

SCOTUS ON MIND AND BEING :
TRANSCENDENTAL
AND DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

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[...] Thomas faciens illud argumentum deceptus fuit per hoc quod non distinxit inter cognoscere aliquid confuse et distincte et distinctum. Verum enim est quod cognoscere aliquid confuse, scilicet minus universale, est medium inter ignorantiam puram et cognitionem eius distinctam, et sic cognitio alicuius confusa prior est cognitione eius distincta. Sed propter hoc non sequitur quod cognitio confusi, id est magis universalis, sit prior cognitione distincti, id est minus universalis, nisi loquendo de cognitione distinta [...] ¹

[...] sic dicunt quod Deus est primum cognitum, quia cognitio nostra naturaliter procedit ab indeterminato ad determinatum, ex I *Physicorum*. Quanto igitur aliquid est indeterminatius, tanto prius a nobis naturaliter cognitum; sed illud quod est 'indeterminatum negative', est magis indeterminatum quam illud quod est 'indeterminatum privative'; cum ergo Deus sit indeterminatus negative – et similiter quidquid attribuitur Deo, est indeterminatum negative – sequitur quod est Deus primum cognitum a nobis cognitione naturali. ²

As we can see from these brief citations, Duns Scotus approaches issues related to mind and being in a context provided by two of the major figures in thirteenth century philosophy, Henry of Ghent and Thomas Aquinas. If we

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¹ B. IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI, *Quaestiones super secundum et tertium De anima*, ed. T. Noone et al., in *Opera Philosophica*, q. 16, n. 27 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y./Washington, D.C.: Franciscan Institute/ CUA Press 2006), p. 154. Hereafter the edition of the *Opera Philosophica* will be cited simply as "OPh" followed by volume and page number.

² IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI, *Lectura*, I, d. 3 pars prima q. 2, n. 14, in *Opera omnia* (Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1960), XVI, pp. 228-229. Hereafter the Vatican edition will be cited simply as "ed. Vat." followed by volume and page number.

reflect in turn upon how these two figures summed up much of the thinking found in contemporaries and predecessors – in the case of Henry we find traces of William of Auvergne, Guibert of Tournai, and St. Bonaventure, while in the case of Thomas Aquinas, we find elements in common with Parisian arts masters and Albert the Great –, we may readily gauge the extent to which Scotus is framing his discussion of the proper object of the human mind against the received tradition on the relationship between mind and being. What interests us here is how Scotus's own theory may be understood against this immediate background, which provides the target for his criticisms as well as many of the positive elements or structures that he appropriates. But viewing Scotus's thinking only in reference to Thomas and Henry would not do full justice to his views: much of what he has to say becomes only fully intelligible when we realize how he is the beneficiary of an on-going discussion within the thirteenth century regarding how our intellectual knowledge progresses, a discussion that plays itself out in arts masters' commentaries on the first book of Aristotle's *Physics* and *De anima* as well as in disputed and quodlibetal questions by theologians. Unfortunately, limitations of space will not permit a broad survey of this rich material.

Nonetheless, even within the limits set us, the right place to begin for us is with the earlier views on the *primum cognitum* found in Guibert of Tournai and its critique by Thomas Aquinas; systematically considered, the views we shall first examine are only part of medieval developmental psychology, but an extremely important part since these efforts are bound up with the more familiar themes of abstraction and illumination in the area of medieval epistemology. What exactly do I mean by the term 'medieval developmental psychology'? I mean the efforts on the part of medieval philosophers to trace out how our intellectual knowledge of the world progresses. Obviously, part of the explanation advanced by any given medieval thinker will assume his own account of the interrelation between our various cognitive faculties, i.e., the contribution of the senses, internal and external, the imagination, the role played by the agent intellect and the role if any assigned to intelligible species. But what is of more interest to us is how the temporally first objects of our intellectual awareness relate to the knowledge of the world that we eventually achieve and the process that leads to our success in knowing the world.

Given that the target of our study is Duns Scotus and his manner of explaining the development of our intellectual knowledge, we shall be much concerned, as Scotus himself is, with the theories of Henry of Ghent. Fortunately, we are the beneficiaries of two outstanding studies treating Henry of Ghent that make Henry's role in our tale relatively easy to tell.³ Much of

³ M. PICKAVÉ, *Heinrich von Gent über Metaphysik als erste Wissenschaft: Studien zu einem Metaphysikentwurf aus dem letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts*, «Studien und Texte zur Geistes-

what I shall say here regarding Henry and the figures influencing Henry is simply a summary of the findings of Prof. Martin Pickavé and Prof. Wouter Goris. But regarding the background to Guibert of Tournai in Grosseteste's thought, I have added some points of interest and differentiation. Regarding the interpretation of Henry's doctrine of being as *primum distincte cognitum*, I think I have indicated how his thought relates to but advances beyond that of Thomas and how his ideas either reflect or are reflected by ideas found in certain masters of arts. Finally, regarding Scotus himself, though several excellent studies have been devoted to his theory of intelligible species and to his epistemology, no study has identified correctly the precise background to his concept of habitual knowledge of being, a notion that proves essential to understanding his claims about how our intellectual knowledge actually develops.

The thesis of the present paper grows out of this historical study of the background for Scotus's use of habitual knowledge and it may be stated quite briefly. The notion that our actual intellectual knowledge begins with the concept of being, however that notion may be related to the proper object of a given thinker, is found in both Thomas and Henry with the further claim that all of our knowledge of the world, whether of the other transcendentals or of categorical items, is mediated by this first intellectual apprehension of being. Conversely, some of the arts masters on the *Physics* as well as other thinkers had suggested that the actual starting point of our intellectual knowledge is physical substances and their specific natures and that our knowledge proceeds from these items to the transcendental notions or being as such, which are the objects of metaphysical science.⁴ Scotus, in what is likely his first treat-

geschichte des Mittelalters», bd. 91 (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2007), esp. 170-179 and W. GORIS, *Absolute Beginners: Der mittelalterliche Beitrag zu einem Ausgang vom Unbedingten*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2007).

⁴ Richard Clive (teaching arts around 1275-80; subsequently, a theologian at Oxford ca. 1285-90) would be an example. Clive distinguishes between the properly universal, which he identifies as understood, signified, and understood by the intellect, and the improperly universal, which he identifies as the *confusum* which is the general that exists apart from any act of mind. See Then he writes: «His suppositis, respondendum est quaestioni. Nota etiam quarto quod singulare dicitur duobus modis: proprie et improprie. Proprie nominat quid signatum, improprie speciem specialissimam, I Physicorum. Accipendo universale proprie et singulare proprie, prius est singulari cognitioni nostrae absolute. [...] Cognitionem absolute voco quae est communis cognitioni sensitivae et intellectivae; sic loquitur Aristoteles de universali libro De anima - a singulari enim fit abstractio universalis. Si universale et particulare improprie accipiuntur (accipitur [universale] improprie pro eo quod est quid rei), sic non habent comparationem respectu nostrae cognitionis, quia sic universale non sentitur nec intelligitur, quia circumscribit operationem intellectus - et hoc loquendo de universali de genere substantiae. In genere tamen accidentium habent comparationem ad intellectivam, ad sensitivam vero non, quia sic singulare sumptum improprie est proprie

ment of these issues in the *QDA*, initially distinguishes between two orders of knowledge, confused and distinct, arguing that in the order of confused knowledge we know first the *species specialissima* of the item that most strongly moves the sense, but in the order of distinct knowledge we know being first and it is through the knowledge of being that we come to distinct knowledge of anything we do know distinctly. But, crucially, this leaves him with a difficulty regarding how it is possible for our mind to pass from the temporally prior state of confused knowledge to the temporally later but naturally prior state of distinct knowledge, given that he does not permit the concept of being to be known in such a way that it could be revised or known confusedly. The thesis argued for here is that the device of habitual, rather than actual, knowledge of being allows for a presence of being as actually intelligible in the intellect from the outset of our knowledge; it is to this habitual, though distinct, knowledge of being that our intellect turns to begin the process of distinct cognition of the items previously confusedly known. Problems remain for Scotus's theory, of course, but the problems occur in regard to other features of his overall view of our knowledge of transcendental concepts and how they function in the way that they do in our progressive intellectual understanding of the world.

1. THOMAS AQUINAS

1. 1. *Critique of Deus ut primum cognitum*

When we approach Thomas Aquinas's commentary and questions upon Boethius's *De Trinitate*, we find questions related to our theme at the beginning of the text. Aquinas divides the first question, concerned with human knowledge of divine things, into four articles: 1) whether in knowing truth the human mind needs some new illumination (*nova illustratione*); 2) whether we can come to know God; 3) whether God is first known (*primum cognitum*); and 4) whether the human mind can come to know the Trinity.⁵ In the first article, Thomas contrasts what he deems to be the correct position with that of Avicenna who allowed only a passive power to the human intellect; consequently,

universale. Sic comparando universale et singulare improprie dicta ad intellectum, sic prius intelligit singulare. Prius enim intelligit hominem quam hoc animal, quia hoc animal non intelligit nisi per reflexionem» (R. CLIVE, *Quaestiones super Physicam*, I, q. 19 a 'Utrum magis universale sit prius minus universali', [Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library, Q. 13, f. 82 va]). I would like to thank Dr. Silvia Donati, of the Albertus Magnus Institute, Bonn and the Thomas Institute, Koeln for making available to me her transcriptions of Richard Clive and numerous other arts masters' writings on the first books of the *Physics*.

⁵ SANCTI THOMAE DE AQUINO, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, in *Opera omnia*, t. 50, cura et studio fratrum Praedicatorum (Roma/Paris: Commissio Leonina/Les Éditions du Cerf 1992), q. 1, ed. cit., 80 a.

the Islamic philosopher had to posit an external source for the actuation of the human intellect in a separate substance that Thomas here names *intellectus agens*, though elsewhere more correctly *intelligentia agens*.⁶ According to Thomas's own construal, the more Aristotelian and more Scriptural view is to grant the human mind an active as well as a passive power and thereby to render the natural cognitive powers of the human soul, both sensitive and intellectual, sufficient for knowing the entire range of natural truths.⁷ While Thomas allows so much independence for the human mind, he also insists, perhaps in response to the criticisms of St. Bonaventure's *De scientia Christi* q. 4, that God's activity remains necessary for the human intellect to realize its own activity of knowledge.⁸ After this denial of the need for any new light regarding our knowledge of natural knowable truths, Aquinas turns in the following article to our knowing God, though this in part means, too, determining what humans are capable of knowing in principle. The human intellect, at least according to its functions in the present life, is delimited to knowing sensibles and the forms taken from sensibles; hence it cannot know the divine

⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Boetium*, q. 1, art. 1 (ed. Leonina, 50: 81b–82a). Cfr. AVICENNA, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, ed. S. Van Riet (Louvain/Leiden: Éditions Orientalistes/E.J. Brill 1968), pp. 126-127: «Dicemus quod anima humana prius est intelligens in potentia, deinde fit intelligens in effectu. Omne autem quod exit de potentia ad effectum, non exit nisi per causam quae habet illud in effectu et extrahit ad illum. Ergo est hic causa per quam animae nostrae in rebus intelligibilibus exeunt de potentia ad effectum. Sed causa dandi formam intelligibilem non est nisi intelligentia in effectu, penes quam sunt principia formarum intelligibilium abstractarum. Cuius comparatio ad nostras animas est sicut comparatio solis ad visus nostros, quia sicut sol videtur per se in effectu, et videtur luce ipsius in effectu quod non videbatur in effectu, sic est dispositio huius intelligentiae quantum ad nostras animas. Virtus enim rationalis cum considerat singula quae sunt in imaginatione et illuminatur luce intelligentiae agentis in nos quam praediximus, fiunt nuda a materia et ab eius appendiciis et imprimuntur in anima rationali, non quasi ipsa mutantur de imaginatione ad intellectum nostrum, nec quia intentio pendens e g multis (cum ipsa in se sit nuda considerata per se), faciat similem sibi, sed quia ex consideratione eorum aptatur anima ut emanet in eam ab intelligentia agente abstractio».

⁷ «Unde sicut aliae potentiae activae naturales suis passivis coniunctae sufficiunt ad naturales operationes, ita etiam anima habens in se potentiam activam et passivam sufficit ad perceptionem veritatis... Sic ergo sunt quaedam intelligibiles veritates ad quas se extendit efficacia intellectus agentis, sicut principia quae naturaliter homo cognoscit, et ea quae ab his deducuntur; et ad haec cognoscenda non requiritur nova lux intelligibilis, sed sufficit lumen naturaliter inditum» (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Boetium*, q. 1, art. 1 [ed. Leonina, 82^o]).

⁸ «[...] Deus nos interius docet in naturalibus cognitis, quod lumen naturale in nobis causat et ipsum dirigit in veritatem; in aliis vero etiam novum lumen infundendo» (THOMAS, *Super Boetium*, q. 1, art. 1, ad 2, 82 b). «In hoc ergo continue Deus operatur in mente, quod in ipsa lumen naturale causat ut ipsum dirigat, et sic mens non sine operatione primae causae in operationem suam procedat» (*ibidem*, 83 a: pp. 230-234). See below for the reference to Bonaventure's texts.

essence. Instead, we are confined to knowing God by his effects. But such knowledge, too, needs to be qualified; some effects are proportioned to their causes and yield isomorphic results regarding the essences of their causes, but others are disproportionate to their causes and yield little beyond telling us about the existence of the cause. The sensible things are of the latter type, yielding only knowledge that God exists and no knowledge of the divine essence. Knowledge, however, of the existence of something can be greater and less, so Aquinas outlines a hierarchy of knowledge of a cause through effect: a) knowledge of how the effect proceeds from the cause ; b) knowledge of likeness of the cause in the effect; and c) knowledge of how the effect falls short of the cause. The highest knowledge we can achieve in the present life is the last, that is the knowledge of God that comes through knowing how much creatures fall short of Him. The proportion of God to our intellect is by way of the proportionality of the creature to God as effect to cause.⁹

The third article turns to the possibility that God would be the first thing known by our intellect. The opening arguments set up the problem clearly: God should be the first thing known if, for example, the first thing known is the item in which all other things are known or if, following Avicenna's dictum, we hold the more simple and prior are first known; the alternative, however, seems to be evident from the origin of our knowledge in the senses and the fact that our thinking must begin with what is posterior rather than what is prior by nature. At the outset of his reply to the article, Thomas mentions the views of certain thinkers who think that God is the first thing known even in the present life. As Goris has argued,¹⁰ the view being called into question is, in all probability, that of Guibert de Tournai. This becomes evident when one compares the way Aquinas describes the function of God as being the first truth and that through which all other things are known (*qui est ueritas prima, et per hoc omnia alia cognoscuntur*) to the claims of Guibert that in the creature God is first known and all things through Him (*Quod in creatura Deus primo ab intelligentia advertitur et sic in eo quodammodo cetera cognoscuntur*). Aquinas' reply is to critique the view theologically by arguing that the opin-

⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Boetium*, q. 1, art. 2 (84 b-85 b).

¹⁰ W. GORIS, *Die Anfänge der Auseinandersetzung um das Ersterkannte im 13. Jahrhundert; Guibert von Tournai, Bonaventura und Thomas von Aquin*, «Documenti et studi», 10 (1999), pp. 363-364. The original text of Guibert is found in C. BERUBÉ et S. GIEBEN, *Guibert de Tournai et Robert Grosseteste: Sources inconnues de la doctrine de l'illumination suivi de l'édition critique de trois chapitres du Rudimentum doctrinae de Guibert de Tournai*, in S. Bonaventura: 1274-1974 (Grottaferrata (Roma): Collegio S. Bonaventura 1973), pp. 627-654. The pointer in the direction of Guibert was first given in F. RUELLO, *La doctrine de illumination dans le traité Super librum Boethii De Trinitate de Thomas d'Aquin*, «Recherches de science religieuse», 64 (1976), pp. 341-357. Ruello prefers to see Guibert in the second opinion listed by Aquinas and in the first opinion cited by Thomas the view of Grosseteste.

ion has difficulty distinguishing between our current knowledge of God and the beatific vision. A second opinion is listed by Aquinas as related to the first but this opinion holds that the divine influence is what is first known and, in this mitigated sense, God is first known. Goris has argued that certain of Guibert's texts may underlie the view that Thomas describes here,¹¹ but this is not clear; the wording of Aquinas may be deliberately vague and meant perhaps to include figures such as Bonaventure, as Goris also notes. Bonaventure, however, would strenuously object to having his claim that we reach the divine light in our certain knowledge reduced to meaning our knowledge is rooted only in a divine influence. In any event, Thomas interprets the claim to mean that we know the light of our minds prior to knowing any particular thing and that in this sense all things are known through God and his divine influence. Thomas's rejection of this second position is based on the standard Aristotelian position that self-knowledge must ultimately be grounded on the knowledge of something else as naturally (and perhaps temporally) prior to knowing the knowing self.¹²

Thomas's rejection of the *Deus ut primum cognitum* hypothesis is accompanied by his own reflections upon what the actual *primum cognitum* is. Thomas himself proposes a distinction between one sense of *primo cognitum* as relating to the different powers of the senses and the intellect, and another sense of *primo cognitum* as bearing upon the objects of a single power, such as intellect. Regarding the first sense of what is first known, the sensible singular is the *primo cognitum* since our intellects are sense-dependent and the activities of the senses are prior to the activity of the intellect. In regard to the second sense of first known, specifying the first object known in reference to the intellect as a distinctive power, we must say that the prior objects are those abstracted by the agent intellect from the phantasm and the first of these are the ones that first occur to the intellect in its abstraction:

¹¹ W. GORIS, O. C., pp. 365-366. *Ibidem*, p. 361, n. 23, cites BONAVENTURA, *De scientia Christi*, q. 6 (ed. Quaracchi, V, 34 b): «[...] ad cognitionem cuiuscumque creaturae perfectam et certitudinalem concurrat non tantum lucis aeternae praesentia, sed etiam lucis aeternae influentia[...]». But the point Bonaventure is making there is that the finite human mind contributes something to certain knowledge and that is what is included under 'lucis aeternae influentia', as the continuation of the quotation shows: «[...] non tantum Verbum increatum, verum etiam verbum intus conceptum; non tantum sapientia aeterna, verum etiam notitia animae impressa; non tantum veritas causans, verum etiam veritas informans». In a word, the divine influence is on the creaturely side of these analogies, though perhaps Goris means that this text provided an occasion for Thomas's supposed misreading. In any event, Bonaventure is quite clear that he does not mean that we attain only a divine influence in our certain intellectual knowledge: *De scientia Christi*, q. 4 (ed. Quaracchi, V, 23 a-b) listing just such a position as one of the two incorrect extremes against which he proposes his own view as a middle way.

¹² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Boetium*, q. 1, art. 3 (87 a-b).

The agent intellect, moreover, does not render forms separated from matter intelligible, which are rather intelligible in their own right, but instead it renders intelligible forms that it abstracts from phantasms, and, accordingly, things of this sort are those that our intellect first understands. And among these, those are prior that first befall the intellect in its abstraction; these, moreover, are the ones that encompass many other items, either as a universal whole or as an integral whole. That is why the more universal are the first things known to the intellect and items that are composed prior to their component parts, and the item defined prior to the parts of its definition. And in this regard, there is a certain imitation of the intellect by the sense, which also in a way receives items separated from matter, so that even in sense cognition the more common items within the singular are known first; for example, 'this body' is known prior to 'this animal'.¹³

A natural consequence of this is that God cannot be the first item known, but rather He must be an item that we are acquainted with through knowing other things. In the same vein, Thomas denies that there is a strict parallel between knowledge and being such that God is the first object of our mind; God may be the first in the order of intelligibles absolutely speaking, but He is not the first in the order of intelligibles for us («[...] *Deus sit in ordine intelligibilium primum simpliciter, non tamen est primum in ordine intelligibilium nobis*»).¹⁴ What is even more telling from our point of view is that Thomas argues in his reply to the third objection that, along the lines Avicenna suggests, the first items arising from the abstraction of the phantasms are the first items known, such as being and unity.¹⁵ Though Thomas has emphasized here the need for our intellectual knowledge to begin with the senses and the phantasm, there is no formal treatment here of the proper object of the intellect, but rather of the order of origin or ideogenesis. If we turn to the *Summa theologiae*, we find the topics of proper object and order of origin treated in close proximity and it is to this text, a proof text used often by Scotus, that we now address ourselves.

¹³ «[...] intellectus autem agens non facit intelligibilia formas separatas, quae sunt ex ipsis intelligibiles, sed formas quas abstrahit a phantasmatis; et ideo huiusmodi sunt quae primo intellectus noster intelligit. Et inter haec illa sunt priora, quae primo intellectui abstrahenti occurrunt; haec autem sunt qua plura comprehendunt: vel per modum totius universalis, vel per modum integralis; et ideo magis universalia sunt primo nota intellectui, et composita componentibus, ut definitum partibus definitionis. Et secundum quod quaedam imitatio intellectus est in sensu, qui etiam quodammodo abstracta a materia recipit, etiam apud sensum singularia magis communia sunt primo nota, ut hoc corpus quam hoc animal» (THOMAS, *Super Boetium*, q. 1, art. 3, 87 b). Cfr. AVICENNA, *Liber primus naturalium: tractatus primus de causis et principiis naturalium*, ed. S. Van Riet (Louvain-la-Neuve/Leiden: E. Peeters/E.J. Brill 1992), I c. 1, ed. Van Riet, p. 11).

¹⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Boetium*, q. 1, art. 3, ad 2 (88 a).

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, q. 1, art. 3, ad 3 (88 a).

1. 2. *Proper Object and First Object(s) of the Intellect*

Though Thomas treats the object of the intellect in several places, the 'classic' place for the early reception of his teaching was the *Summa theologiae* I q. 84 and q. 85. In some ways this is an unfortunate circumstance, inasmuch as, even within the prima pars of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas sometimes hints that being or being as given in material things is the object of the intellect.¹⁶ If we turn to *Summa contra gentiles* and the *Sententia de anima*, we find texts claiming that 'quod quid est' is the object of the intellect,¹⁷ and this, too, would seem to be a different position than the one usually ascribed to Thomas by Scotus.¹⁸

The texts taken as normative and guiding for the interpretation of Thomas's views on intellect are understood as follows. Thomas's discussion of the human cognition as placed in an intermediary position within the extremes of angelic cognition, on the one hand, and sense cognition, on the other, is taken as giving a reason why the object of the human intellect is intermediate and thus material quiddity prescinding from individuating matter, as opposed to subsistent form and form as existing in corporeal matter.¹⁹ This is viewed as the metaphysical or cosmological principle behind the explicit statement of *Summa theologiae* I q. 85 art. 5:

¹⁶ «Primo autem in conceptione intellectus cadit ens, quia secundum hoc unumquodque cognoscibile est, in quantum est actu, ut dicitur in IX Metaphy. Unde ens est proprium obiectum intellectus et sic est primum intelligibile, sicut sonus est primum audibile» (IDEM, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 5, art. 3 corp [ed. Leonina IV 58a]): «Ad primum ergo dicendum quod obiectum intellectus est commune quoddam, scilicet, ens et verum, sub quo comprehenduntur etiam ipse actus intelligendi. Unde intellectus potest suum actum intelligere. Sed non primo; : quia nec primum obiectum intellectus nostri, secundum praesentem statum, est quodlibet ens et verum, sed ens et verum consideratum in rebus materialibus [...], ex quibus in cognitionem omnium aliorum devenit» (*ibidem*, q. 87, art. 3, ad 1 [ed. Leonina, V, 361 b]).

¹⁷ «Item, proprium obiectum intellectus est quod quid est: unde circa hoc non decipitur intellectus nisi per accidens, circa compositionem autem et divisionem decipitur; sicut et sensus qui est proprius semper est verus, in aliis autem fallitur» (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 1, cap. 58, n. 5 [ed. Leonina, XIII 165 b]). «Et huius rationem assignat quia quod quid est est proprium obiectum intellectus, unde, sicut visus nunquam decipitur in proprio obiecto, ita nec intellectus nunquam decipitur in cognoscendo quod quid est [...]» (IDEM, *Sententia libri De anima III*, c. 5 [ed. Leonina XLV.1 227 b]).

¹⁸ For an excellent summary, emphasizing the complexity of Thomas's position, see M. PICKAVÉ, *Heinrich von Ghent*, cit., pp. 135-139 and J.A. AERTSEN, *Aquinas and the Human Desire for Knowledge*, «ACPQ», 79/3 (2005), pp. 428-429.

¹⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, art. 1 corp (ed. Leonina, V, 330 b – 331 a). The same interpretation as Scotus advances may be seen in R. MARSTON, *QQ. disp. de anima*, q. 2 (BFS, VII, 231-232).

But since the human intellect proceeds from potency to act, it bears a likeness with generable things that don't have their perfection all at once, but acquire it over time. And so, too, the human intellect does not get a perfect awareness of a thing at first, but first it grasps something about it, namely the quiddity of a thing, which is the primary and proper object of the intellect and thereafter understand properties, accidents, and the attendant features of a thing.²⁰

If we return to the theme of what is first known, we find many similarities to what we have already noticed in Thomas's *Commentary on the De Trinitate* of Boethius. In *Summa theologiae* I q. 85 art. 3 where the question is 'whether our intellect naturally knows what is more universal first', Thomas refers to both the universal whole and the integral whole and distinguishes between what is first in the order of the sense and what is first in the order of the intellect. Several new features are introduced. The key text of Aristotle's *Physics* that prompts extensive discussion of this issue in *Physics* commentaries is referred to twice in the body of the question. Furthermore, after pointing out that, given the dependence of our intellects upon our sense powers, the singular is the first known, Thomas emphasizes the progressive nature of our knowledge:

Secondly we must consider that our intellect proceeds from potency to act. But everything that passes from potency to act first reaches the state of incomplete act, which is between potency and act, before reaching complete act. The complete act, however, that the intellect reaches is complete scientific knowledge, through which things are distinctly and determinately known. Incomplete act, in this case, is imperfect knowledge through which things are known indistinctly under a certain confusion. Whatever is known in this fashion is known qualifiedly in act and in a way in potency. That is why, the Philosopher tells us in I *Physics* that certain manifest and confused things are known to us at first, but later we know by distinguishing clearly their principles and elementa.²¹

²⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, art. 5 [ed. Leonina, V, 341 a]: «Cum enim intellectus humanus exeat de potentia in actum, similitudinem quandam habet cum rebus generabilibus, quae non statim perfectionem suam habent, sed eam successive acquirunt. Et similiter intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus; et deinde intelligit proprietates et accidentia et habitudines circumstantes rei essentiam» (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I q. 85 art. 5 [ed. Leonina, V 341a]). But the text that is being used to control this one, it seems to me, is IDEM, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 88, art. 3 corp. (ed. Leonina, V, 368 b): «Primum autem quod intelligitur a nobis secundum statum praesentis vitae, est quidditas rei materialis, quae est nostri intellectus obiectum, ut multoties supra dictum est».

²¹ «Respondeo dicendum quod in cognitione nostri intellectus duo oportet considerare. Primo quidem, quod cognitio intellectiva aliquo modo a sensitiva primordium sumit. Et quia sensus est singularium, intellectus autem universalium, necesse est quod cognitio

The use of 'elements and principles' in reference to Aristotle's text shows that Aquinas still has in mind the view of it that is commonly found in earlier commentators on the *Physics*, such as Albert the Great,²² who, inspired by Averroes's commentary, interpret Aristotle as speaking of sensible wholes as items of our first acquaintance and the things known later as the elements and principles that are revealed by the investigations of natural science.

Here, however, Aquinas means to make a point parallel with certain other commentators on the *Physics* who wonder about the connection between this Aristotelian passage and the *universaliora* of our knowledge that are supposed to be known first according to the dictum of Avicenna at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*.²³ Thomas, too, as we saw in the *De Trinitate* commentary associates the *totum universale* at least with the notions of being and unity. He makes his point in general terms within this text, deliberately arguing that the *confusum* is to be understood as referring to either a universal whole or an integral whole and in both cases the whole in question is known initially confusedly:

It is clear, moreover, that knowing something containing many items without having a proper knowledge of each of them is knowing something under a certain confusion. But it is in just such a fashion that both a universal whole, in which parts are contained potentially, and an integral whole can be known; for each whole can be known in a certain confusion without their parts being distinctly known. To know what is contained in a universal whole distinctly involves having knowledge of the less universal item, as, for example, knowing animal indistinctly is knowing animal as animal, but knowing animal distinctly involves knowing animal as rational or irrational and this is to know human and lion. Accordingly, it first befalls our intellect

singularium, quoad nos, prior sit quam universalium cognitio. Secundo oportet considerare quod intellectus noster de potentia in actum procedit. Omne autem quod procedit de potentia in actum, prius pervenit ad actum incompletum, qui est medius inter potentiam et actum, quam ad actum perfectum. Actus autem perfectus ad quem pervenit intellectus est scientia completa, per quam distincte et determinate res cognoscuntur. Actus autem incompletus est scientia imperfecta, per quam sciuntur res indistincte sub quadam confusione. Quod enim sic cognoscitur, secundum quid cognoscitur in actu, et quodammodo in potentia. Unde Philosophus dicit, in i physic., quod sunt primo nobis manifesta et certa confusa magis; posterius autem cognoscimus distinguendo distincte principia et elementa» (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, art. 3 [ed. Leonina, V, 336 a]).

²² ALBERT, *Phys. lib. I*, tr. 1 c. 6 (ed. Coloniensis, 12 b: 56-60).

²³ For an example of an arts master concerned about the same issues arising from Avicenna, see PSEUDO-SIGER OF BRABANT (Petrus de Auvergne?), *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*, I, q. 6 (ed. Philippe Delahaye, Les Philosophes Belges, t. 15, pp. 26-27). Cfr. AVICENNA, *De prima philosophia*, I, c. 5 (ed. AviL, pp. 31-32): «Dicemus igitur quod res et ens et necesse talia sunt quod statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus se».

to know animal than human, and the same pattern holds if we compare any more universal notion to a less universal notion.²⁴

The epistemological point at the heart of this passage is that all of our knowledge (sense and intellectual as Thomas points out later) begins with confused knowledge of wholes and works towards articulate and distinct knowledge of each of these wholes. No exception is made regarding any difference between generic notions such as animal and transcendental notions such as being and unity; they are both put on the level of being universal wholes that are initially confusedly known and then known distinctly through knowing their parts or defining elements. As we shall see, Scotus's main criticism will consist precisely in what he deems to be an essential difference between the cases of generic/specific notions, on the one hand, and transcendental notions, on the other.

Schematically presented, Thomas's view amounts to the following claims as it is presented here in key texts of I ST q. 84-88:

1) The proper object of our intellect is the quiddity of material things, which function as the primary and proper objects of our understanding.

2) The first thing known about the quiddity of any thing known are the transcendental notions of being and unity and it is through these that other features of the quiddity of the thing come to be known.

3) These 'first knowns' are themselves not distinctly known, but known in a confused manner.

Several questions of clarification might be appropriately asked about Aquinas's claims. First, should claim 1) be taken to mean that the target of our awareness initially is a given thing's quiddity, not its essential features taken in their specificity? That would be the most plausible interpretation, but then the claim that the quiddity is first known needs to be qualified. Second, in claim 2) exactly how do the transcendental notions function in helping to bring us to knowledge of the quiddities of species and genera? Third, are these first notions themselves known as objects of awareness and then the other things

²⁴ «Manifestum est autem quod cognoscere aliquid in quo plura continentur, sine hoc quod habeatur propria notitia uniuscuiusque eorum quae continentur in illo, est cognoscere aliquid sub confusione quadam. Sic autem potest cognosci tam totum universale, in quo partes continentur in potentia, quam etiam totum integrale: utrumque enim totum potest cognosci in quadam confusione, sine hoc quod partes distincte cognoscantur. Cognoscere autem distincte id quod continetur in toto universali, est habere cognitionem de re minus communi – sicut cognoscere animal indistincte est cognoscere animal in quantum est animal, cognoscere autem animal distincte est cognoscere animal in quantum est animal rationale vel irrationale, quod est cognoscere hominem vel leonem. Prius igitur occurrit intellectui nostro cognoscere animal quam cognoscere hominem, et eadem ratio est si comparemus quodcumque magis universale ad minus universale» (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, art. 3 corp. [ed. Leonina, V, 336 a-b]).

through them, or do they function after the manner of intelligible species as pure media of awareness, not themselves known? Fourth, regarding claim 3) how is being confusedly known? There does not seem to be a wider notion in reference to which we could know being vaguely and then better. Nor does it seem obvious that Thomas would want to argue that our notion of being improves through our knowing what falls in its purview. These problems will be noticed by Scotus, but the proximate object of Scotus's criticism will be Henry's theory.

2. HENRY OF GHENT

2. 1. *Proper Object*

The teaching of Henry of Ghent on the proper object of the human mind is found in its briefest and perhaps clearest presentation in his *Summa* art. 34 q. 3 in a question devoted to resolving the issue of whether truth is in God absolutely in reference to His essence or relative to His intellect. Henry takes the occasion of posing this question to treat the nature of truth as related to intellect in general, including human intellect. Following Aquinas's observation²⁵ that there exists an analogy between our knowledge of complexes or propositions, which are traceable back to the first principles, and our awareness of simples that relate to being, Henry argues our awareness of simples or concepts may be traced back to being. It may seem, accordingly, that being is the object of the intellect, but, for Henry, this is not quite true; being does not, of itself, determine or specify the aspect of the intelligible, something that the transcendental 'verum' does. Hence, to be precise, we must say that truth or the true is the feature under which the intellect apprehends things:

For the reasoning power of the intellect may only discern what can fall under its apprehension, but the notion of being does not determine any feature of apprehensibility or non-apprehensibility by the intellect in terms of its own content, just as it does not determine sensible or non-sensible, [...] accordingly, the feature of apprehensibility must be added to the notion of being so that it may be determined to the intelligible, whereby being has a relation to the intellect as capable of moving the intellect and in such a fashion that the feature of being apprehensible by the intellect would not exist were being incapable of taking on such a determinate feature [...]. This feature, moreover, is that from which the name 'true' or 'truth' is imposed and it

²⁵ «Dicendum quod sicut in demonstrabilibus oportet fieri reductionem in aliqua principia per se intellectui nota, ita investigando quid est unumquodque, alias utrobique in infinitum iretur, et sic periret omnino scientia et cognitio rerum; illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio suae *Metaphysicae*; unde oportet quod omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens» (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 1, art. 1 corp. [Ed. Leonina, 22.1.2, 4 b – 5 a]).

adds to being in such a way that true is nothing other than being as capable of assimilating or adequating or declaring itself to the intellect, either actually or habitually [...]. And so the notion of being does not include from its very meaning the notion of the true, the intelligible, or the feature of rendering itself manifest to the intellect, but rather the reverse is the case: the notion of the true includes the notion of being. For, although the first concept of the intellect, as an object, is the notion of being, even being is only conceived under the notion of the true; and even though the notion of the true is the first means of conceiving, it is not, however, the first item conceived. For, in terms of an object, that which is being as being is the first concept and thereafter the true as, however, containing being in itself. But in terms of disposing the power and as the formula according to which something is conceived as an object, the true is the first means of conceiving and it alone, as was said above, encompasses all being, both itself and all the other properties of being, for being, true, good, beautiful, and all the remaining features of being are only conceived under the notion of the true.²⁶

Henry is clear here in this part of the *Summa* that what true adds to being is a relational feature since it makes being bear upon the intellect. We might well characterize the position as holding that being of itself is indeterminate, but true adds the determination that makes being available to intellect, while good adds the determination that makes being desirable by will.²⁷

²⁶ «[...] Nihil autem est nata ratio intellectus distinguere, nisi in quantum cadit vel natum est cadere, sub eius apprehensione, ratio autem entis non determinat in re aliquam rationem apprehensibilis ab intellectu vel non apprehensibilis, sicut neque sensibilis aut non sensibilis, [...] oportet igitur quod super rationem entis, ut determinetur ad rationem intelligibilis, sit ratio apprehensibilis, qua ens respectum habet ad intellectum ut motivum intellectus, ita quod ratio entis apprehensibilis ab intellectu non esset, nisi huiusmodi rationis in se esset susceptibilis [...]. Haec autem ratio est illa a qua imponitur hoc nomen 'verum' sive 'veritas', et addit eam super ens, ut verum nihil aliud sit quam ens assimilativum vel aequativum vel declarativum eius quod est apud intellectum, et hoc vel actu vel habitu, secundum quod habet perfectiorem vel minus perfectam rationem veri, ut amplius patebit in sequenti quaestione. Et sic ratio entis non includit ex suo nomine rationem veri intelligibilis vel declarativi sui apud animam, sed e converso ratio veri includit rationem entis, quia, licet primus conceptus intellectus obiective sit ratio entis, non tamen concipitur nisi sub ratione veri, et licet ratio veri sit prima ratio concipiendi, non tamen est ratio quae primo concipitur. Obiective enim et ut concipitur, id quod est ens, in quantum est ens, primus conceptus est, et deinde verum, ut tamen ens in se includit. Dispositive autem et ut ratio secundum quam concipitur id quod obiective concipitur, verum est prima ratio concipiendi, et sola, ut dictum est supra, ita quod circuit totum ens, et se ipsum et omnes rationes entis, quia nihil concipitur nisi sub ratione veri, neque ens, neque verum, neque bonum, neque pulchrum, neque aliquod ceterorum» (HENRICUS GAND, *Summa*, a. 34, q. 3 in corp. [*AMPh*, s.2, xxvii, pp. 191-192]).

²⁷ HENRY OF GHENT, *Quodlibeta*, III, q. 14 (f. 68 rZ-70 rC).

2. 2. *God as First Known and the First Object(s) of the Intellect*

Henry's position on the proper object of the intellect may have had some influence, but his views on God as first known were widely discussed and often received favorably.²⁸ The most important text in this regard is to be found in Henry's *Summa* in art. 24 q. 7 and, given its discussion by Richard of Mediavilla in the first book of his *Sentences* and its criticism on the part of the Dominican Bernard of Trillia during the middle of the 1280s,²⁹ we may safely say that the position was well known among contemporaries by the end of the 1280s at the latest.

The issue that Henry is treating in the section of the *Summa* of concern to us is the knowability of God. Wishing to argue, contrary to the claims of Thomas, for the possibility of a quidditative understanding of God, Henry elaborates a quite impressive account of how, in different respects, we know what God is prior to rational investigation of the question of whether God exists and have even more positive knowledge of God at the term of our argumentation. The question that concerns our inquiry, however, is what the primary object is in the order of time or, if you wish, in the process of our knowledge. To this question, Henry has two distinct answers. In the order of indeterminate knowledge and at the basis of all our knowledge of any sort, God is the first thing known, as we can see from the following text:

Therefore since our mind naturally conceives first what is indeterminate prior to the determinate [...] our mind in understanding any good thing at all understands in it naturally first the good undetermined by negation; this is the good that is God. And just as this is the case with the good, so with all the other properties understood about God from creatures. We should say then, absolutely speaking, that within the scope of the most general manner of understanding what God is in reference to its first two degrees, what God is is the first object that has to be understood on the part of the human intellect from creatures. This happens in such a manner that nothing can be known in or from creatures (that is the true, the good, the beautiful, the just, being, unity or something determinate of this sort existing through matter or a supposit) can be understood unless something is understood already, though sometimes temporally simultaneously, naturally prior, that is simply and indeterminately true, good, beautiful, being, unity, and so on. The result is that in God Himself there is

²⁸ T. KOBUSCH, *Gott und die Transzendenten: Von der Erkenntnis des Inklusiven, Impliziten, Konfusen, und Unbewußten*, in M. PÍCKAVÉ (herausgegeben von), *Die Logik der Transzendenten: Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65. Geburtstag*, (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003), pp. 421-432.

²⁹ For an illuminating study of Bernard's doctrine and its place in the development of the history of the theme of God as first known, see W. GORIS, *Die Kritik des Bernhard von Trillia an der Lehre von Gott als Erstekanntem: Einleitung und Textausgabe*, «RTPM», 65/2 (1998), pp. 248-319.

found both the beginning and end of our cognition; the beginning in reference to our most general knowledge of Him, the end as far as the direct and particular vision of Him. Hence God is the beginning and the end of all things in their being known, just as He is their beginning and end in their being of nature. And just as nothing can be perfectly known unless He is previously perfectly known, so too nothing else can be known however imperfectly unless He is known in the most general manner; for example, man or white or something else cannot be known unless that is the case. For nothing of such things in a creature is even understood as such, unless first we know, understand, and are aware of it under the notion of being and unity and all of the other first intentions; so the fact that something is a being or one, which are necessarily conceived about something by means of a first impression (at least by a priority of nature), [is so conceived] about it prior to anything else, such as the fact that it is white or human. Whenever we conceive being, however, what is necessarily conceived is first and simply being, as was claimed above; for just as in conceiving this good goodness simply is grasped, so too in it is grasped the good which is proper to God.³⁰

Henry's argument here is rooted in his analysis of the stages of our conceiving God in the first two degrees of the most general way we are aware of Him; these correspond to understanding a transcendental such as being in reference to a concrete subject and then the same transcendental taken just in itself. Though in a sense we grasp being at the outset of our knowledge, what we are indistinctly aware of us is actually God or Being Itself.

³⁰ «Ergo, cum semper intellectus noster naturaliter prius concipit indeterminatum quam determinatum, sive distinctum a determinato, sive indistinctum ab eodem, intellectus noster intelligendo bonum quodcumque in ipso naturaliter, prius cointelligit bonum negatione indeterminatum, et hoc est bonum quod Deus est. Et sicut de bono, ita et de omnibus aliis de Deo intellectis ex creaturis. Absolute ergo dicendum quod in generalissimo modo intelligendi quid est Deus, quoad primum et secundum eius gradum, quid est Deus est primum obiectum quod ab humano intellectu ex creaturis habet intelligi, ut nihil possit cognosci in creaturis et ex creaturis, quia verum, bonum, pulchrum, iustum, ens, unum, aut aliquid huiusmodi determinatum existens per materiam, aut per suppositum, nisi naturaliter prius, licet quandoque simul duratione, cognito eo quod est simpliciter et indeterminatum verum, bonum, pulchrum, ens, unum, et huiusmodi, ut, scilicet, in ipso Deo sit principium et finis nostrae cognitionis: principium quoad eius cognitionem generalissimam, finis quoad eius nudam visionem particularem, ut sic sit principium et finis omnium rerum in esse cognitivo, sicut est principium et finis earum in esse naturae. Et sicut nihil aliud potest perfecte cognosci nisi ipso prius perfecte cognito, sic nec aliquid potest cognosci quantumcumque imperfecte, nisi ipso prius saltem in generalissimo gradu cognito, ut homo aut album aut quodcumque aliud. Nihil enim talium cognoscitur in creatura aut intelligitur ut tale, nisi prius cognoscendo et intelligendo ipsum sub intentione entis et unius, et caeterarum primarum intentionum, ut quod sit ens aut unum, quae necessario prima impressione, saltem prioritate naturae, concipiuntur de quolibet, antequam concipiatur aliquid eorum quia album aut quia homo. Concipiendo autem ens, necessario concipitur primum et simpliciter ens, ut dictum est. Sicut nam concipiendo hoc bonum necessario concipitur bonum simpliciter, et in illo bonum quod Dei est» (HENRY OF GHENT, *SOQ*, art. 24, q. 7 [ed. Badius 144 r-v H]).

Furthermore it is important to emphasize that the awareness of God that is primitive is not a determinate awareness of God, but a confused and unconscious one as Henry tells us in the same question:

In all general intentions of things whenever you understand one of them simply – for example, being, true, good, you first understand God, but you do not notice it; and so long as you abide in that simple understanding, you continue to understand God. But if you start to add qualifications to what was simply conceived, you fall back to the level of understanding the creature.³¹

But we might rightly object that Henry's account would seem not to be consistent with his general point that being is the foundation for our knowledge of other concepts, while his claim that awareness of God occurs at the outset of our knowledge would seem to wreak havoc with his view that being as being is the subject of metaphysics and that the metaphysician advances a properly metaphysical proof of God a priori.³²

As Prof. Pickavé has convincingly argued, Henry readily handles such an objection.³³ Henry distinguishes between the indistinct awareness of God that is the indeterminate starting point for all of our knowledge and the distinct awareness of being, which is the intelligible content through which we form all other simple notions and through them complex propositions and science.³⁴

How then does our knowledge progress according to Henry? If we turn back to quite an early portion of Henry's *Summa*, we find an extremely helpful text. Here at *SOQ* art. 1 q. 12 the issue is whether a human being can acquire knowledge equally of all objects without discursive reasoning. Henry's reply emphasizes the distinctiveness of human knowing and, as result, argues that discursive reasoning is needed. What is especially relevant for our pur-

³¹ «In omnibus ergo generalibus intentionibus rerum cum aliquam illarum intelligis simpliciter, ut ens, verum, bonum, primo Deum intelligis, etsi non advertis, et quantum steteris in illo simplici intellectu, tantum stas in intellectu Dei. Si autem modo aliquo quod simpliciter conceptum est determines, statim in intellectu creaturae cadis» (HENRY OF GHENT, *SOQ*, art. 24, q. 7, ad. 2 [ed. Badius], 144 vK).

³² For type of proof that Henry thinks primary, see A.C. PEGIS, *A New Way to God: Henry of Ghent (II)*, «Mediaeval Studies», 31 (1969), pp. 95-105; on Henry's position on the subject of metaphysics, see, in addition to Pickavé, A. ZIMMERMANN, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Leiden-Köln: E.J. Brill 1965), pp. 194-196.

³³ M. PICKAVÉ, *Heinrich von Gent*, cit., p. 151.

³⁴ «Et quia isto modo considerandi Deum ut scilicet consideratur in scientiis philosophicis non est Deus id quod primo mens in rebus concipit (dico conceptione discretiva, discernendo ipsum ab aliis – conceptione enim absoluta est id quod etiam in naturali notitia mens primo concipit, ut infra ostendetur); immo primus conceptus discretivus naturalis cognitionis ex creaturis est ratio entis simpliciter» (HENRY OF GHENT, *SOQ*, art. 7, q. 6, ad 2 [ed. Badius, 56 r R]).

poses is his use of the proof text of the Aristotle's *Physics* I c. 1 to organize his views on the progress of human intellectual knowledge:

'For the way of knowing is naturally within us from the better known to us, which are the more confused, proceeding to the items better known by nature, which are the distinct rather and the determinate' [*Physics*, I c. 1] along the following lines. At first, indeed, a human being gains knowledge regarding terms and the quiddities of things in general, knowing them and considering them in terms of what is said through their names. Once the terms are composed and divided, a human being next conceives the first complex principles under their confused being. And the better disposed a human is through the light of natural intelligence and the subtlety of his mind, the more perfectly he grasps both the simple and complex principles right at the start. Nonetheless everyone generally conceives them at the start under their confused being, although some people have more distinct and others less distinct awareness. But everyone sooner or later comes to determine the meaning of these notions more and more [...]. And this confused awareness of the principles is obtained as such through sense, memory, and experience; these consists in knowledge of singulars, but science and art are not founded upon such items [...]. That starting point is standing outside the bounds of art, before the intellect abstracts the universal from the singulars; once, however, the universal exists in the soul ... it stands within the bounds of art [...] and then especially when the intellect knows the nature and the cause of a thing within that universal and so sees its truth. For it is then that the intellect has determinate knowledge for the first time. But, nonetheless, prior to such determinate knowledge, starting from such confused knowledge, both in reference to simples and propositions, the discourse of reason begins, first to know the truth of the quiddity of the terms in simple principles; determinate knowledge of these is gained by inquiring by way of definition, starting from the confused awareness of the thing defined expressed by the name [...]. And it is once the terms are so understood in their definitive meaning, that we have the truth and quiddity of things, from which we have determinate understanding of the first complex principles, just as before we had indeterminate understanding of them from the terms known in a confused signification.³⁵

³⁵ «[...] Quia «innata est nobis via sciendi ex nobis notioribus», quae sunt confusa magis, procedendo «in notiora naturae» quae sunt distincta et determinata magis, et hoc per hunc modum. Homo enim sibi acquirit notitiam primo de terminis et quidditatibus rerum in generali primo cognoscendo et considerando quid dicitur per nomen. Ex quibus terminis componendo et dividendo secundo concipit prima principia complexa sub esse confuso, et secundum quod homo magis est dispositus in lumine naturalis intellectus et ingenii subtilitate, tanto perfectius prima principia, tam incomplexa quam complexa, ab initio concipit. Omnes tamen generaliter ab initio ea sub esse confuso concipiunt, licet unus magis distincte et minus confuse quam alter. Sed postmodum paulatim determinant ea omnes semper magis et magis. [...] Et haec confusa notitia principiorum in quantum huiusmodi habetur primo via sensus, memoriae et experientiae, quae consistit in singularibus, in quorum notitia non consistit ars aut scientia [...]. Principium dico extra terminos artis consistens, antequam intellectus ex ipsis universale abstrahat, quod existens in anima intra terminos

Henry's short commentary upon the key passage of Aristotle's *Physics* makes the following points. First, we proceed [stage I] from the *confusa* to the *distincta* by first gaining a knowledge of the simple terms and the quiddities, i.e., the *universaliora* and the specific quiddities, knowing them at first only nominally (*quid dicitur per nomen*). Second, we gain a confused knowledge of propositions or complexes [stage II] by way of composition and division, still having this only in confused cognition. Third, while Henry notes that those with greater intellectual capacities more perfectly grasp the first principles, both simple and complex, everyone generally speaking gets them vaguely (*sub esse confuso*), subject only to minor variation of degree. Fourth, gradually we acquire more and more determinate knowledge of the 'firsts', whether simples or complexes, and so arrive at [stage III] definite knowledge, allowing for art and science.

So much for the process so far. But Henry makes a distinction between the confused knowledge of the principles, given by way of sense, memory, and experience and determinate knowledge of principles: the former stands outside the arts and sciences and is present prior to abstracting the universal. When the intellect comes to know the nature and causes of something in the universal, it gains determinate knowledge of the principle. The passage from the second to the third stage of the process described, from confused to distinct knowledge, involves discursive reasoning, first in order to arrive at the truth of the quiddities of the terms in simples. Henry describes this in detail: the determinate knowledge is gained by inquiry in a definite manner beginning from the confused awareness of the thing being defined in reference to what its name signifies and this results in a definitive (and hence distinctive) knowledge of what it is. Then, once the terms of propositions are known in this same manner and the truth and quiddities of things are known, there results definitive knowledge of the principles as well.

What Henry clearly means to appeal to ultimately for our knowledge of the principles, whether simples or complexes, is our notion of being. Being is

artis consistens [...] et tunc maxime quando intellectus in illo universali abstracto naturam et causam rei cognoscit et veritatem videt. Tunc enim primo determinatam notitiam principii habet. Sed tamen ante ipsam ab eius notitia confusa, tam in complexis quam in incomplexis, incipit rationis discursus, primo ad cognoscendum veritatem quidditatis terminorum in principiis incomplexis, quorum notitia determinata acquiritur inquirendo via definitiva ex confusa cognitione definiti in significato nominis, eliciendo cognitionem eius determinatam in definitiva ratione [...]. Et tunc primo, quando termini sic cognoscuntur in definitiva ratione, intelligitur veritas et quidditas rerum, ex ipsis concipitur intellectus determinatus primorum principiorum complexorum, sicut prius eorum intellectus indeterminatus concipiebatur ex ipsis terminis cognitio in confusa nominis significatione» (HENRY OF GHENT, *SOQ*, art. 1, q. 12, [ed. Wilson], pp. 187-189).

what allows us to know whatever it is that we do know and it is clear from the way that he describes it that Henry means to claim that being is what yields definitive knowledge of the items that are confusedly known at the outset:

As in the case of incomplex principles, the first principle and first concept is the concept of being insofar as it is being. It is under this concept that all the other simple concepts are found and it is from that concept and following upon that concept that those other items are conceived. For it is from the concept of being by way of deduction that all the other simple concepts that follow thereafter are elicited in terms of their definitive meaning. This is why Avicenna tells us in his first book of the *Metaphysics*: “Thing and being are what are impressed upon the soul at its first impression”.³⁶

Combining these claims, with Henry’s insistence that only distinctly understood principles, whether simple or complexes, may function as the principles of art and science,³⁷ we can see that the concept of being is the starting point for Henry, as it will be later for Scotus, to any distinct understanding of the world.

If we place all of our findings regarding Henry’s account of our intellectual knowledge into a schema, the following emerges:

1) the proper object of the human mind is truth, though this is not the first thing conceived but the formula under which things are conceived.

2) The first indeterminate object of the human mind is God, known in the first two stages of our most general knowledge of God; this is a confused and unconscious awareness that is lost almost as soon as we attend to the object of our awareness.

3) The first determinate object of our minds is being and it is through being that we come to know the other transcendentals and the categorical concepts.

4) The process of knowledge involves three stages: a) a stage at which our knowledge is of quiddities and is a confused or nominal awareness; b) a stage at which our knowledge of propositions is of the same confused and nominal sort; and c) a stage at which our awareness of both simple and complexes is rendered distinct through our concept of being that furnishes the starting point for the discursive process that yields our definitive knowledge.

³⁶ «Ut in incomplexis principiis primum principium et primus conceptus est conceptus entis, in quantum est ens, sub quo sunt omnes alii conceptus incomplexi, et ex ipso et post ipsum concipiuntur. Ex conceptu enim entis via deductionis ratione definitiva eliciuntur omnes alii conceptus incomplexi sequentes. Unde dicit Avicenna in I *Metaphysicae* suae: «Res et ens talia sunt quae statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus se, et alia acquiruntur ab eis» (HENRY OF GHENT, *SOQ*, art. 1, q. 12, ed. Wilson, p. 189).

³⁷ «Et sunt principia ista definitive intellecta, tam complexa quam incomplexa, principia artis et scientiae infra terminos intellectualis cognitionis» (*ibidem*, art. 1, q. 12, ed. Wilson, p. 189).

3. DUNS SCOTUS

3. 1. *The Three First Objects and Primary Object as Adequate Object*

The distinctive feature of Scotus's presentation of the discussion of the object of the intellect is precisely his distinction among three different ways in which the term 'first object' (*primum obiectum*) may be taken. We may understand this term to refer to a primacy in the order of generation, a primacy in the order of perfection, or a primacy in the order of adequacy.³⁸ What authors before Duns Scotus meant by 'proper object' corresponds to Scotus's notion of adequate object. An adequate object is one that precisely aligns with a cognitive power for the reason that it is what moves the cognitive power to know as opposed to any other features of the thing known.³⁹ The usual example given is that of sight and color. According to the standard analysis, color moves sight to its act and the power of sight becomes aware of the color of the object known. In asking what the adequate object is, Scotus is pursuing the inquiry of what it is that moves the intellect after the fashion that color moves sight.

Scotus's treatment of the adequate object is bound up with his insistence on one of his own major teachings, namely, the univocity of the concept of being. We need not enter into all the details of univocity, however, in order to appreciate his basic stance. The adequate object must match and be the plausible moving cause in all things that the human intellect can know. None of the alternative candidates for the adequate object fits this description. The quiddity of the material thing, the alternative proposed by Aquinas, does not seem to be the right object for several reasons, philosophical and theological. But the philosophical considerations are based on a methodological version of the adequacy criterion: no cognitive power should exceed its putative proper object by knowing something more common than the feature identified as its proper object. But the human intellect, even in its present condition, exceeds the range of the material quiddity by knowing being as being. Indeed, were this not the case, then a science of being as such would not be possible. Furthermore, even pagan philosophers such as Aristotle spoke of a knowledge of immaterial substances available to our natural powers; such knowledge would not be possible in principle, were the human mind confined to knowing material quiddities.⁴⁰

³⁸ SCOTUS, *QDA*, q. 16, n. 8 (*Oph*, V, 147); IDEM, *QDA*, q. 21, n. 6 (*Oph*, pp. 208-209); IDEM, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2, n. 70, ed. Vat. III, pp. 48-49.

³⁹ IDEM, *Lectura*, I, d. 3 pars prima q. 1-2, n. 90, ed. Vat. XVI, p. 259; IDEM, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3, n. 183, ed. Vat. III, p. 111.

⁴⁰ IDEM, *Lectura*, I, d. 3, pars prima q. 1-2, n. 93-94, ed. Vat. XVI, pp. 259-260; IDEM, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3, n. 117-118, ed. Vat. III, pp. 72-73. H. KLUG, *Das Objekt unseres Verstandes und die okkulte Erkenntniskraft unserer Seele nach dem seligen Johannes Duns Scotus*, «Franziskanische Studien», 14 (1927), pp. 69-71.

Henry of Ghent's alternative view, that truth functions as the primary, in the sense of the adequate object, is also rejected. The arguments that Scotus marshals against this view are several, but the main ones are that, if the true is the object of the intellect, then 'true' should be essentially predicabile of everything that actually functions as an object of the intellect. But 'true' cannot be so predicated essentially; it can only be predicated denominatively. Furthermore if the true were the object of the intellect, then the scientific habit of metaphysics, dealing with being as being, would exceed the scope of the power of which it is the habit, something that Scotus thinks is patently unacceptable.⁴¹

A theory related to Henry's and taken from his writings is one that holds God is the first or proper object. Though this theory is more extensively treated under the next topic of the primary object in the order of generation, Scotus also sometimes considers it as a candidate for the adequate object. Henry's consideration in advancing God as the first object known, as we saw above, was precisely that God, though Himself only confusedly apprehended, was that through which all other things come to be known, including the notion of being that is properly predicated of creatures. Scotus's criticism, however, centers around other considerations that the proper object must meet: the proper object must be capable of moving the power to act and it must be predicabile of all the items that the power knows. Unfortunately, God fails to meet these criteria. In the present life at least, God is not naturally the mover of our intellect, but rather the agent intellect and the phantasms. Furthermore, the notion of God is not predicabile of the items that move our intellect. Hence Scotus concludes God is not the primary, in the sense of the adequate, object of the intellect.⁴²

So what are we left with? To show the extent to which Scotus's treatment of the adequate object is connected with his own doctrine of univocity, let us see how he puts the matter in the *Ordinatio* at the outset of presenting his own theory:

To the question, accordingly, I say briefly that no object can be posited as the natural object of our intellect on account of virtual adequacy [...]. Hence either will be no primary object posited at all, or we must seek to find a first adequate object because of its community. But if being is posited as equivocal to created and Uncreated being, substance and accident, since all of these are essentially intelligible to us, it seems that no primary object of our mind can be found, neither by virtuality nor by community. But, positing the view

⁴¹ SCOTUS, *Lectura*, I, d. 3, pars prima q. 1-2, n. 137-139, ed. Vat. XVI, pp. 278-279; IDEM, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3, n. 171-174, ed. Vat. III, pp. 105-107.

⁴² IDEM, *Lectura*, I, d. 3, pars prima q. 1-2, n. 89-91, ed. Vat. XVI, pp. 258-259; IDEM, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3, n. 126-128, ed. Vat. III, pp. 79-80.

taken in the first question of this distinction regarding the univocity of being, the claim that there is a primary object of our intellect can be salvaged.⁴³

Scotus then goes on to argue that being can fit all the requirements implied in the concept of a primary object understood as adequate: being is predicabile of all the items that function as objects of the intellect, it can move the intellect to understanding, whether with or without dependency upon phantasms, and, if it is understood to be univocally commonly predicabile, it allows for predication of God and creature.

3. 2. Primary Object in the Order of Generation

Several texts in the corpus of Scotus treat the matter of the first in the order of the generation of our knowledge: *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum* I q. 10, *Quaestiones super secundum et tertium De anima* q. 16, and the *Lectura* and *Ordinatio* treatments in book I distinction 3. In addition, there are helpful passages for illuminating our theme to be drawn from book I distinction 27 of the *Ordinatio*. I have listed these texts in what is likely their chronological order and, to a certain extent, the study of these texts will reveal a systematic problem in the earlier ones that is addressed in the later ones. Space, however, does not allow for a detailed examination of each of these texts, so I shall focus our attention upon the texts from Scotus's *De anima* and the parallel treatment in the *Lectura*, drawing upon the balance of the material only to provide clarifications of what we find in the principal texts treated.

The title of the question in q. 16 of the *De anima*, «*Utrum magis universale prius intelligatur a nobis quam minus universale*», is rather unusual for a set of questions or commentary on the *De anima*. The normal place for such a question is either at the outset of a *Physics* commentary or in one of the first two books of a *Metaphysics* commentary.⁴⁴ Indeed, when we examine the struc-

⁴³ «Ad quaestionem ergo dico breviter quod nullum potest poni obiectum intellectus nostri naturale propter adaequationem talem virtualem, propter rationem tactam contra primitatem obiecti virtualis in Deo vel in substantia. Vel ergo nullum ponetur primum, vel oportet quaerere 'primum adaequatum' propter communitatem in ipso. Quod si ens ponatur aequivocum creato et increato, substantiae et accidenti, cum omnia ista sint per se intelligibilia a nobis, nullum videtur posse poni primum obiectum intellectus nostri, nec propter virtualitatem nec propter communitatem. Sed ponendo illam positionem quam posui in prima quaestione huius distinctionis, de univocatione entis, potest aliquo modo salvari aliquod esse primum obiectum intellectus nostri» (SCOTUS, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3, n. 129, ed. Vat. III, pp. 80-81).

⁴⁴ For the tradition of the commentaries on the *Physics* in the thirteenth century, see the list of authors in their proper chronological order in S. DONATI, *La discussione sull'unità del concetto di ente nella tradizione di commento della 'Fisica': commenti parigini degli anni 1270-1315 ca.*, in M. PICKAVÉ (herausgegeben von), *Die Logik der Transzendentalen: Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65. Geburtstag*, bd. 30 in *Miscellanea mediaevalia*, (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003), pp. 61-64; for an analysis of the texts in the English tradition bearing upon

ture and content of the question, we find references to the *Physics* on both sides of the question and this tendency to refer to *Physics* I is a hallmark of Scotus's approach to the issue of the first in the order of generation. Scotus distinguishes between the three senses of first object before embarking upon his own solution, but also, quite importantly, makes a remark about the meaning of 'confusum' in the Aristotelian text underlying much of the discussion: «Unde quidem necesse est modum hunc producere ex incertioribus naturae, nobis autem certioribus in certiora naturae et notiora. Sunt autem nobis primum manifesta et certa quae confusa magis, posterius autem ex his fiunt nota elementa et principia dividendibus haec». ⁴⁵ *Confusum* designates either a universal whole, such as a genus, that can be distinguished into parts, such as animal in reference to human, or an integral whole. We can be aware of human as animal; then we have confused awareness (*confuse*) of human through animal and this knowledge is characterized as having a nominal or vague notion of the item known as opposed to distinct knowledge that comes through knowing the thing known through its proper defining elements. ⁴⁶

Scotus's solution to this question is divided into three articles: the first argues that the less universal is first known by way of confused cognition; the second claims that being is first known in the order of distinct cognition; and the last that the first thing known in terms of absolute perfection is God, but relative to our cognitive powers it is the species specialissima of the singular that moves our sense powers most forcibly. ⁴⁷ Regarding the first article, Scotus introduces a number of proofs. One is that natural causes must produce their most perfect effect, but the most perfect effect that the causes of cognition can bring about is awareness of the most particular species. Connected to this claim is a psychological observation: if it were really the case that we had to pass through all the intermediate genera to come to awareness of a specifically distinct item, we would require much time to come to this awareness; this is simply false by experience. Other arguments adduced include arguments about the ease of abstraction for the specific items within a species as opposed to genera, the commonplace that geometers often are unaware of the metaphysical properties of their object of study, yet know their science, and the authority of both Avicenna, who argues that metaphysics is last in the order of learning, and Aristotle who speaks of our knowing the item defined

our theme, see EADEM, *Physica* 1,1; *L'interpretazione dei commentatori inglesi della translatio vetus e la loro recezione del commento di Averroè*, «Medioevo», 21 (1995), pp. 154-167. For lists of questions on the *Metaphysics*, see A. ZIMMERMANN, *Verzeichnis ungedruckter Kommentare zur Metaphysik und Physik des Aristoteles; aus der Zeit von etwa 1250-1350*, (Leiden-Köln, E.J. Brill 1971).

⁴⁵ ARISTOTELES, *Physica*, I c. 1, 184 a 19-23 (*AL*, VII, 1, 7).

⁴⁶ SCOTUS, QDA, q. 16 n. 9 (*Oph*, v, 147-148).

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, q. 16 n. 10.18.20 (*Oph*, v, 148, 150, 152).

prior to our knowing the defining elements.⁴⁸ The conclusion reached is that our first awareness is confused cognition of the most particular species moving our sense faculties.

Distinct cognition, on the other hand, is claimed to begin with the concept of being. Here the proofs are only two in number. Being enters into the notion of all other concepts, but being can only be distinctly known, so being is the source of all our distinct knowledge. The proof that being can only be distinctly known is an application of the description of confused knowledge: if something is indistinctly or confusedly conceived it is so conceived in reference to a wider notion through which the item in question can be conceived. But this condition simply fails in the case of being. Another proof of being as the source of our distinct cognition comes from one of Scotus's favorite sources, Avicenna. Avicenna argues that even the lower sciences need the establishment or certification of their principles through the science of metaphysics, a theme emphasized by Albert and Thomas, too. But if this is so, all other sciences are ultimately definitive in their knowledge through metaphysics and its object, which is being.⁴⁹

The final article is not so germane to our study except in regard to Scotus's proof that, relative to our cognitive powers, the species specialissima is the thing that most corresponds, in terms of perfection, to our powers. What is more pertinent is Scotus's criticism of Thomas cited above at the outset of the present paper: Aquinas, Scotus tells us, failed to make the requisite distinction between 'confusum' and 'confuse' and thought that because the 'confusa' were at the outset of our knowledge in the order of distinct knowledge, they were at the outset of our knowledge without qualification. Furthermore, Thomas's treatment suggests that when we know the 'confusa', we know them 'confuse', but this is not even possible for Scotus, as we have seen.⁵⁰

A critical review of Scotus's discussion of our knowledge of being in the QDA shows how far he has advanced towards outlining the process of human knowledge:

1) First in the order of confused cognition is the species specialissima of the item that most strongly moves the sense, say, whiteness.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, q. 16 n. 11-17 (*OPh*, v, 148-150).

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, q. 16, n. 18-19 (*OPh*, v, 150-152).

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, q. 16, n. 27 (*OPh*, v, 154-155).

⁵¹ I am using the example of a properly sensible accidental feature, quite deliberately, for a connected thesis that Scotus holds is that substance is only knowable by inference and not directly because of the presence of an intelligible species of substance in the soul. For a study of the background to Scotus's discussion of substance, see T. B. NOONE, *The Problem of the Knowability of Substance: The Discussion from Eustachius of Arras to Vital du Four*, in *Aa. Vv.*, *Essays in Honor of Prof. Stephen F. Brown's 75th Birthday* (forthcoming).

2) First in the order of distinct cognition is being, and being, though maximally *confusum*, can only be distinctly known inasmuch as knowing something confusedly requires there be some wider notion in reference to which the item(s) in question could be taken, a condition that fails in the case of being and all the other transcendentals.

3) What is most perfectly known proportionate to our cognitive powers is what most strongly moves the sense.

4) Our knowledge gets to be distinct by the division of genera, ultimately relying on the concept of being.

5) The way in which Scotus speaks of the notion of being and the way in which we ascend to and descend from being indicates the role transcendental notions, especially being, play in the refinement/adjustment of our confused concepts.⁵²

But this leaves us with following puzzles: a) How do we pass from the temporally prior state of confused cognition to the state of distinct knowledge?; b) What intellectual access do we have to being during the time (perhaps years) that we pass through life in the state of confused intellectual cognition? We seem to need some cognitive device that will allow us to have an awareness of being without reducing our awareness of being to a residue left over after we have cognized all else, but this awareness would also need to be in a non-actual state until we begin to know things distinctly. This is just what we find in Scotus's presentation of our theme in the *Lectura*.

The text from the *Lectura* that will concern us is embedded in the section of Scotus's treatment of the theme of the knowability of God and his critique of Henry's claim that God is the first item known. This change of context means that Scotus's treatment of our theme is textually connected to his critique of Henry's theory of analogy and Scotus's own presentation of his counter-thesis that being is univocal. But we shall not be wrong in setting aside the bulk of Scotus's surrounding discussion and focusing on how he develops the elements we have already studied if we wish to extract precisely what Scotus's own teaching is about the *primum cognitum* and how he tries to resolve the puzzles note above.

The question posed in this section of the text is the second of the question in the first part of the distinction 3 of the first book and reads 'Utrum Deus sit primum cognitum a nobis naturaliter'. But, although Scotus makes

⁵² «Sic in proposito: species prius cognoscitur indistincte – scilicet in cognoscendo quid dicitur per nomen vel in suo universali; sed cognito universali distincte, tunc per eius divisionem et contractionem – per additionem differentiae – fit reditus ad cognoscendum speciem distinte» (SCOTUS, *QDA*, q. 16, n. 19). «Dicendum quod Philosophus I Physicorum intendit dare modum deveniendi in cognitionem distinctam; et hoc est per divisionem magis universalis et magis confusi, quod tamen est prius notum nobis cognitione distincta» (*ibidem*, q. 16, n. 25).

criticisms of Henry's theory of the *primum cognitum* seen in our discussion above, of *SOQ* art. 24.7, he actually treats the question as if it read 'Quid sit *primum cognitum a nobis*'. Presenting his now familiar distinction of three kinds of 'first object' (first in the order of adequation, origin or generation, and perfection), Scotus addresses himself to the matter of first in the order of generation. What is immediately noticeable is the distinctive feature of the *Lectura/Ordinatio* treatment, namely, the distinction between actual or occurrent cognition and habitual/virtual cognition. In regard to occurrent or actual cognition, Scotus argues, in much the same fashion as he does in the *QDA*, that the first item in the order of confused actual cognition is the most particular species of the individual items that most forcibly moves the sense power, but that being is what is known first in the order of distinct actual cognition. Regarding the latter point, Scotus tells us:

Second of all I say that being is the first distinctly known in the order of origin or generation. Proof: being can only be distinctly known since it is not resolvable into several prior concepts, but, on the other hand, being must be known first in order for something to be known by distinct cognition since being is contained in every other concept. And we have to know the more universal concepts first before the less universal concepts can be distinctly known in which the prior concepts are included. Hence when a definition, which causes distinct knowledge of the item defined, is obtained by way of division, the defining elements are known first and these are the more common features.⁵³

Notice that being must be cognized prior to distinct cognition occurring regarding lower level notions (*sed ad hoc quod aliquid distincte cognoscatur cognitione distincta, oportet quod ens praecognoscatur, quia in omni conceptu est ens*). That the concept of being operates not only at the level of the transcendentals, but also in general categorical concepts becomes clear at the end of the passage, in the section wherein Scotus refers not simply to the more universal items being distinctly known for the less general items to be distinctly known, but also to definition.

Likewise, Scotus tells us that being and the most particular species are compared as what is distinctly known first to what is confusedly known first. The

⁵³ «Secundo dico quod ens est primum, ordine originis et generationis, quod cognoscitur cognitione distincta. Probatio: ens non potest cognosci nisi distincte, quia non est resolvable in plures conceptus priores; sed ad hoc quod aliquid distincte cognoscatur cognitione distincta, oportet quod ens praecognoscatur, quia in omni conceptu est ens; et oportet quod conceptus universales praecognoscantur antequam conceptus minus universales distincte cognoscantur, in quibus includuntur superiores. Unde quando per viam divisionis acquiritur definitio, quae facit distinctam notitiam definiti, prius cognoscuntur definitiva quae sunt magis communia» (SCOTUS, *Lectura*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 2, n. 75, ed. XVI, pp. 252-253). The italics are here inserted by me for the sake of illuminating Scotus's description of 'inquisitio' as proceeding by way of division below.

latter is emphasized as what is absolutely first in the history of our intellectual lives. Indeed, commenting upon the *confusa* of the Aristotelian text, Scotus tells us that the common view (*ratio communis*) is correct insofar as it interprets the *confusa* as referring to confused cognition which is halfway between pure ignorance and distinct knowledge, but that it is incorrect to the extent that it would suggest that the *confusa* are all of them known through confused cognition, a parallel point to what we have seen in the *QDA*. Here, however, in the *Lectura* our puzzles have, if anything, been only heightened since Scotus explicitly states here that the entire order of confused cognition comes before the entire order of distinct cognition in the order of origin, that is to say, in the order of time.⁵⁴

It is precisely at this point that Scotus introduces the new type of cognition habitual/virtual cognition:

Now we should see what is first known in habitual or virtual cognition. Here we should first note that I call cognition 'habitual' when the object is present in such a manner that an act of understanding can sufficiently terminate at it, but call cognition 'virtual' when something is contained in something else and thereby can be known when the other item is known. Things are more perfectly known when they are known virtually than when they are known habitually. I say, then, that in habitual and virtual cognition the 'confusum' is first known in order of origin, whether the object is known habitually or virtually in the fashion of parts in a whole. This point is proved by analogy. If form perfects matter and virtually includes other forms, it perfects forms in the very order that would obtain if the forms were really distinct [...]. Since these habitual forms, if they were distinct, would naturally perfect the intellect in a certain order in such a way that 'confusum' would be first, inasmuch as our intellect proceeds from the imperfect to the perfect, there holds the same sequence in the actual order: if many things are included in the same notion, the more universal will be known habitually first. For this point, we have the authority of Avicenna in book one of his *Metaphysics* chapter 5 "being and thing are impressed upon the soul at its first impression," and he speaks there of the habitual impression of the intellect. And the same holds true of the items that are proximate to the most 'confusa': they are known, as nearer to the most 'confusa', next and prior to the items that are further removed from these.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ IDEM, *Lectura*, v, d. 3, pars 1, q. 2, n. 77-79 (ed. xvi, pp. 254-255). At n. 79 (p. 255) Scotus writes: «Et secundum hoc tenet ratio communis, quae assignatur, quod confusa sint primo cognita, quia cognitio confusa media est inter cognitionem distinctam et potentialem; sed medium est in quod prius venit intellectus quam in ultimum; igitur prius acquiritur cognitio confusa quam determinata, praecipue cum intellectus noster procedat de imperfecto ad perfectum. Et hoc verum est. Sed tamen non sequitur quod confusum sit nobis primo cognitum cognitione confusa. Unde patet quod totus ordo cognitionis confusae praecedit totum ordinem cognitionis distinctae secundum prioritatem originis. Et haec dicta sunt de cognitione actuali».

⁵⁵ «Nunc videndum est quid sit primo cognitum cognitione habituali et virtuali. Ubi primo sciendum est quod voco cognitionem 'habitualement' quando obiectum est praesens

Notice several things. This whole section on habitual/virtual is the distinctive doctrinal element of the *Lectura/ Ordinatio* presentation; there is nothing like it in the QDA. Scotus makes a similar claim about priority, that is, about the more general being prior in the order of distinct occurrent cognition, but now he applies it to the *cognitum habitualiter* and in *both* of these orders, *being* is what is first known. There are thus levels of what is known habitually and some things are more universal, and hence more confused, in the habitual as well as the actual order. Yet an oft-repeated claim of the Subtle Doctor is that being (*contra Thomam*) can only be distinctly known – but being is known habitually; this seems to entail that there is such a thing as: distinct, habitual cognition.

But someone might object, arguing that such a mode of cognition is not recognized within the tradition of scholarship on this passage and there seems to be no textual warrant for it since habitual/virtual cognition is presented in a distinct section of text from that of occurrent cognition and it is to the latter that the distinction of confused and distinct are applied in our texts.⁵⁶ For my interpretation to be correct, Scotus would have to apply, at the very least, the predicate ‘confused’ to the order of habitual as well as to the order of actual or occurrent cognition.⁵⁷

ut sufficienter actus intelligendi possit terminari ad ipsum, cognitionem autem ‘virtualem’ voco quando aliquid includitur in alio, et ideo intelligi potest ad intellectionem illius; et perfectius cognoscuntur quae cognoscuntur virtualiter quam quae habitualiter. Dico igitur quod in cognitione habituali et virtuali confusum est prius cognitum prioritate originis, sive cognoscitur ut obiectum ‘habitualiter’, sive ut partes in toto ‘virtualiter’. Quod probatur per simile: si sit forma aliqua perficiens materiam, virtualiter includens alias formas, eodem ordine perficit materiam sicut si essent aliae formae distinctae, sicut dicunt ponentes tantum unam formam: primo perficit secundum rationem formae universalioris. Cum igitur istae formae habituales, si essent distinctae, natae essent perficere intellectum ordine quodam, ita quod confusum prius, quia intellectus noster procedit ab imperfecto ad perfectum, – igitur eodem modo nunc, si includuntur plura in eodem, universalius erit prius cognitum habitualiter. Ad hoc est auctoritas Avicennae I Metaphysicae cap. 5: “Ens et res sunt quae primo imprimuntur in anima prima impressione”, et loquitur ibi de impressione habituali. – Et eodem modo quae sunt propinquiora eis, sunt prius nota habitualiter quam quae sunt remotiora» (SCOTUS, *Lectura*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 2, n. 80-81, ed. xvi, p. 255).

⁵⁶ D. DEMANGE, *Jean Duns Scot: La théorie du savoir*, (Paris: J. Vrin 2007), pp. 165-172. He makes no mention, in his excellent study, of the difference between occurrent and habitual knowledge, while BARTH, *Being, Univocity, and Analogy according to Duns Scotus*, ed. J.K. RYAN (edited by), *John Duns Scotus: 1265-1965*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 1965), p. 221 writes that «Being is apprehended at a relatively early time by our intellect, although still in an indistinct or uninformed manner as an indefinite horizon of our cognition», and Honnefelder cites the meaning of ‘habitus’ as ‘delectabiliter, faciliter, expedite et prompte’ (related to the notion of ‘habitus’ in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) in his *Ens Inquantum Ens: Der Begriff Des Seienden Als Solchen Als Gegenstand Der Metaphysik Nach Der Lehre Des Johannes Duns Scotus* (Münster i. W.: Aschendorff 1979), p. 161.

⁵⁷ I owe this object in its entirety to Prof. Wouter Goris and his intervention at a recent

Let us turn to the history of the use of the terms ‘cognitio habitualis’ and the related sense of ‘habitus’ to see whether this history provides some insight into what Scotus means here by ‘cognitio habitualis’ and then let us look at other texts in Scotus’s corpus to see if these can help illuminate our key passage on habitual cognition of being. First the earlier tradition; then Scotus.

Our lead on where to begin is found within the texts of Scotus’s descriptions of ‘cognitio habitualis’. Here is the wording in the *Lectura* and the parallel passage in the *Ordinatio*:

Lect.: *obiectum est praesens ut sufficienter actus intelligendi possit terminari ad ipsum.*

Ord: ‘Habituaalem’ voco quando *obiectum sic est praesens intellectui in ratione intelligibilis actu, ut intellectus possit statim habere actum elicatum circa illud.*

Notice that the mode of cognition is a mode of *presence of an actually intelligible object within the intellect*: one that is ready to be, but is not actually cognized.

We find a quite similar notion in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, when Thomas is dealing with the presence of the human mind to itself prior to any actual self-cognition:

But as far as habitual cognition goes I say that the soul see itself through its essence, that is to say, from the very fact that its essence is present to itself, the soul is capable of engaging in an act of cognition of itself, just as someone, from the very fact that he has the habit of a science, can perceive, thanks to the presence of the habit within him, the items that are subject to the habit.⁵⁸

Notice Aquinas is comparing a fully developed habit’s presence in the soul to the cognitive presence of the essence of the soul to the intellect, but that precisely is the case at stake; for the soul’s knowledge of itself, no preceding act is presumed for this ‘habit’.

After Aquinas, I have found that the arts masters writing on the *De anima* use his distinction to explain how and why someone who has a habit, such as the habit of science, may not employ it. An important addition by these authors is an analogy with a natural ‘habit’ such as the heaviness of a rock.⁵⁹

conference on Scotus held at Leuven University. Though we disagreed then about how to understand Scotus’s position, I would like to register here my gratitude for his objection, which caused me to make my case more clearly and now, hopefully, persuasively.

⁵⁸ «Sed quantum ad habituaalem cognitionem sic dico quod anima per essentiam suam se videt, id est, ex hoc ipso quod essentia sua est sibi praesens, est potens exire in actum cognitionis sui ipsius ; sicut aliquis ex hoc quod habet habitum alicuius scientiae, ex ipsa praesentia habitus est potens percipere illa quae subsunt illi habitui» (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 10, art. 8 “Utrum mens se ipsam per essentiam cognoscat aut per aliquam speciem”, [ed. Leonina, XXII-2, 321 b: 234-322 a, p. 246]).

⁵⁹ M. GIELE, F. VAN STEENBERGHEN, B. BAZÁN, *Trois commentaires anonymes sur le traité*

The most valuable elements in the tradition before Scotus comes in the correct place geographically and at roughly the right time. In the disputed questions on the soul by the Dominican Hugo Sneyth, dated by their editor Fr. Zbigniew Pajda, OP to 1288-1289 in *Oxford*,⁶⁰ we find precisely the usage that Scotus will employ. Quaestio 149 of Sneyth is entitled *Utrum mens per essentiam suam se ipsam cognoscit* and what figures mightily in its sources are the QQ. *disp. de veritate* of St. Thomas. He lists three possible responses but only one is of concern to us. That one distinguishes *cognitio abdita* and *manifesta*, referring to Aug. *De Trin.* xiv 7.9., and then argues that the soul knows itself through its essence through 'abdita sive habituali notitia' (p. 84). The disproof of this first view is that (p. 84-85): «*sciens habitualiter est sciens actu primo et considerans in potentia accidentali, sicut actu grave extra suum ubi exiens, est in potentia accidentali respectu sui ubi*». The problem that the objector sees is that this would mean all you would need is a *solvens prohibens* and that could only be the will; hence we could know ourselves at will, which seems counterintuitive. After listing the other two possibilities, knowing ourselves through the 'species' that is the mental word and knowing ourselves by distinguishing between the habitual knowledge through the essence and the actual knowledge through acts, the author begins his solution. At p. 92, he asks whether we mean habitual or actual knowledge, when we speak of the human person being aware of his soul, writing as follows: «*Si de habituali, dico quod homo novit quodam modo habitualiter animam suam per essentiae praesentiam tamquam illud quod est principium operationis vitalis, cognitione dico et confusa, ut patebit. Sicut enim quis ex praesentia alicuius habitus scientiae potest exire in actualem cognitionem rerum*

de l'âme d'Aristote, (Louvain-Paris: Publications universitaires/Béatrice-Nauwelaerts 1971). M. Giele-Anonymus writes only on the first two books of Aristotle's *De anima*. Of interest is a pair of questions he poses on book II, q. 12 "Utrum aliquis possit habere habitum scientiae et non considerare tamen", and q. 13 "Utrum habens habitum, cum sit actu considerans, alteratur aliquo modo" (88: 20 – 89: 42): «Dico ad primum [i.e., the first question]. Contingit aliquem habere scientiam in habitu, non tamen considerare in actu, ut contingit aliquid habere formam / 89/ gravitatis ut habitum quemdam, non ut actum. Sic in proposito, et hanc comparationem in littera tangit Aristoteles. Unde contingit aliquem habere formam in prima perfectione, ita quod non in postrema. Et hoc contingit duabus ex causis quas tangit littera. Nam scientia in habitu, etsi sit principium actualis considerationis, non tamen est sufficiens, quia nisi habens habitum voluerit, ex scientia in habitu non exit in actum, scilicet in actualem considerationem: ut habens habitum aedificandi potest non aedificare, eo quod non habet voluntatem aedificandi. Ita quod voluntas est unum quod exigitur ad reducendum habitum scientiae ad actum. Item scientia in habitu est principium per quod innascitur actualis consideratio; sed in isto principio potest cadere impedimentum, sicut in forma gravis sursum, potest cadere impedimentum, nam potest detineri. Impedimentum autem in proposito est occupatio qua occupatur homo circa exteriora, ut circa victui necessaria vel circa delectabilia et consimilia».

⁶⁰ Z. PAJDA, *Hugo Sneyth et ses questions de l'ame*, (Paris: Libraire Philosophique, J. Vrin 1996), p. 47.

cognoscibilium per illum habitum, ita homo ex hoc ipso quod essentia animae est sibi praesens tamquam principium motus vitalis absque omni aliquo habitu potest exire in cognitionem eius: et hoc est proprium cognitionis habitualis».

But what about Scotus himself? Does he ever use *habitualis* with *confusa*? While the presentation in the *Lectura* and *Ordinatio* I d. 3 texts seems to confine the *distincta/confusa* terminology to occurrent knowledge, a passage taken from Scotus's discussion of the mental word, in this case in the *Ordinatio*, proves useful and terminologically instructive:⁶¹

Scotus, *Ordinatio* I d. 27 q. 1-3 n. 74-78 (Ed. Vat. VI 93-94):

n. 74 Secundum declaro sic, quia intellectus noster non statim habet notitiam perfectam obiecti, quia secundum Philosophum I Physicorum innata est nobis via procedendi a confuso ad distinctum; et ideo primo, ordine originis, imprimitur nobis notitia obiecti confusa, prius quam distincta, – et ideo est inquisitio necessaria ad hoc ut intellectus noster veniat ad distinctam notitiam: et ideo est necessaria inquisitio praevia verbo perfecto, quia non est verbum perfectum nisi sit notitia actualis perfecta.

n. 75 Sic ergo intelligendum est quod cognito aliquo obiecto confuse, sequitur inquisitio – per viam divisionis – differentiarum convenientium illi; et inventis omnibus illis differentiis, cognitio definitiva illius obiecti est actualis notitia perfecta et perfecte declarativa illius habitualis notitiae quae primo erat in memoria: et ista definitiva notitia, perfecte declarativa, est perfectum verbum. n. 76 Hoc dicit Augustinus IX Trinitatis cap. 10 vel 24: ((Definitio quid sit intemperantia, et hoc est verbum eius)); et ibidem praemisit Augustinus, in eodem capitulo, quod iam superius positum est: ((quamdiu de memoria proferri et definiri potest)), – id est distincte et definitive actualiter cognosci, virtute eius quod est in memoria. n. 77 Non ergo est de ratione verbi gigni post inquisitionem, sed necessarium est intellectui imperfecto – qui non statim potest habere notitiam definitivam obiecti – habere notitiam talem post inquisitionem; et ideo verbum perfectum non est in nobis sine inquisitione. Et tamen quando verbum perfectum sequitur talem inquisitionem, illa inquisitio non est generatio ipsius verbi formaliter, sed quasi praevia ad hoc ut generetur verbum; quod bene innuit Augustinus in auctoritate praeallegata (libro xv cap. 39): ((Hac atque illac, volubili cogitatione)) etc., ((quando ad illud quod scimus pervenit atque inde formatur)), verbum est etc., – innuens quod ista iactatio (id est inquisitio) non est gignitio verbi formaliter, sed eam sequitur gignitio verbi de eo quod scimus, *id est de obiecto in memoria habitualiter cognito*.

n. 78 Et si obiciatur 'ad quid tunc est inquisitio necessaria?', – posset dici ad illud, quod motus necessarius est ad hoc ut inducatur forma perfecta (quae non posset statim in principio motus induci), vel inductio multarum formarum ordinarum ad inductionem ultimae formae, et absque illo ordine formarum non posset ultima forma induci statim. *Et secundum hoc ponitur iste ordo: primo est habitualis notitia confusa, secundo actualis intellectio confusa, tertio inquisitio (et in inquisitione multa verba*

⁶¹ On the significance of this text see also, G. PIZZO, *Intellectus und memoria nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus: Das menschliche Erkenntnisvermögen als Vollzug von Spontaneität und Rezeptivität*, (Kevelaer: Butzon und Bercker Verlag 1998), pp. 173-184.

de multis notitiis habitualibus virtualiter contentis in memoria), quam inquisitionem sequitur distincta et actualis notitia primi obiecti cuius cognitio inquiritur, – quae notitia ‘actualis distincta’ imprimis habitualem perfectam in memoriam, et tunc primo est perfecta memoria, et assimilatur memoriae in Patre; ultimo, ex memoria perfecta gignitur verbum perfectum, sine inquisitione mediante inter ipsam et verbum, – et ista gignitio assimilatur gignitioni verbi divini perfecti, ex memoria paterna perfecta. Nullum ergo verbum est perfectum, repraesentans verbum divinum (quod potissime investigat Augustinus), nisi istud quod gignitur de memoria perfecta sine inquisitione media inter talem memoriam et tale verbum, licet nec illa memoria possit haberi in nobis – propter imperfectionem intellectus nostri – nisi praecedat inquisitio». (Emphasis is mine).

Clearly Scotus uses here the term ‘notitia habitualis’ in a way directly parallel to the ‘cognitio habitualis’ seen in the main texts see earlier. Here, however, it is equally clear that ‘confusa’ is being employed in conjunction with habitual knowledge; so habitual confused cognition is part of the registry of Scotus’s terminology and this would seem to warrant at least the possibility of ‘cognitio habitualis distincta’. Furthermore, while parts of this description might be taken as meaning that Scotus has in mind a purely inductive or revisory process, careful attention to the key term of ‘inquisitio’ indicates that this is not the case. As he states in n. 75 cited above, the *inquisitio* that immediately precedes the expression of the actual distinct cognition involves the way of division, the precise way that Scotus describes coming down to a given categorical item, ultimately from the concept of being, in the progress of distinct cognition.⁶² Furthermore, this use of *inquisitio* is precisely parallel with Henry of Ghent’s use of *inquirere* in the passage from his *SOQ* art. 1 q. 12.

3. 3. Scotus’s Transcendental and Developmental Psychology

If the interpretation advanced is even approximately correct, Scotus is claiming that our abstractive intellectual awareness of reality is quite complex. On the one hand, our intellects receive intelligible species and these species inform our thinking about the world. But actually two things go on either eventually – a delay seems to envisaged in the *Ordinatio* text – or immediately (this seems more in keeping with the text of the *Lectura*): the intelligible species from the items that most strongly move the sense cause us to think confusedly of the most particular species of that item and a habitual cognition in the sense of the presence in the intellect of the distinct content of being occurs. After an unspecified period of actual confused cognition, actual distinct cognition begins by drawing upon the reserve, so to speak, of the distinct habitual cognition of being that has become present in the soul. It is through the pro-

⁶² Cfr. «unde quando per viam divisionis acquiritur definitio, quae facit distinctam notitiam definiti, prius cognoscuntur definientia quae sunt magis communia» (SCOTUS, *Lectura*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 2, n. 75, ed. XVI, p. 253).

cess of descent from the distinct notion of being – sometimes described as a ‘reditus’, an ‘inquisitio’, or a ‘divisio’ – that the confused cognitions we have get converted to distinct and, for categorical items, definitional awarenesses of the items of which we are initially confusedly aware.

Furthermore, if this interpretation is correct, there is a remarkable parallel between Scotus’s theory and Henry of Ghent’s theory. Henry has our unconscious and quasi-habitual awareness of being/Being as the reservoir from which our distinct awareness of the world eventually comes. In like fashion, Scotus has our unconscious, but distinct habitual cognition of being as the ultimate source of our distinct awareness of the world. Though Scotus would not allow that the awareness of being is an awareness of the divine being, he has a theory that bears remarkable structural similarities to the view that seems to be the chief target of his criticism.

ABSTRACT: This article examines the sources for Scotus’s critique of Aquinas and Henry of Ghent regarding being as the first object known and its role in the development of our intellectual knowledge. Viewing Aquinas’s and Henry’s own treatments against the background of what might be called Scholastic developmental psychology and in particular the thesis that God is the first object known, the article sketches out Aquinas’s view that being and not God is the first object of the intellect, even though it is not in confused manner. Turning to Henry’s theory that God is the first confused object of awareness, but being the first concept distinctly known, the article then lays out Scotus’s critique of both of these alternative views. What emerges, apart from the details of the critique, is that Scotus’s theory has adapted elements from both Thomas and Henry in his own quite distinctive theory of the relationship between mind and being.

KEYWORDS: John Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, Thomas Aquinas, theory of knowledge, object of the intellect, ideogenesis, metaphysics, epistemology.