are contracted to God and to creatures by virtue of the intrinsic modes of infinity and finitude which do not 'modify being extrinsically through some kind of real addition but simply qualify being as infinite or finite in the same way that a certain degree of intensity qualifies something that is white'.[17]

That the first premise of the argument from certain and doubtful concepts is true is taken by Scotus to be evident from the fact that any given intellect cannot be at once doubtful and certain of the same thing at one and the same time. That the second premise is true is attested by the fact that past philosophers have disagreed over whether the first principle is finite or infinite, material or immaterial, while maintaining that it is nonetheless a being. From this, the concept of being must be distinct from finite and infinite, God and creature and be equally applicable to all of these. That God is or is not an infinite or a finite being is a matter of demonstration. But demonstration of this fact must start from something certain about God for otherwise it would proceed from doubtful premises. As such, the concept of being must be admitted as certain and as distinct from the concepts of finite and infinite. If this is not admitted, then no reasoning regarding God is possible. The univocity of the concept of being is therefore necessary for any reasoning about God to be possible. For this reason, Scotus claimed that theologians who explicitly denied a concept of univocal being nevertheless implicitly relied on it. He says: 'every inquiry regarding God is based upon the supposition that

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[16] John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, transl. Wolter, 20.
[17] Stephen F. Brown 'Medieval Christian Philosophy', in *The Pimlico History of Western Philosophy*, ed. R .H. Popkin (London, 1999), 219–78, at 226.

the intellect has the same univocal concept which it obtained from creatures'.[18]

A Franciscan philosophical theology

Scotus was a Franciscan, a follower of the Assisi saints, Francis and Clare (1194–1253). Franciscan thinkers build upon the foundations laid by these two founders of their Order while also working toward an integration of the thought of Aristotle and Saint Augustine of Hippo[19]. Scotus's Franciscan outlook can be detected in several of his theses. As Mary Beth Ingham has characterised Franciscan theology, it 'emphasizes the contingent particular (person and experience) and focuses on the dynamic of ongoing conversion in the life of the individual believer within the faith community'.[20] Placing an emphasis on contingency and human experience (praxis) are two central planks of the Franciscan form of theological life.

Meritorious poverty and placing emphasis on 'the centrality of beauty and divine graciousness; [and] the superiority of loving over knowing as perfective of human persons' are key Franciscan themes, as are the importance of Saint Augustine and the centrality of the will.[21] Love surpasses intellectual knowing: loving is the act that most fulfils the person. The human will (sometimes referred to as the human orientation toward God as Good) is regarded as the highest faculty of the soul and will is superior to intellect (sometimes referred to as the human orientation toward God as True). This is because while it is impossible to fully understand God, it is possible to fully love God. For this reason, Franciscan theology generally can be called a 'praxis theology of love' rather than an abstractive or theoretical theology.[22] Still, for Franciscans, the use of reason is internal to the life of faith and reflection and as reflective their approach to the truths of faith is not fundamentalist or literal.

Franciscan thinkers tend to lay stress on the importance of the free divine will in the act of creation and salvation. A form of 'necessitarian' thinking had come into the Latin West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries from Arab and Aristotelian philosophy. On such views, the 'cosmic order is what it is necessarily' and did not come about as

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[18] John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, transl. Wolter, 25.

[19] For a recent discussion of early Franciscan theology see Lydia Schumacher, *Early Franciscan Theology: Between Authority and Innovation* (Cambridge, 2019).

[20] Mary Beth Ingham, 'Franciscan theology', *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe *et al*. (St Andrews, 2022), 1; available on line at https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/FranciscanTheology (accessed 6 December 2024)

[21] *Ibid*., 3.

[22] *Ibid*.

the 'result of a free, creative act on the part of the divine will'.[23] The necessitarian view of creation had become popular in the arts faculties in universities at this time, but it would come to be condemned in both 1277 (Paris) and 1284 (Oxford). Franciscan thinkers rejected necessitarianism and in the post-1277 context – the context within which we should approach Scotus – a model of divine freedom was developed that served as a model for human freedom.[24]

A philosophy of freedom of the will had wide implications which would be investigated within a theology of divine love, freedom, and generosity, among other things. For example, the primacy of God's freedom played a part in Franciscan thinking concerning the incarnation. As Ingham notes, Franciscan theologians came to the view that the incarnation was God's primary intention, even before the creation of the world, and so did not come about as a result of Adam's sin. Divine generosity, rather than human sin, explains why God became human. God's presence 'in and through creation and the created order' is an act 'of loving conservation'.[25] And while modern Franciscan theologians develop this insight to ground an 'ecological and spiritual ethic of kinship with all creation (*Laudato Sí* 2015)' Scotus will highlight the 'beauty of each creature, in all its particularity, with his identification of *haecceitas* ('thisness') as the foundational principle of individuation'.[26]

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] See Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Introduction to Medieval Theology*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2022), 310–27.

[25] Ingham, 'Franciscan Theology', 3.

[26] *Ibid.*, 3–4. Scotus's doctrine of *haecceitas* was influential on the German existential philosopher Martin Heidegger. In it he would find a 'nearness (*Haecceitas*) to real life' that was missing from other scholastic thinkers: Martin Heidegger, *Duns Scotus Theory of the Categories and of Meaning*, transl. H. Robbins, (Chicago, 1978), 15. A new translation of this text, Heidegger's *Habilitation* thesis, is now available: Martin Heidegger, *Duns Scotus's Doctrine of Categories and Meaning*, transl. Joydeep Bagchee and Jeffrey D. Gower (Bloomington, Ind., 2022). Prior to his abandonment of 'dogmatic Catholicism' in 1919, Heidegger drew heavily on Scotus and other medieval thinkers. His *Habilitation* of 1916 can be read as the culmination of his early philosophical and theological interests. For Heidegger, what became essential in his reading of Scotus was his concept, *haecceitas* (thisness). Theodore Kisiel points out that, in his letter to Karl Löwith following the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, that Heidegger observed that the impulse to investigate what he called in his early work 'the primal something', 'life in and for itself', the 'historical I', the 'situated I', 'facticity, and eventually 'Dasein' is located in his early work on Scotus. He says: 'The problems of facticity exist for me no less than in my Freiburg beginnings, only much more radically, and now *in the perspectives* which even in Freiburg were guiding me. That I was constantly concerned with Duns Scotus and the Middle Ages and then back to Aristotle, is by no means a matter of chance' (Heidegger's Letter to Löwith is cited in Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's* Being and Time, Berkely, Cal., 1993), 19). Pomplum notes that one of the newest charges against Scotus is that his 'essentialism' and 'univocalist metaphysics' mark the beginning of what

Heresy and the move to Cologne

In 1307 Blessed John began his duties at the Franciscan *studium* at Cologne. The city was a famous centre of learning, although it was mainly associated with the house of Dominican friars there. Both Albertus Magnus (Albert the Great, 1192×1200–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (*c.* 1225–1274) had taught there. Albertus had been sent in 1248 to be rector of this new *studium generale* for Germany and his student,

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Heidegger called 'ontotheology' (see Pomplum, 'John Duns Scotus', 440). As ontotheology, metaphysical thinking fixes upon what it takes to be a 'pre-eminent being or sense of being and generalizes [it] to all beings' (Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *The Heidegger Dictionary* (Bloomsbury 2013), 130). In medieval Christianity, for example, being is understood in terms of creation, conservation and participation. Modernity, by contrast, deifies the subject. As ontotheology metaphysics orders beings, classifies them and explains them, while at the same time, subordinating them to a primary being or primary analogue. This is why Heidegger came to see a philosophy of the analogy of being as a 'stringent aporia'. Ontotheology thinks of being as what 'grounds beings both by virtue of being common to them all (ontology) and by virtue of being their ultimate ground, the supreme being (theology)' (*ibid*., 148). Ontology and theology entail one another. For something to exist it must be created and it is only possible for something to exist if there is a creating cause for its existence. For ontotheology, there is nothing more to say about being. Scotus, on this reading, is an ontotheological thinker. He asks: 'Is the proper subject of metaphysics being as being, as Avicenna claims, or God and the Intelligences, as the Commentator, Averroes, assumes?' (William A. Frank and Allan B. Wolter, *Duns Scotus, Metaphysician* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1995), 21). In other words, is the proper content and interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics ontology (the study of beings in so far as they exist) or theology (the study of the first, Supreme Being)? Scotus will answer, being is the subject of metaphysics, and he will summarise the distinction of things or beings as a basis for classifying the difficult metaphysical questions that have been raised in the tradition: 'a thing [*res*] is primarily classified (1) as created or uncreated, (2) as having being of itself or having it from another, (3) as necessary or possible, (4) as finite or infinite. The uncreated, self-existent, infinite, and necessary thing or being we call God. The created, the 'from another', the possible [i.e., contingent], the finite goes by the common name of creature' (Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures*, *The Quodlibetal Questions*, transl. F. Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter (Princeton and London, 1975), 3). God is a being, metaphysics is ontotheological. Heidegger's central charge against the metaphysical tradition is that it omitted or 'forgot' to thematise what he calls *Ereignis*, or 'the difference' (*Unter-schied*). This is the event whereby being is first given to thought to think. Human beings, what Heidegger calls 'Dasein' (being there, here, now), are able to interpret what beings mean to them. This is more than just recognising that beings are there, that they exist. They also feature in meaningful cultural worlds, and it is this sensitivity to the meaningfulness and significance of things that marks out Dasein as unique amongst living things. What Heidegger calls the 'ontological difference' is the difference between the meaning of the thing (being) and the thing's occurrence (as just a being, or as just things), and it is human existence as being-in-the-world or Dasein that is sensitive to this difference. Human beings have cultural worlds, and they have a history, and culture and history are on the side of being as the very meaningfulness of things. What Heidegger wants to do in his thinking is to see how we could have missed this sensitivity to meaning wherein being is first given to us to think and instead create a metaphysics that omits this step in the story. He characterises this as taking a 'step back' out of metaphysics and its language which

Aquinas, went with him. However, it was not yet a university and considerably less eminent than Paris where until then Scotus had been regent master, occupying the Franciscan chair of theology. At this time in his life he was at the height of his intellectual powers.

The University of Paris specialised in theology and amongst its professors had been the same Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and the Franciscan, Saint Bonaventure (1217–1274). Such was its reputation that,

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constantly prevents us from accessing this more basic experience of the meaningfulness of things. He says: 'The step back points to the realm which until now has been skipped over, and from which the essence of truth becomes first of all worthy of thought' (Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, transl. J. Stambaugh (Chicago, 1969), 49). The essential co-dependence of human existence, as Dasein, as the place where being appears in phenomenological aspect as the meaningfulness of things, is what the philosophical tradition has missed. It has missed a vital pre- and post-metaphysical sense of being as non-representational and experiential. It is this fundamental experience of being that is the enabling condition of any subsequent conceptual rendering of the shape of beings (their 'being') in the history of metaphysics that has been forgotten. He says: 'Since metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole, it represents beings in respect of what differs in the difference [… but] without heading the difference as difference' (*ibid.*, 70). This is to reassert the phenomenological aspiration to be sensitive to the very origin of meaning, and it was this origin, this 'difference as difference', that was the subject of Heidegger's later meditations. Fritz has recently provided a useful survey of Catholic responses to Heidegger's thought. These are 'rejection', 'warm acceptance', and 'critical appropriation'. Rejectors include Erich Przywara and Alasdair MacIntyre. Acceptors include Bernhard Welte and Jean-Luc Marion. Critical appropriators include Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner, for whom Heidegger remained a flawed but worthy partner in dialogue. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the foregoing discussion, it is the perceived relationship to Thomas Aquinas – specifically his metaphysics – that serves as a key to the different attitudes of Catholic thinkers towards Heidegger. As Fritz says, 'The more a Catholic warms to Thomas the cooler they become towards Heidegger' (Joseph Fritz, 'Catholic Theology and Heidegger', in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. L. Ayres and M. A. Volpe (Oxford, 2019), 850–62, at 850). Yet, Heidegger remains an important partner in dialogue for Catholic thinkers not least because such partnership has prompted continued thinking on the nature of revelation and of how the finite is open to the infinite. Rowland notes that, for some scholars, Vatican II was an attempt to 'Heideggerise Catholic theology'; 'Some scholars have gone so far as to describe the Second Vatican Council as an attempt to Heideggerise Catholic theology by reconciling the timelessness of the faith with the contemporary interest in history, culture and hermeneutics' (Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (London, 2017), 4). While resolving the charge of ontotheology will take more space than it is here possible to develop, we should note that it was in the concept of *haecceitas* that Heidegger found a principle of singularity and un-repeatability that would inform his own philosophy of Dasein, individuation, and his account of being-towards-death, and as Michael Inwood reminds us, Heidegger's thought has been referred to as 'secularized Scotism' (Michael Inwood, 'Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)', in *The Great Philosophers: Introducing Great Western Thinkers*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford, 1995), 235). I cannot resolve the issue of ontotheology here. Still, in a sense, I think we can read Heidegger's critique of ontotheology partly as a critique of abstractions, in a similar way to the thought of the religious existentialist of the Catholic tradition, Miguel de Unamuno, the 'greatest heretic of modern times' (George Pattison,

as Ebbesen puts it, 'throughout the thirteenth century Paris overshadowed all other universities in the arts as in theology'.[27] Given this, the question may naturally arise as to why Scotus moved from Paris to Cologne. Several explanations were put forward by contemporaries. Cologne was the most important centre of learning in Germany and the city aspired to rival Paris. The Parisian theologian Gerard Calcariensis indicated in his inaugural lecture there, following the formal establishment of the University by pontifical decree in 1388, that the university had been erected upon the foundations laid by earlier scholars such as Albertus, Aquinas and Scotus. At the time Scotus was sent there, a replacement was needed following the death of the Franciscans' official lector of theology. The importance of securing a theologically astute replacement was partly necessitated by a growing theological crisis. Henry II of Virnburg, the recently appointed archbishop, denounced groups known as Beghards and Beguins as heretics for living by mendicancy and for establishing a new order in contravention of the Fourth Lateran Council. In some ways these dissenters could be regarded guardians of Saint Francis' original vision of a spiritual life of poverty, a view which found some sympathy within the Franciscan Order itself. The archbishop also accused them of blaspheming against God by arguing that those 'moved by the Spirit of the Lord are free' – even to commit fornication without sin.[28] Embarrassingly, they were also alleged to be interrupting both the Dominicans and Franciscans while preaching, and these were the very orders which had been charged by the archbishop with preventing heresy. Further, disciples of Albertus Magnus at Cologne had reignited the debate over the conception of Mary. By all accounts, Scotus was undefeated in debate on this question and sending him to the Dominican stronghold of Cologne to tackle this difficult theological issue could be seen as provocative. In any case, as far as his order was concerned, and as far

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Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism London, 1999), 195). The other major representative of existential thought in Catholicism, Gabriel Marcel, was – like Heidegger – critical of Aristotelianism and Thomism, which he regarded as studying the human being merely as an abstract concept, a no-man. Compare Heidegger's *das Man*). Passion, for Unamuno as for Kierkegaard, was a guide to truth, and it is the passionate concern for one's own life that provides the irrational seedbed of faith. For Unamuno no abstractions were permitted, whether the adjective *humanus* (the human) or the abstract substantive *humanitas* (humanity), not the rational animal (*politikon zoon*), *homo economicus*, nor *homo sapiens*. Instead, it is the concrete substantive 'man': 'The man of flesh and bone; the man who is born, suffers, and dies – above all, who dies' (*ibid.*, 21). It is this concrete man that is the 'subject and the supreme object of all philosophy' (*ibid.*, at 21). With all this said, the point of comparison and discussion with Scotus will surely start with his philosophy of love.

[27] Ebbesen, 'The Paris Arts Faculty', 269.

[28] Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent, c. 1250–c. 1450* (Manchester, 1967), 317–18.

as it is possible for us to tell, Scotus had an unblemished personal and intellectual reputation and so would be a perfect thinker to place in this geographical hotbed of ideas.

Even so, Scotus's removal from Paris would deprive that city of one of the greatest thinkers of the age. And, in fact, a hint of controversy has been commented upon in the literature over the years. By the time he left Paris, Scotus was known for his opposition to the French monarchy. As we have seen, Scotus's academic career had begun by the time of his ordination to the priesthood. Scotus was selected by the English provincial to read Peter Lombard's *Sentences* at Paris. By the middle of the thirteenth century, Peter Lombard's twelfth-century synthesis of the opinions (*sententia*) of the Church Fathers had become a standard textbook utilised by the faculties of theology at both Oxford and Paris. He probably arrived there in the autumn of 1301. At this time Gonsalvus of Spain (*c.* 1255–1313) was the Franciscan regent master and it is likely that Scotus participated in his famous disputation with the Dominican Meister Eckhart (*c.* 1260–*c.* 1328).

Within a year of his arrival Scotus' first exile from Paris had been ordered. Hostilities between Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303) and Philip IV ('The Fair') (1285–1314) had been developing since 1296, following the issue of the bull *Clericis laicos*, which expressly forbade the taxation of the clergy without papal permission. Both Philip and his rival, King Edward I of England (1272–1307) were preparing to do exactly that in pursuit of revenue for their war over English territorial claims in south-west France.

Faced with the threat of both kingdoms withholding revenues due to the Papacy, Boniface backed down, but the dispute reopened in 1301 when Philip broke a second legal safeguard of the clergy's position in secular society. Bernard Saisset (1232–1314), the bishop of Pamiers, was arrested by royal officials on a range of charges including sedition. Philip demanded that he be stripped of his clerical status by the Pope and tried by the royal authorities. When Boniface retaliated by defending the right of the Church to try its own people, Philip the Fair and his chief advisor William of Nogaret sought the upper hand by circulating forged letters supposedly issued by the Papacy claiming that 'the king of France was subject to Boniface in spiritualities and temporalities'. This and other propaganda galvanised public opinion against the Pope. Philip and Nogaret summoned representatives of both laity and clergy to the first meeting of the Estates General and publicly accused the Pope of illegal election, heresy and sodomy.

It was also in 1303 that Philip's campaign to depose Boniface as an illegitimate Pope reached the University. Commencing in March of that year, Philip secured the support of the French nobility, followed by certain members of the clergy; lastly, he sought the support of the University of

Paris and of the chapter of Notre Dame. On 24 June a great anti-papal demonstration took place in the gardens of the Louvre. The Franciscans attended and the meeting was addressed by Bertold of St Denis, bishop of Orleans, and a former chancellor of the University of Paris. The next day royal commissioners examined each friar at the Franciscan convent in order to determine who sided with the Pope and who sided with the King: eighty-four Franciscans, mainly French, sided with the King while eighty-seven, mostly foreigners, remained loyal to the Pope. Both Scotus and Gonsalvus were among those loyal to Boniface. The penalty for such loyalty was exile from France within three days.

Boniface reacted to these measures by issuing a bull that suspended the University of Paris' right to confer degrees in theology as well as in both canon and civil law, but by this time Philip and Nogaret's patience had run out. In September the Pope was seized at Anagni by an armed force led by Nogaret. Although he was released two days later, Boniface never recovered from the ordeal and died soon after on 11 October 1303. Following his passing, Boniface was succeeded first by Benedict XI (1303–1304) and then by Clement V (1305–1314). The grave did not protect him and Philip continued his campaign, demanding Boniface be tried and condemned posthumously. This vengeful offensive had the advantage of drawing out key concessions that enabled a thawing of relations: in the interests of peace Benedict XI lifted Boniface's ban on the University's conferral of degrees and Philip, in April 1304, allowed the exiled friars to return to France. Scotus returned (probably in May) and, in line with university regulations, he would most probably have resumed lecturing on Book 4 of the *Sentences*.

Scotus' second departure from Paris in 1307 has been put down to both his holding of a particular theological view and as result of a political stance that he took. Yet, it seems clear that Scotus did not leave Paris for Cologne because of his opposition to Philip the Fair over the Boniface controversy. While this probably did not win him any friends in the camp that had sided with Philip – and it certainly would not have amongst members of Philip's inner circle, such as Nogaret – it does not seem to have harmed his career, or Gonsalvus' for that matter. Gonsalvus was promoted to Minister General of the Franciscan order and in a letter dated 18 November 1304 he placed Scotus in line for promotion to the position of regent master, following Gilles de Ligny who had taken up this post upon the reopening of the University of Paris after its closure during the confusion caused by Philip IV.

Nevertheless, this may not be the end of Philip IV's role in the story of Scotus' departure from Paris since another possibility is that Scotus fell out with the royal authorities over his opposition to the suppression of the Knights Templar. Certainly, his university colleague, Jean de Pouilly – who, as we shall see, accused Scotus of heresy – was a

vigorous supporter of Philip's moves against the military order. Philip's actions were driven by the Knights' wealth and his own shortage of resources. He ordered all the Templars in France to be arrested on charges of heresy on 13 October 1307. Frank and Wolter observed that although Scotus would have had to sit on a board of regent masters who would decide the veracity of the charge of heresy brought against the Knights, he was 'already persona non grata in the eyes of the King's lawyers and advisors because of the position he had taken against the Crown in the Boniface affair'.[29] Even though three years had passed since Scotus's exile it could very well be that his earlier position had in fact come back to haunt him. If this is true then it could be that his earlier stance was an underlying political factor in his later departure, and that the theological controversy that Scotus found himself in in Paris may have been a legitimizing factor in this debacle, although, as with so much, this is more than can be said with certainty.

Frank and Wolter argue that Scotus' time in Paris was cut short because of two of his doctrines: one on the rationale for Christ's incarnation and the other on Mary's status with regards to original sin. Of these two teachings it is Scotus' view on Mary that is the more controversial. Scotus underplayed Christ's role as redeemer in favour of his incarnation into the world, created in the likeness of God as His Son. Yet more contentious than this, and not unconnected to Christ's redemptive role, was his defence of the 'immaculate' conception of Mary.

The Dominican Thomas Aquinas had argued that Mary shared the sinful condition of humanity. As a descendant of Adam, conceived seminally, Mary stood to inherit the guilt of her ancestor's sin at the moment of her conception. However, if – as Scotus argued – Mary were conceived immaculately, she would not stand in need of redemption, being without sin. Were this so, then Christ would not be the *universal* redeemer, since there existed at least one person, His mother, whom he could not redeem. Original sin is something that can only be rectified by baptism and the gift of grace by virtue of Christ's redemptive acts. There is nothing that would logically prevent an all-powerful and all-knowing God from having bestowed such grace as well as a lack of original sin at the moment of the creation of Mary's soul and it is just such a theological possibility that Scotus upholds: fittingly Mary, Mother of Jesus, was pre-redeemed. Aware that he was on dangerous ground, Scotus put his view carefully:

> I say that God could have brought it about that she was never in original sin, or she was in sin for only an instant, or she was in sin for some period of time and at the last instant of that time was purged of it … But which of these three possibilities is factually the

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[29] Frank and Wolter, *John Duns Scotus, Metaphysician*, 14, note 24.

case, God knows – but if the authority of the Church or the authority of Scripture does not contradict such, *it seems probable that what is more excellent should be attributed to Mary.*[30]

This argument caused significant opposition to Scotus in Paris. Dominicans, who had selected St Thomas Aquinas as their 'common doctor', such as Master Hervé de Nédélec opposed Scotus's view on Mary, but it was the secular master Jean de Pouilly who suggested that 'one should proceed not by arguments but otherwise' (*non argumentis sed aliter*) against Scotus as a result of this view. It is Jean de Pouilly who levies the charge of heresy against Scotus:

> First I want to say that a person cannot say in the mode of probability, nor can he hold as a probable opinion, that the blessed Virgin did not actually contract original sin. Indeed, for the sake of all that is holy, this ought to be branded as heretical.[31]

Crucially though, as Wolter notes, this charge was made a year after Scotus' death in Cologne. Sinister as it sounds, then, and in similar vein to Philip's vengeance on Boniface VIII, the threat may not have been to Scotus' person, but to his reputation. Taking excerpts from Florence, National Central Library, Fondo nazionale, MS II.ii.117, Callebaut ranged over five folios of the manuscript in question to produce a problematically concatenated account. Not only is the accusation anonymous, and the insertion of Scotus' name (as Little pointed out[32]) almost certainly a later gloss, but it also occurs two folios further on from the threatening passage. A further comment calling for those who deny the general Redemption of Christ to be released to the secular arm – cited by Callebaut in seeming confirmation of the chilling threat – follows three folios further on still. Jean de Pouilly may well have wanted deniers of Christ's 'redemptive powers' put to death, but, given that Scotus was already dead, the threat, whether issuing from de Pouilly or another, rather loses its menace.

A modern heretical interlude
One other place where a discussion of Scotus's views and the issue of heresy can be heard is in the idiosyncratic reading of his metaphysics by the twentieth century French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and he does so in connection to Scotus's doctrine of the univocity of being.

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[30] John Duns Scotus, *Four Questions on Mary*, transl. Allan B. Wolter (New York, 2000), 42–45.
[31] De Pouilly cited in Frank and Wolter, *John Duns Scotus*, 14, note 23.
[32] See my earlier piece, 'Between medieval and modern beholding', for comprehensive references, including to Little's text.

Deleuze reads Scotus's philosophy of univocity as threatening to cross the heretical line into madness: univocity presented a meaningful but 'mad' challenge to the rationality of the Christian analogical-participatory universe.

The concept of heresy that is generally understood today derived from its Greek root *hairesis* (choice or 'thing chosen') which was originally applied to the various doctrines adhered to by philosophical schools in the ancient world. In I Corinthians 11. 19, Saint Paul uses the term to denote a 'divisive faction', while Ignatius of Antioch (*c*. 35–*c*. 107) employs it in order to denote a 'theological error', long before the first ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325. Tertullian (*c*. 160–*c*. 225) employs the term to denote the 'wilful choice of philosophical opinion over revealed Christian truth'.[33]

The most common source of medieval and later understandings of heresy were the Church councils where theological controversies were argued out. The Arian controversy, for example, was settled at Nicaea by the affirmation of Christ as being *homoousios* ('of one substance') with the Father. Because the councils were divinely inspired, losing the debate could itself be open to condemnation. In any case, as Schleiermacher would argue in the nineteenth century, heresy arises within the context of faith, of which it is an inauthentic or inadequate form. It is possible that Deleuze was influenced by Foucault, who had argued that in the Middle Ages, and until the Renaissance, 'man's dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world'.[34] Before the advent of what Foucault designates the Classical Age in the seventeenth century, when madness became seen as a descent into animality with no human significance, Foucault suggests that it had been regarded as something essentially human and that it represented a meaningful challenge to reason; no matter how abhorred it was, it was understood to be an alternative mode of human being, an alternative 'choice'.[35] Only a mad thinker would entertain a position that threatened to collapse God's transcendence, in effect reducing him metaphysically so that he is conceived as being in the same sense as a creature. The univocity of being threatened to diminish God and divinise creation, or to conceive of God as part of the world only, and so as not truly divine. Deleuze suggests that it is on order to avoid these pantheistic consequences that led Scotus to 'neutralise' the concept of being, a

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[33] Stephen Sykes, 'Heresy', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. A. Richardson and J. Bowden (London, 1983), 249.

[34] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Trans. Richard Howard (London and New York, 1989), xiii–xiv.

[35] See Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2001).

neutralization that he would argue was undone by Spinoza when univocal being became 'expressive and affirmative'[36].

    To say that Deleuze's reading of Scotus is idiosyncratic is, in fact, a far milder way of putting the situation regarding his reading of past philosophers. He says: 'I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous'.[37] On his reading, the univocity of the concept of being threatens to collapse God's transcendence of his creatures and, at the same time, leads to a conception of God in anthropological terms. Both God and creature are said 'to be' in the same sense.

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[36] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, transl. P. Patton (London, 1994), 40. Deleuze shared the view that Martin Heidegger developed, namely that traditional metaphysics is ontotheological. Despite their important differences, for both Heidegger and Deleuze, ontology begins with an originary difference; both Heidegger and Deleuze think being as event, whether as the event of the sending of being to historically situated human beings, that binds together their fates, or as the event of the repetition of an originary principle of difference which amounts to his version of the univocity of being. Miguel de Beistegui puts it like this: 'Deleuze's thought maintains an affinity with […] Heidegger['s] in that it remains a thought of ontological difference, which it continues and reinvents, and [where] the univocity of being […] reinscribes the "meaning" (*Sinn*) of being' (Miguel de Beistegui, 'The ontological dispute: Badiou, Heidegger and Deleuze', in *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions*, ed. Gabriel Riera, trasnl. Ray Brassier (New York, 2005), 45–58, at 49). The univocity of beings is thus the 'meaning and ground' of beings, to borrow a characterisation from Heidegger. The question of being is the question of being's difference from entities. For Deleuze, this difference is processual: being is the movement of difference as such. It is 'the spatiotemporalizing movement or operation through which "there are" entities' at all (*ibid.*, 57). For Heidegger, the movement of difference is the event of being in its historical unfolding. For Deleuze, it is a process of individuation, physical, biological and artistic. Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* is, amongst other things, a response to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, where difference corresponds to being and repetition to time. On this reading, Deleuze's terms, the virtual and the actual, can be roughly equated with Heidegger's terms being and beings (see Henry Somers-Hall, 'Deleuze's philosophical heritage: unity, difference, and onto-theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuz*, ed. Daniel W. Smith and Henry Somers-Hall (Cambridge, 2012), 337–56, at 346). On Nathan Widder's reading of Deleuze, his account of univocity turns out to be the inversion of Scotus's: it affirms the 'rights of subconceptual differences' and does not provide a concept of being that includes beings of the greatest extrinsic difference, such as God and creatures (John Roffe, *Badiou's Deleuze* (Durham, 2012), 12). Deleuze's philosophy as a whole is largely indifferent to the question of the existence of God (Philip Goodchild, 'Deleuze and Philosophy of Religion', in *Continental Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion*, ed. M. Joy (Dordrecht, 2010), 12) and in this respect Deleuze represents a very different kind of reader of Scotus than does Heidegger, who was never indifferent to theological concerns and for whom contemporary indifference to questions of the sacred remained a problem for thinking.

[37] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, transl. Martin Joughin, (New York, 1995), 5–6.

It was in a seminar that he delivered at Vincennes in January 1974 that he hints at what he takes to be the heretical implication of Scotus's position. He says:

> Fortunately, however, he had taken his precautions, he said yes but be careful: being is univocal insofar as it is being. That is to say that it is metaphysically univocal. He said: sure it's analogical, which is to say that it's said in several senses physically. This is what interests me: he was at the border of heresy, had he not specified metaphysically univocal and physically analogical, he would have been done for.[38]

For Deleuze, Scotus was thinking at the 'border [*la frontière*] of heresy' because of his doctrine and he provocatively suggests to his students that people could be 'burned or tortured' (*brûler ou supplicier*) for what was at stake in the 'stories' of what seems to us to be 'dead' terms like univocity, equivocity and analogy. More than any other, the term, 'heresy' 'may well signify the quintessential medievalistic moment within the modern popular imagination, conjuring forth visions of … pageants of intolerance, showcasing defiant dissenters at the fiery stake in the name of God'.[39] It certainly does seem that what Deleuze finds most interesting in theology, if not in philosophy too, are what he takes to be limit points at which heresy 'peeks out' (*les points limites où l'hérésie pointe*).[40]

In one sense, however, despite the emphasis on adherence to defined doctrine in Church teaching, the Middle Ages was a relatively tolerant era for intellectuals. Despite the charge of 'heresy' being a common part of the rough and tumble of medieval academic life, no theologian was sent to the stake before John Hus in 1415. In terms of definitions, Aquinas' practical one was clearly used by inquisitors and other judicial authorities. For Aquinas a heretic is a baptised person who consciously rejects some belief or set of beliefs that they ought to accept as true by virtue of their revelation in Scripture or by virtue of their acceptance by the Catholic Church and who at the same time professes to be a Christian. Simply being in error or of doubting a truth is not sufficient for heresy. Rather, as Aquinas argues in *Summa Theologica*, an *error voluntarius* on the part of the heretic is required: namely, the individual in error must freely and deliberately choose to reject a belief or truth proclaimed

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[38] Gilles Deleuze, 'Anti Œdipe et Mille Plateaux', *Cours Vincennes*, 14 January 1974, on line at https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/176 (accessed 6 December 2024). I would like to thank Anne Jack and Merceline Mer (both at Hutchesons Grammar School at the time) for discussing Deleuze's French with me.

[39] Nadia Margolis, 'Heresy', in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge, 2014), 97–108, at 97.

[40] Deleuze, 'Anti Œdipe et Mille Plateaux'.

by the Church.[41] The position in Canon law was similar to Aquinas's view with the condition that the 'heretic' has to continue to hold an opinion, even after being instructed that it contravenes true doctrine of the Church. There can, therefore, be no such thing as heresy without a prior set of defined doctrines. Even John Wyclif's obduracy was only punished in his lifetime by rustication to spend more time with his parishioners in Lutterworth. The test seemed to be that as long as what went on in the university stayed in the university, a blind eye could be turned. The offence was to start spreading heretical doctrines in the world outside. Given this, it seems probable that while Jean de Pouilly may well be threatening Scotus's followers, particularly those fellow Franciscans who were going to preach in the wider world, he knew that he could only inflict wounds on Scotus' reputation.

Heresy, some concluding remarks

Procedures for the censorship of ideas were generally well established by Scotus's time as a result, primarily, of the condemnation of Aristotelianism in 1277. The process of excerpting work and then judging it was further refined in the prosecution of another recalcitrant Franciscan, Peter John Olivi, in the 1280s. He was not allowed to argue against his condemnation as the works in question were confiscated. With a nice irony, Jean de Pouilly was to find out how smoothly the procedures worked when he was condemned for attacking papal authority by Pope John XXII, although he was allowed to submit a written defence, but time for writing was often restricted, even sometimes to a single day. The ultimate aim of medieval censorship mechanisms was to inspire self-censorship. Threats were an integral part of that process, as Jean knew well, when he himself elected to keep silent 'in the hall of the bishop'.[42]

Having said all this, and to conclude this discussion of heresy, there is evidence to suggest that Scotus' departure from Paris was quick, perhaps precipitate. William Vorilong (who lectured in Paris in 1430) indicates that Scotus arrived in Cologne unencumbered by many – if any – of his possessions (although, as a Franciscan, one may wonder exactly how many possessions he may have had). According to Vorilong, Scotus received a letter from Gonsalvus indicating that a move was necessary while he was relaxing with his students outside the city walls at Pré-aux-Clercs. Upon reading it, Scotus set off for Cologne immediately and did not return to the Franciscan convent to collect any of his

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[41] See Karl Rahner, 'Heresy', in his *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London, 1975), 604–11.
[42] François-Xavier Putallaz and Robert Pasnau, 'Censorship', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2009), 99–113, at 100.

belongings. Frank and Wolter suggest, as does Broadie, that Scotus' hasty departure from Paris may – along with his early death on 8 November 1308 – account for the fact that all of his major works, including his three *Commentaries* on the *Sentences*, remained unfinished.

Although it is uncertain whether Gonsalvus' letter was the trigger for Scotus's immediate departure, one thing that is certain is that this letter could not have included in it notification of Jean de Pouilly's 'charge' of heresy, the one that has come down to us, because this charge had not yet been made. Scotus departed Paris not as a heretic, but as a respected philosopher-theologian, albeit one with 'formidable enemies' in the city. In view of his low standing with the French royal authorities and the growing tension in Paris as summer turned to autumn in 1307, Gonsalvus' decision to transfer him to Germany may well have been a very shrewd move.

Conclusion

This article presented a summary overview of some key aspects of the life and work of the great Franciscan theologian philosopher John Duns Scotus. We started with a short overview of what we can establish about Scotus's life, and we went on to tell a tale of his life, and of his departure from Paris for Cologne. Moving through a summary presentation of his important doctrine of the univocity of being, we ventured into a short discussion of his doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and of some of the controversy surrounding that, concluding that Scotus did not leave Paris as a heretic.

That Scotus is enjoying a significant amount of renewed interest in his work in both philosophical and theological circles is clear and is in no small part due to the writings of now historically significant figures in their own right, such as Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Contemporary philosophers and theologians, such as John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Peter van Inwagen and Adrain Moore, also all engage with Scotus's work either directly or indirectly. In the early twenty-first century, philosopher John Hare would find similarities between Scotus and Sartre in their ethical thinking (as had Alexander Broadie in the 1990s).[43] For Hare, the contrast between the two figures proves 'illuminating because Sartre, while he does not refer to Scotus, tracks so closely what Scotus's theory would be without God'.[44] In a similar vein, Cynthia Nielsen will find in Scotus's account of meta-physical freedom the 'condition for the possibility of moral and political

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[43] See Alexander Broadie, *The Shadow of Scotus: Philosophy and Faith in Pre-Reformation Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1995).
[44] John H. Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Oxford, 2009), 115–16).

freedom'.[45] Scotus view provides a 'centre' that enables a contemporary critique of 'slavery, human trafficking, and other violent crimes against human beings *as* inherently free beings'.[46] In 2014, Scotus's key concept of the univocity of being was the subject of Adrian Moore's Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society, while in 2015 John Llewelyn explored the 'spell' of Scotus on Gerard Manley Hopkins.[47] What is clear from this very short list of contemporary engagements is that we have not heard the last from John Duns Scotus. There is no doubt in my mind that Scotus will be an important thinker in many debates to come.

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[45] Cynthia R. Nielsen, *Foucault, Douglass, Fanon and Scotus in Dialogue: On Social Construction and Freedom* (New York, 2013), xiii.

[46] *Ibid.*, xiii.

[47] A. W. Moore, 'Being, univocity, and logical syntax', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 115 (2015), 1–23; John Llewelyn, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Spell of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh, 2015).