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**Duns Scotus on the First Object of the Human Intellect.
From the *ens univocum* to the *ens possibile****

This article will discuss John Duns Scotus's doctrine about being (*ens*) as the first object of the intellect. This well-known doctrine has undergone an evolution from the *Ordinatio* to the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*¹. However, this evolution is not a radical change, but only a development of the doctrine that Scotus elaborates in *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3 and d. 8. This development provides Scotus's position with greater coherence and represents, to a certain extent, a departure from Avicenna's thought. While in the *Ordinatio* Scotus refers to the first object of the human intellect as common to every possible first intention or real being (*ens reale*), like God and creature, substance and accident, in the *Quaestiones quodlibetales* he holds that the first and most adequate object of the intellect also includes every second intention or being of reason (*ens rationis*), such as species, genus and the like. According to Scotus, second intentions are the subject-matter of logic, so they are not investigated in metaphysics. The metaphysician only deals with first intentions. However, both first and second intentions belong to the domain of being and represent different points of view about being². First intentions refer to

* I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their useful suggestions and comments. Faults, of course, are mine and mine alone.

¹ This evolution had been noted by D. DEMANGE, *Jean Duns Scot. La théorie du savoir*, Vrin, Paris 2007, ch. 9. On this evolution, see also G. P. SOLIANI, *Rosmini e Duns Scotus. Le fonti scotiste dell'ontologia rosminiana*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2012, Part I. For an introduction to Scotus's doctrine of being and its relation with the human intellect, see L. HONNEFELDER, *Ens in quantum ens. Der Begriff des Seienden als Solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus*, Aschendorff, Münster 1979; ID., *Der zweite Anfang der Metaphysik. Voraussetzungen, Ansätze und Folgen der wiederbergründung der Metaphysik im 13./14. Jahrhundert*, in J. P. BECKMANN ET AL. eds., *Philosophie im Mittelalter: Entwicklungslinien und Paradigmen*, Meiner, Hamburg 1987, pp. 165-186; ID., *Scientia transcendens: die formale Bestimmung der Seiendheit und Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit: Duns Scotus, Suárez, Wolff, Kant, Peirce*, Meiner, Hamburg 1990, pp. 3-199; O. BOULNOIS, *Être et representation. Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot (XIII^e - XIV^e siècle)*, PUF, Paris 2008²; T. B. NOONE, *Scotus on Mind and Being. Transcendental and Developmental Psychology*, « Acta Philosophica », 18, 2009, pp. 249-282; J. A. AERTSEN, *Medieval Philosophy as a Transcendental Thought. From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez*, Brill, Leiden 2013.

² Cf. e.g. IOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* (= *Quaest. super Met.*), VI, q. 3, edd. G. I. ETZKORN ET AL., in IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI *Opera Philosophica*, vols. III-IV, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N. Y. 1997 (= OPh III and IV), p. 83, n. 71: « omnes

a thing's essence regardless of the relation it bears to the intellect, while second intentions refer to a thing's essence as thought by the intellect³.

The present article is divided into two parts. In the first part, after summarizing Scotus's position on being as elaborated in the *Ordinatio* and in some places of the *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*⁴, we shall discuss the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of this position, and in particular those features of Scotus's understanding of being that will help us to appreciate the development of his position. Interpreters of Scotus have often assumed that the subject-matter of metaphysics coincides with the first and most adequate object of the intellect. But the development of Scotus's position about the first object of the intellect is a clear proof of the difference between being as the first object of the intellect and being as the subject-matter of metaphysics. The problem of the first and most adequate object of the intellect concerns the power and extension of our understanding, while the metaphysics, insofar as it is the science of real being, is not the science of being in its greatest extension. If we consider the four meanings of being (*τὸ ὄν*) given by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, V and VI — absolute being divided into the ten categories; accidental being; being as true and false; being as potency and act⁵ —, as we shall see, Scotus limits the subject-matter of metaphysics to the first meaning, i.e. to the absolute being divided into the ten categories.

In the second part, we shall illustrate the development of Scotus's doctrine of the first object of the intellect. Significant for this purpose is a text from the *Reportata*

intentiones secundae [...] proprie excluduntur a metaphysico. Convertitur tamen cum ente aliquo aliter, quia logicus considerat omnia aliquo aliter ut metaphysicus, sed modus alius considerationis, scilicet per quid reale, et per intentionem secundam, sicut convertibilitas entis simpliciter et deminuti, quia neutrum alterum excedit in communitate. Quidquid est simpliciter ens, potest esse ens deminutum ». See also *Quaestiones super Librum Elenchorum Aristotelis*, q. 1, edd. R. ANDREWS ET AL., in IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI *Opera Philosophica*, vol. II, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N. Y. 2004, p. 272, n. 5: « Ens est duplex scilicet naturae et rationis. Ens autem naturae, in quantum tale, est cuius esse non dependet ab anima. Sed ens rationis dicitur de quibusdam intentionibus quas adinvenit ratio in ipsis rebus, cuiusmodi sunt genus, species, definitio et huiusmodi. Ens autem dictum isto secundo modo aequiparatur secundum communitatem enti dicto priori modo. Non enim est aliquod ens naturae quin possit cadere sub ente rationis, et quin super ipsum fundari possit aliqua intentio, ut generis vel speciei vel proprii vel individui vel saltem causae vel causati. Quia ergo logica dicitur ex communibus procedere ».

³ On Scotus's doctrine of first and second intentions, see G. PINI, *Categories and Logic in Duns Scotus. An Interpretation of Aristotle's Categories in the Late Thirteenth Century*, Brill, Leiden 2002, ch. 4.

⁴ Scotus probably commented on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* many times across his career. On this, see G. PINI, *Scoto e l'analogia. Logica e metafisica nei commenti aristotelici*, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa 2002, pp. 16-22. In particular, on dating the *Questions on the Metaphysics*, see also *Introduction to Quaest. super Met.*, OPh III, pp. XLII-XLVI; S. P. MARRONE, *The Light of Thy Countenance. Science and Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century*, Brill, Leiden - Boston - Köln 2001, vol. II, p. 400.

⁵ Cf. *Met.*, V, 7, 1017a7-b26; VI, 2, 1026a35-1027a35.

Parisiensia, a text that casts doubts on the coherence of the transition from the *Ordinatio* to the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*. Despite this development, Scotus never changed the basics of his doctrine about the relation between being and intellect, confining himself to shaping such a doctrine in a more coherent way. According to the Prologue of the *Ordinatio*, being is not only the first object of the human intellect, but also the first object of the habit of science (*scientia*). In the *Ordinatio*, Scotus holds that the first and most adequate object of the human intellect is being as common to first intentions. This conception of being seems to imply the exclusion of logic from the field of science in general, which cannot be said. This difficulty is probably the reason that led Scotus to modify his initial position. In the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, Scotus finally holds that the first and most adequate object of the intellect is being as common both to first and second intentions. This conclusion appears more coherent with Scotus's epistemological theory.

More specifically, our interpretation is that, according to Scotus, the object of the human intellect is not the product of an abstractive process⁶. In Scotus's works we can distinguish an ontological meaning of the term 'separated' (*abstractum*) from a psychological one. According to the first meaning of abstraction, being has an ontological state of its own, which does not coincide with that of a particular being. Being considered in this sense — as we shall see — is the object of the intellect, although the intellect can discover it only by way of an act of psychological abstraction, namely by considering being as what is in common with every particular beings. With respect to this point, the relation existing among being, habit of science and memory calls for close consideration. According to Scotus, the first object of the intellect is present in human memory as an intelligible species⁷, but is not a product of the human intellect. In this sense, being can be called separated because it is in some way innate to us; for this reason it can be said to be ontologically in common with every human intellect and also with the essence of every particular being. Being does not follow but precedes the act of understanding, so turning out to be a regulative principle of any cognitive operation. Only God can be considered the ontological fulfillment of being, but He can be seen by us only in the beatific vision.

⁶ Luigi Iammarrone seems to stress this same point when, with a Rosminian language, he talks of an « innatismo virtuale dell'idea dell'essere » (L. IAMMARRONE, *Giovanni Duns Scoto. Metafisico e teologo. Le tematiche fondamentali della sua filosofia e teologia*, Miscellanea francescana, Roma 1999, p. 34).

⁷ According to Scotus, the human intellect is provided with a memory which is able to contain the past knowledge, but also the intelligible species. Moreover, the intelligible species must precede the act of intellection because it is the representation of the object and the object must always precede the act of intellection. On this, see È. GILSON, *Jean Duns Scot. Introduction à ses positions fondamentales*, Vrin, Paris 1952, ch. 8.1; G. PIZZO, *Intellectus und memoria nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus*, Verlag Butzon und Bercker, Kevelaer 1998; BOULNOIS, *Être et représentation*, pp. 98-122; see also R. CROSS, *Duns Scotus's Theory of Cognition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, ch. 4.

1. SOME REMARKS ON HUMAN INTELLECT AND BEING

1.1 *Community and Virtuality of Being*

According to Scotus, the human intellect turns to being in its full extension, including both God and every creature. This fact is mainly argued out of theological necessity: if the human intellect turned only to a portion of being and not to being as common to God and creatures, neither would the beatific vision be possible⁸, nor talking about God⁹. Even metaphysics as the science of being *qua* being would be impossible¹⁰. For this reason, the human intellect must extend *de jure* — but not *de facto* — its cognitive capacity towards God and immaterial substances¹¹.

Being is common to and present in every essence. This is the reason why being is predicable essentially (*in quid*) of every essence. However, *community* is not enough to characterize being as the first object of the human intellect. In fact, being is not predicable essentially of the ultimate differentiae (*differentiae ultimae*) and of the proper passions of being (*passiones entis*), the transcendental properties, like one, good and true¹². Scotus maintains that also *virtuality* is required, for it is what allows being to extend its domain also to the ultimate differentiae and the transcendental properties¹³. Note, however, that ‘virtuality’ does not mean

⁸ Cf. e.g. IOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* (= *Ord.*), I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, in IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI *Opera omnia*, vols. I-XIV, cura et studio Commissionis Scotisticae, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitas Vaticana 1950-2013 (= ed. Vat. I-XIV), vol. III, p. 70, n. 113: « intellectus, existens eadem potentia naturaliter, cognoscat per se quidditatem substantiae immaterialis, sicut patet secundum fidem de anima beata. Potentia autem manens eadem non potest habere actum circa aliquid quod non continetur sub suo primo obiecto »; *Lectura* (= *Lect.*), I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, in IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI *Opera omnia*, vols. XVI-XXI, cura et studio Commissionis Scotisticae, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitas Vaticana 1960-2004 (= ed. Vat. XVI-XXI), vol. XVI, p. 259, n. 92.

⁹ Cf. *Lect.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1, ed. Vat. XVII, p. 234, n. 29: « omnes magistri et theologi videntur uti conceptu communi Deo et creaturae, licet contradicant verbo quando applicant, nam in hoc conveniunt omnes quod accipiunt conceptus metaphysicales et removendo illud quod est imperfectionis in creaturis, attribuunt Deo quod est perfectionis, ut bonitatem, veritatem et sapientiam ». See also *Reportata Parisiensia* (= *Rep. Par.*), I, d. 3, q. 1, Vivès, Paris 1891-1895, vols. XXII-XXIII (= ed. Vivès XXII-XXIII), vol. XXII, p. 95, n. 7: « Hoc etiam Magistri tractantes de Deo, et de his, quae cognoscuntur de Deo, observant univocationem entis in modo dicendi, licet voce hoc negent ».

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars I, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, pp. 72-73, n. 117; *Rep. Par.*, I, d. 3, q. 1, ed. Vivès XXII, p. 93, n. 3.

¹¹ Cf. *Ord.*, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, p. 113, n. 186.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 81, n. 131: « dico quod ens non est univocum dictum in ‘quid’ de omnibus per se intelligibilibus, quia non de differentiis ultimis, nec de passionibus propriis entis ».

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 93, n. 150: « in ente concurret duplex primitas, videlicet primitas communitatis in ‘quid’ ad omnes conceptus non-simpliciter simplices, et primitas virtualitatis — in se vel in sui inferioribus — ad omnes conceptus simpliciter simplices. Et quod ista duplex primitas concurrens sufficiat ad hoc quod ipsum sit primum obiectum intellectus, licet neutram habeat praecise ad omnia

'potentiality'. What is *virtual* has already an incipient actuality of being that is absent in what is simply potential. According to Scotus, thanks to its virtuality, being is able to contain and become all that is possible, both metaphysically and epistemologically. In fact, the object of the intellect's domain includes everything that is intelligible (*intelligibile* or *cognoscibile*)¹⁴, and for this reason it includes God and whatever is created by Him. Being is also the first object of science, and as such it includes every other knowledge¹⁵. For all these reasons, Scotus affirms that being is the principle and the proper measure of knowledge¹⁶.

1.2 *The Relation between the Human Intellect and the First Object*

More in particular, Scotus describes the relation between the human intellect and being as the relation of proportionality that holds between matter and form, potency and act, or mover and movable¹⁷. In order to understand this point and

per se intelligibilia ». A doctrine that is alternative to this theory is present in the *Questions on the Metaphysics*. On this, see G. PINI, *Univocity in Scotus's Quaestiones super Metaphysicam. The Solution to a Riddle*, « *Medioevo* », 30, 2005, pp. 69-110.

¹⁴ Cf. *Quaest. super Met.*, II, qq. 2-3, OPh. III, p. 228, n. 94 : « nihil nisi ens est commune omni per se intelligibile, nisi forte alia convertibilia enti, ante quae omnia naturaliter prius est ens intelligibile, ut subiectum ante proprietates ».

¹⁵ Cf. *Ord.*, prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, art. 2, ed. Vat. I, pp. 96-97, nn. 142-143 : « ratio primi obiecti est continere in se primo virtualiter omnes veritates illius habitus. Quod probo sic : primo, quia obiectum primum continet propositiones immediatas, quia subiectum illarum continet praedicatum, et ita evidentiam propositionis totius ; propositiones autem immediate continent conclusiones ; ergo subiectum propositionum immediatarum continet omnes veritates illius habitus. Declaro idem secundo sic, quia primitas hic accipitur ex I *Posteriorum*, ex definitione universalis, secundum quod dicit adaequationem ; obiectum non esset adaequatum habitui nisi virtualiter contineret omnia illa ad quae consideranda habitus talis inclinatur, quia si non, habitus excederet obiectum illud ».

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, d. 3, pars 2, q. 3, ed. Vat. VII, p. 581, n. 370 : « Omnis autem ratio cognoscendi quae est in intellectu creato [...] se habet ad ipsum cognitum sicut mensuratum ad mensura, et ita sicut 'posterius naturaliter' ad prius ; quare unitas eius necessario dependet ab unitate obiecti mensurantis. Igitur necesse est aliquod unum obiectum esse mensuram eius. Sed obiectum quod est mensura eius, est ei adaequatum ; ergo non est ratio cognoscendi alia, nisi quia continetur virtualiter in primo obiecto quos est mensura eius ». See also DEMANGE, *Jean Duns Scot*, ch. V.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ord.*, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, p. 74, n. 120 : « Potentiam enim et obiectum non oportet assimilari in modo essendi : se habent enim ut motivum et mobile, et ista se habent ut dissimilia, quia ut actus et potentia ; sunt tamen proportionata, quia ista proportio requirit dissimilitudinem proportionatorum, sicut communiter est in proportione, — sicut patet de materia et forma, parte et toto, causa et causato, et ceteris proportionibus » ; prol., pars 3, q. 1-3, ed. Vat. I, p. 100, n. 148 : « proportio obiecti ad potentiam est proportio motivi ad mobile vel activi ad passivum » ; *Quaest. super Met.*, II, q. 2-3, OPh. III, pp. 222-223, n. 75 : « Ad illud ergo de proportione inter obiectum et potentiam, dicendum quod non requiritur proportio in essentia, nec in modo essendi ; similiter nec in natura. [...] Sed requiritur proportio motivi et mobilis ».

make his view clear, it is important to distinguish what Scotus calls the *first act*, i.e. the first actualization of the intellect, which concerns the intellect's being (*modum essendi*), from the *second act*, the second actualization, which instead concerns the intellect's operation (*modus cognoscendi*). On this distinction, when the act of cognition is achieved, the intellect assimilates the cognized object to itself, but the intellect conserves its nature, not transforming its essence into the cognized object's essence¹⁸.

It is clear that in Scotus the *first act*, that is, the intellect's being, depends on the relation with being, which is the first object of the intellect. In this respect, being is what actualizes the potentiality of the intellect to exist. Moreover, being is also the only essence that can move the intellect to the second act. 'To move the intellect' means 'to activate the intellect', in a metaphysical as well as in an epistemological sense, to the second act. Finally, thanks to the presence of being in every essence, the human intellect is able to know everything¹⁹.

Now, from a cognitive point of view, being is the simplest²⁰, the most indeterminate²¹ and the most common concept.²² It should be noted, on the other hand, that also the capacity of the human intellect is, *de jure*, potentially infinite. The human intellect has an indeterminate capacity that makes it able to determine itself towards every determinate cognition. Scotus explains that this indetermination concerns the intellect's being an active agent (*indeterminatio agentis*), that is, the agent's capacity of acting toward a thing, and not the so-called material indetermination, namely the matter's potentiality of becoming any form

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75, n. 122: « Aliud est loqui de modo essendi ipsius potentiae in se, et aliud est loqui de ipsa in quantum ipsa est sub actu secundo, vel dispositione proxima ad actum secundum, qui sit aliud a natura potentiae. Nunc autem est quod potentia cognoscens assimilatur cognito. Verum est, per actum suum cognoscendi, qui est quaedam similitudo obiecti, vel per speciem, disponentem de proximo ad cognoscendum, — sed ex hoc concludere ipsum intellectum, in se naturaliter, habere modum essendi similem modo essendi obiecti, vel e converso, est facere fallaciam accidentis et figurae dictionis ».

¹⁹ The first object of a faculty is a necessary condition for a faculty to operate. The nature of every faculty is characterized by this intentional connection with the faculty's first object. This doctrine was also held by Thomas Aquinas, although Duns Scotus criticizes him on this point. See e.g. THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa theologiae*, I^a-II^{ae}, q. 9, a. 1, in SANCTI THOMAE AQUINATIS *Opera Omnia*, Ex Typographia polyglotta s.c. De propaganda fide, Roma 1891, vol. VI, p. 74b: « obiectum movet, determinando actum, ad modum principii formalis [...]. Primum autem principium formale est ens et verum universale, quod est obiectum intellectus ».

²⁰ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, qq. 1-2, ed. Vat. III, p. 49, n. 71: « conceptus 'simpliciter simplex' est qui non est resolvable in plures conceptus, ut conceptus entis vel ultimae differentiae ».

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105, n. 66. See also *Quaestiones super secundum et tertium libro De anima* (= *Quaest. super De an.*), q. 19, edd. B.-C. BAZÁN ET AL., in IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI *Opera Philosophica*, vol. V, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N. Y. 2006, p. 323, n. 35.

²² *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, p. 113, n. 186: « nihil potest adaequari intellectui nostro ex natura potentiae in ratione primi obiecti nisi communissimum ».

(*indeterminatio materialis*). In fact, the intellect is an act with an active potency that is able to produce an infinite series of concepts²³. For this reason, according to Scotus, the human intellect is really a νοῦς ποιητικός (productive intellect) and at the beginning is not turned to a particular being, but only to being in its indeterminate and widest extension²⁴.

However, the indetermination of being does not imply the impossibility, for being, to be determined. Scotus notes that being does not have a negative indetermination (*indeterminatio negativa*), but only a privative indetermination (*indeterminatio privativa*), which expresses the possibility of receiving an infinite series of possible determinations. What is indeterminate in a negative sense cannot further be determined. For example, the individual being is not able to receive another determination because it is complete in itself. On the contrary, what is indeterminate in a privative sense can receive an infinite series of determinations²⁵. With respect to the feature of indetermination, being and the intellect display a common characteristic which allows for a kind of convertibility of entity and intelligibility. This convertibility represents the condition of possibility of science and, in particular, of metaphysics.

1.3. *The First Object of the Human Intellect and the Subject-Matter of Metaphysics*

Although what has been said above would seem rather clear in itself, Scotus raises in his *Ordinatio* further questions about being. One is especially significant for the present issue: Is being, as the first object of the intellect, a metaphysical

²³ *Ibid.*, d. 3, pars 3, q. 2, pp. 325-326, n. 545: « Cum arguitur post de indeterminatione intellectus ad diversos actus et obiecta, — respondeo quod aliqua est 'indeterminatio materialis', propter defectum actus, aliqua est 'indeterminatio agentis', propter illimitationem virtutis activae, sicut sol est indeterminatus ad generandum multa. 'Primo modo indeterminatum' non agit nisi determinetur per aliquem actum, quia alias non est in actu sufficiente sed in potentia; 'secundo modo indeterminatum' nulla alia forma a se determinatur, sed ex se determinatur ad producendum quemcumque effectum ad quem ex se est indeterminatum, et hoc praesente passo receptivo, sicut sol praesente passo generat quocumque generabile, ex quo ipsum natum est generari ».

²⁴ *Ibid.*, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, p. 77, n. 124: « Ens enim in quantum ens, communius est quocumque alio conceptu primae intentionis (secunda intentio non est primum obiectum), et sic intelligitur nulla contractione omnino cointellecta — nec habitudine ad sensibile, nec quacumque ».

²⁵ *Ibid.*, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1-2, pp. 66-67, n. 105: « et cum arguitur quod "indeterminatum negative" est magis indeterminatum quam 'indeterminatum privative' — nego, loquendo de indeterminatione ad propositum, qualis scilicet est in primo intellectu [sc. ente], quia 'indeterminatum negative' est singulare, et tale non est magis indeterminatum quam 'indeterminatum privative'. Indeterminatio autem negativa, scilicet repugnantia ad determinari, etsi sit aliquo modo maior quam indeterminatio privativa, non tamen tale indeterminatum prius occurrit intellectui, quia tale non est confusum sed distinctissimum cognoscibile ».

concept or a logical one?²⁶ There is not a simple answer to this question. In the *Ordinatio* and in the *Lectura*, Scotus's answer is that being is not a logical concept, but only a metaphysical concept²⁷, that is, a first intention²⁸. The distinction between *metaphysical concepts* and *logical concepts*, that is, between first intentions and second intentions, relates to the distinction between *essence* and *logical universal*. As known, Scotus endorses Avicenna's doctrine of the threefold consideration of essence and according to this doctrine, essence absolutely considered is indifferent to 'being universal' and 'being particular', to 'being in the soul' or 'being outside the soul'. On the contrary, the logical universal exists only in the intellect and is essentially characterized by the property of being predicable of many things, a property that our intellect attaches to the essence when it considers it as existing in the intellect.

Scotus holds that being and the most general concepts do not have an essence (*quidditas*) in the proper sense. Nevertheless, he recognizes that for the most general concepts to possess an essence, it suffices that they can be predicated *in quid* of their inferiors²⁹. Now, when being is taken as the first object of the intellect, it is a univocal concept that is able to virtually include, at the same time

²⁶ Cf. *Ord.*, II, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1, ed. Vat. VII, pp. 402-404, nn. 30-33 : « Natura est indifferens ad unitatem singularitatis; non igitur est de se sic illā una, scilicet unitate singularitatis. Qualiter autem hoc debeat intelligi, potest aliquantulum videri per dictum Avicennae V *Metaphysicae*, ubi vult quod 'equinitas sit tantum equinitas, — nec est de se una nec plures, nec universalis nec particularis'. Intelligo : non est 'ex se una' unitate numerali, nec 'plures' pluritate opposita illi unitati; nec 'universalis' actu est (eo modo scilicet quo aliquid est universale ut est obiectum intellectus), nec est 'particularis' de se. Licet enim numquam sit realiter sine aliquo istorum, de se tamen non est aliquod istorum, sed est prius naturaliter omnibus istis, — et secundum prioritatem naturalem est 'quod quid est' per se obiectum intellectus, et per se, ut sic, consideratur a metaphysico et exprimitur per definitionem; et propositiones 'verae primo modo' sunt verae ratione quidditatis sic acceptae, quia nihil dicitur 'per se primo modo' de quidditate nisi quod includitur in ea essentialiter, in quantum ipsa abstrahitur ab omnibus istis, quae sunt posteriora naturaliter ipsā. Non solum autem ipsa natura de se est indifferens ad esse in intellectu et in particulari, ac per hoc et ad esse universale et particulare (sive singulare), — sed etiam ipsa, habens esse in intellectu, non habet primo ex se universalitatem. Licet enim ista intelligatur sub universalitate ut sub modo intelligendi ipsam, tamen universalitas non est pars eius conceptus primi, quia non conceptus metaphysici, sed logici (logicus enim considerat secundas intentiones, applicatas primis secundum ipsum). Prima ergo intellectio est 'naturae' ut non cointelligitur aliquis modus, neque qui est eius in intellectu, neque qui est eius extra intellectum; licet illius intellecti modus intelligendi sit universalitas, sed non modus intellectus! ».

²⁷ Cf. *Lect.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1-2, ed. Vat. XVI, p. 235, n. 29.

²⁸ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, p. 77, n. 124 : « Ens enim in quantum ens, communius est quocumque alio conceptu primae intentionis (secunda intentio non est primum obiectum) ».

²⁹ Cf. *Quaest. super Met.*, I, q. 1, OPh. III, pp. 40-41, n. 75 : « cum dicitur 'ens non habet quid quia est transcendens', — responsio : hoc concluderet aequaliter de omni generalissimo, quia nullum generalissimum habet quidditatem proprie dictam. Tamen quodlibet habet quid; tum quia habet essentiam; tum quia alias non praedicaretur in quid de aliquo ». Scotus seems to consider valid this argument.

and in the same way, infinite being and finite being. But in the *Ordinatio* Scotus maintains that, for the metaphysician, being is not a univocal concept. First of all, he admits that accidents have a relation of attribution with the substance. In this case, we cannot consider being as univocal, for an accident's being is different from a substance's being; nevertheless, Scotus concedes that the intellect can abstract a univocal concept that is common to accidents and substance³⁰. In the *Questions on the Metaphysics*, Scotus reinforces this conclusion by observing that the subject-matter of metaphysics is not being taken as common to all things (*ens communissimum*)³¹, that is, as a concept including real being (*ens reale*) and being of reason (*ens rationis*), God and creature, substance and accident. Scotus makes a clear statement on this issue by explaining that if being in its total community (*ens secundum totam communitatem*) were the subject-matter of metaphysics, it would not have a cause; but being in its total community includes every possible cause, in particular God; therefore it cannot be the subject-matter of metaphysics. Since an object is known only when its cause is known, it is impossible for a science to study being in its total community. The subject-matter of metaphysics, by consequence, is the created being (*ens creatum*), which can be divided into the ten categories; such a being is caused by God³². It is rather clear that, for the metaphysician, substance takes primacy over accidents and God³³. To understand

³⁰ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, pp. 100-101, n. 163: « Philosophus VII *Physicorum* dicit quod 'in genere latent aequivocationes', propter quas non potest esse comparatio secundum genus. Non tamen est aequivocatio quantum ad logicum, qui ponit diversos conceptus, sed quantum ad realem philosophum, est aequivocatio, quia non est ibi unitas naturae. Ita igitur omnes auctoritates quae essent in *Metaphysica* et *Physica*, quae essent de hac materia, possent exponi, propter diversitatem realem illorum in quibus est attributio, cum qua stat tamen unitas conceptus abstrahibilis ab eis [...]. Concedo tunc quod totum quod accidens est, attributionem habet essentialiam ad substantiam, et tamen ab hoc et ab illo potest conceptus communis abstrahi ». See also *Quaest. super De an.*, q. 21 (OPh. V, p. 224, n. 37), an early text that is however more problematical because Scotus introduces the notion of 'logical' univocity as distinct from 'metaphysical' analogy.

³¹ The expression 'being taken as common to all things' (*ens communissimum*) is used by Scotus in at least two different ways. As we shall see later, it can comprise every real being (*ens reale*), or can also extend its meaning to every being of reason (*ens rationis*).

³² *Quaest. super Met.*, I, q. 1, OPh. III, *adnotationes interpolatae*, p. 15: « Nota quod, secundum communiter loquentes, ens est hic subiectum in quantum est commune ad decem praedicamenta, et non in quantum est commune ad omne ens, sive reale sive rationis sive privativi, quia talia non cadunt per se sub scientia reali, cuiusmodi est metaphysica. Etiam si ens secundum totam communitatem esset hic [subiectum], haberet causam sui esse et per consequens omne ens et etiam Deus, quia quod est subiectum scientiae, oportet quod habeat causam sui et partes etc. Hoc autem est impossibile, ergo etc. Intelligitur ergo de ente creato, quia tale habet causam sui esse tantummodo ». For more on this doctrine, see A. ZIMMERMANN, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Texte und Untersuchungen*, Peeters, Leuven 1998².

³³ On the primacy of substance in Scotus's *Metaphysics*, see also O. BOULNOIS, *Métaphysiques rebelles. Genèse et structures d'une science au Moyen Age*, PUF, Paris 2013, pp. 261-311.

better this statement, recall that, for Scotus, the subject-matter of metaphysics is being *qua* being (*ens in quantum ens*) or being according to its entity (*ens secundum suam entitatem*)³⁴, and that the primacy in question is a primacy of origin (*prioritas originis*) and not a primacy of intention (*prioritas intentionis*). We can clarify the meaning of these two primacies by saying that with respect to the primacy of origin, the subject-matter of metaphysics is the totality of beings, regardless of their relationship with God; but with respect to the primacy of intention, God can be considered the proper subject-matter of metaphysics because God is what is finally ‘intended’, i.e. understood, by every particular knowledge about beings³⁵. Scotus is not here drawing a distinction between two metaphysics, but between two different points of view on metaphysics. If we consider what is immediately knowable by us, we must turn to the most general subject-matter, which is being *qua* being, without any particular determination. But if we consider the ultimate aim of metaphysics, God holds the primacy because He is the aim of every knowledge. By speaking in this way, Scotus tries to reconcile the different statements about the subject-matter of *Metaphysics* that can be found in Aristotle’s work³⁶. In fact, according to Scotus, metaphysics is about both the transcendentals — like being, one, true and good — and the highest causes, like God³⁷. However, since being *qua* being is the most knowable concept for human beings *in via*, it holds epistemological priority as compared

³⁴ Cf. *Quaest. super Met.*, I, q. 1, OPh. III, p. 41, n. 78: « cum dicitur ‘principia entis in quantum ens’, non intelligitur ly ‘in quantum’ reduplicative ita quod denotet causam, sed specificative, ut is sit sensus: entis in quantum ens, id est, entis secundum suam entitatem ».

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63, nn. 137, 140: « Prima dubitatio est circa hoc quod ponitur Deum esse subiectum in metaphysica, et quod consideret entia ut attribuuntur ad Deum, quoniam consideratio entium in quantum entia videtur esse prior quam in quantum attribuuntur ad primum ens; igitur erit alia metaphysica prior, quae consideret entia in quantum entia, quam illa quae ponitur de Deo ut de subiecto ». [...] Ad primam rationem istius dubitationis dicendum est quod illa consideratio, qua considerantur entia in se, prior est prioritate originis [...], sed non prioritate intentionis. Et primum subiectum ponitur cuius cognitio principaliter intenditur; vel ad quod, ut a principium, tota aggregatio multarum cognitionum principaliter ordinatur ».

³⁶ See e.g. *Met.*, IV, 1, and VI, 1.

³⁷ Cf. *Quaest. super Met.*, I, q. 1, OPh. III, p. 15. On transcendentals in Scotus’s philosophy, see A. B. WOLTER, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N. Y. 1946 (rep. Kessinger, Whitefish 2008); S. D. DUMONT, *Transcendental Being. Scotus and Scotists*, « Topoi », 11, 1992, pp. 135-148; J. A. AERTSEN, *Being and One. The Doctrine of Convertible Transcendentals in Duns Scotus*, « Franciscan Studies », 56, 1998, pp. 47-64; J. J. E. GRACIA, *Scotus’ Conception of Metaphysics. The Study of the Transcendentals*, « Franciscan Studies », 56, 1998, pp. 153-168; T. S. LEITE, *Ontologia e teoria dos transcendentales na Metafísica de Duns Scotus*, in L. A. DE BONI ET AL. eds., *João Duns Scotus (1308-2008). Homenagem de scotistas lusófonos*, EST, Porto Alegre/Bragança Paulista 2008, pp. 206-223.

to God³⁸. According to a text from the *Questions on the Metaphysics*, VI, q. 1, the subject-matter of metaphysics is characterized as one and common (*unum commune*) and as a real object (*obiectum reale*), which can be abstracted from a multiplicity of beings. In the same text, Scotus also affirms that this real object is divided into the ten most general concepts, which are the ten categories³⁹, and that God, since He does not belong to any category, exceeds the subject-matter of metaphysics. In the *Ordinatio* Scotus calls 'finite being' this general concept of being that is common to the ten categories, but this concept is different from being that is common and indifferent to 'infinite being' and 'finite being'⁴⁰.

To summarize what has been said so far, being as the first object of the intellect and being as the subject-matter of metaphysics display some different characteristics. The former is understood by the human intellect as an univocal concept that is indifferent to God and creature, substance and accident, while the latter is fundamentally the created being as divided into ten categories and as caused by God, which is the final goal of every metaphysical knowledge. The change of doctrine from the first to the second draft of the *Questions on the Metaphysics*, IV, q. 1, seems to concern the analogy or univocity of the concept of being as common to the ten categories and not of the concept of being as common to God and the creatures⁴¹. Moreover, until the *Ordinatio* Scotus excludes the being of reason both from the object of the intellect and from the subject-matter of metaphysics.

³⁸ Although Gilson does not sharply distinguish between the first and most adequate object and the subject-matter of metaphysics, what he wrote about the place of God in Scotus's metaphysics remains true: « Cet être premier, dont elle établit l'existence, n'est pas son propre sujet, mais celui de la théologie, car s'il appartient à la théologie de traiter de Dieu comme de son sujet propre, la métaphysique se voit par là même interdire le droit de le revendiquer aussi comme sien. Elle ne l'atteint qu'indirectement. La métaphysique est pour l'homme la science naturelle suprême, parce que le sujet dont elle traite est le sujet ici-bas accessible à l'intellect humain, mais ce sujet n'est pas Dieu, c'est l'être. D'où cette double conséquence : aucun savoir naturel humain ne peut parler de Dieu connu sous quelque notion qui lui soit propre, et la métaphysique est un savoir qui tend vers l'objet de la théologie comme vers son terme » (GILSON, *Jean Duns Scot*, p. 82).

³⁹ Cf. *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 1, OPh. IV, pp. 19-20, nn. 47-48 : « ab omnibus speculabilibus realibus potest unum commune, scilicet ens, abstrahi, de cuius communitate ALIBI dictum est. [...] Ens autem est obiectum reale. Quod patet, quia de rebus dicitur in quid, et est obiectum proprie speculabile [...]. Sub ente autem prima dividenda occurrunt decem generalissima de quibus ex principiis notis via sensus non sunt aliae passionis demonstrabiles nisi transcendentis ».

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 8, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. IV, pp. 205-206, n. 113 : « Ens prius dividitur in infinitum et finitum quam in decem predicamenta, quia alterum istorum, scilicet 'infinitum', est commune ad decem genera ; ergo quaecumque conveniunt enti ut indifferens ad finitum et infinitum, vel ut est proprium enti infinito, conveniunt sibi non ut determinatur ad genus sed ut prius, et per consequens ut est transcendens et est extra omne genus » ; see also, *Lect.*, I, d. 8, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. XVII, p. 37, n. 107. On this point, see A. NANNINI, *Univocità metafisica dell'ens e individuazione mediante intensità di potenza in Duns Scotus*, « Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica », 103/3, 2011, pp. 389-423.

⁴¹ Scotus presents the question as follows : « questio est utrum possit esse aliquis conceptus communis decem generibus, quocumque nomine illud significetur, sive per 'ens' sive per aliud nomen » (*Quaest. super Met.*, IV, q. 1, OPh. IV, p. 301, n. 28).

Certainly, the possibility of metaphysics is bound tightly to the intellect's capacity and to its inclination to being. Scotus holds that the first object of the intellect cannot be more particular than being *qua* being, otherwise metaphysics would be less transcendent than physics and being would not be understood by us⁴². In the *Ordinatio* Scotus clarifies this statement as follows :

« Alia, de metaphysica, probat quod ens ut 'hoc intelligibile' intelligitur a nobis, sed si esset primum obiectum, hoc esset secundum totam indifferentiam ad omnia in quibus salvatur, non ut aliquod unum intelligibile in se, — et quidlibet illius indifferentiae posset intelligi »⁴³.

In this passage Scotus seems to affirm that the object of the intellect is absolutely indifferent to any possible determination, such as God and creature. On the other hand, the subject-matter of metaphysics expresses a determinate intelligible being (*hoc intelligibile*). Scotus describes it as a 'this' intelligible (*hoc intelligibile*), that is, a determinate concept of being. On the contrary, the first object of the intellect is characterized by no reference to the concept of determination. As a matter of fact, Scotus always characterizes it as indifferent and indeterminate.

1.4. *The Unity of Being*

In Scotus's *Ordinatio* there is also a second question about being that is significant for the present issue. It concerns the univocity of being⁴⁴. In the *Ordinatio* Scotus considers the univocity of being as common to God and creature and not only to substance and accident, as he seems to do in the *Questions on the Metaphysics*.

⁴² Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, p. 73, n. 118 : « quidquid per se cognoscitur a potentia cognitiva, vel est eius obiectum primum, vel continetur sub eius obiecto primo; ens ut ens est communius sensibili, per se intelligitur a nobis, alias metaphysica non esset magis scientia transcendens quam physica; igitur non potest aliquid esse primum obiectum intellectus nostri quod sit particularius ente, quia tunc ens in se nullo modo intelligeretur a nobis ».

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 77, n. 124. For a possible motivation for this distinction, see DEMANGE, *Jean Duns Scot*, pp. 432-434.

⁴⁴ Cf. O. BOULNOIS, *Introduction*, in Id., *Jean Duns Scot. Sur la connaissance de Dieu et l'univocité de l'étant*, PUF, Paris 1998; Id., *Scotus' Doctrine of Univocity and the Medieval Tradition of Metaphysics*, in J. A. AERTSEN, A. SPEER eds., *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? Akten des X Internationalen Kongresses für mittelalterliche Philosophie der Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale, 25 bis 30 August 1997 in Erfurt*, De Gruyter, Berlin - New York 1998 (Miscellanea Mediaevalia, 26), pp. 193-212; L. A. DE BONI, *Duns Scotus and the Univocity of the Concept of Being*, in R. H. PICH ed., *New Essays on Metaphysics as Scientia transcendens. Proceedings of the Second International Conference of Medieval Philosophy, held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) (Porto Alegre/Brazil, 15-18 August 2006)*, Brepols, Turnhout 2007, pp. 91-113.

For Scotus, being considered as the first object of the intellect is a univocal concept which

« possesses sufficient unity in itself, so that to affirm and deny it of one and the same thing would be a contradiction. It also has sufficient unity to serve as the middle term of a syllogism, so that wherever two extremes are united by a middle term that is one in this way, we may conclude to the union of the two extremes among themselves »⁴⁵.

Since this doctrine could reduce being to a genus, Scotus is urged to solve two objections that call into question the univocity of being. The first objection states that the extremes of a contradiction do not have any univocal concept in common. For example, God and creature are the extremes of a contradiction, just as are 'all that depends' and 'all that does not depend' or 'all that is caused' and 'all that is not caused'⁴⁶. The second objection is similar to the first and states that no concept is neutral (*neuter*) with regard to the extremes of a contradiction⁴⁷.

Scotus responds by noting that the extremes of a contradiction are able to divide exhaustively the common genus under which they fall and, thus, to receive the predication of the contradiction and at the same time to have something abstract (*aliquid abstractum*) or a substrate (*substratum*) common to them⁴⁸. On the one hand, by the term 'abstract' Scotus probably wants to refer to the Aristotelian term *χωριστός*⁴⁹, which signifies what is abstracted in an ontological sense⁵⁰. On the other hand, by the term 'substrate' Scotus probably wants to

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars I, q. 1-2, ed. Vat. III, p. 18, n. 26 : « univocum conceptum dico, qui ita est unus quod eius unitas sufficit ad contradictionem, affirmando et negando ipsum de eodem ; sufficit etiam pro medio syllogistico, ut extrema unita in medio sic uno sine fallacia aequivocationis concludantur inter se uniri » (translation by A. B. WOLTER, *Duns Scotus. Philosophical Writings*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1987², p. 20).

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 8, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. IV, p. 171, n. 45 : « Prima est ista : illis quae sunt totaliter et immediate sub extremis contradictionis, nihil est commune univocum ; Deus et creatura sunt totaliter et immediate sub extremis contradictionis — dependere et non dependere, causatum et non causatum, esse ab alio et non ab alio ; ergo nihil est eis commune univocum ».

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171, n. 46 : « Item, secundo sic, et est confirmatio alterius rationis : omnis conceptus communis est neuter respectu illorum quibus est communis ; nullus est conceptus neuter respectu contradictorium, quia est alter eorum ; ergo etc. ».

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190, n. 80 : « Accipe tunc maiorem quod quaecumque sunt talia quibus conveniunt extrema contradictionis 'ipsa non univocantur in aliquo' : ista maior est falsa, nam omnia per se dividuntur aliquod commune sunt talia quod de ipsis dicuntur extrema contradictionis, et tamen univocantur in ipso diviso. Ita in proposito : possunt ista secundum se tota recipere praedicationem contradictionis, et tamen possunt habere aliquid abstractum — vel substratum illis extremis illius contradictionis — quod est commune ambobus ».

⁴⁹ Cf. *Met.*, VI, 1, 1026a16.

⁵⁰ This meaning of 'what is abstracted' must be distinguished from the psychological meaning of abstraction expressed by the Aristotelian term *ἀφάρεσις*. See e.g. *De anima*, I, 1, 403b10-20.

refer to the Aristotelian term ὑποκείμενον although, in the Aristotelian doctrine, only the genus is usually considered the common substrate of the differentiae⁵¹. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle holds that the ὑποκείμενον is not predicated of any other thing, but it is that of which every other thing is predicated⁵². But this cannot be the case of being. In fact, as seen above, being can be predicated of everything. But in the Aristotelian writings, there is also another meaning of the term ὑποκείμενον. In the *Physics*, Book V, for example, Aristotle explains that the term ὑποκείμενον fundamentally means « what is affirmatively expressed »⁵³. According to this meaning, we can say that being is the first and the most common substrate because it is the first thing that is *affirmatively expressed* of everything and every determination of being can be *affirmatively expressed* thanks to being. If this is what Scotus meant by the term ‘substrate’ in the text from the *Ordinatio* mentioned above, we can consider being as the first predicate and the necessary condition for every predication.

However, Scotus carefully notes that being must not be considered as a genus. Being is not formally neutral (*neuter formaliter*) with respect to the extremes of a contradiction, while this is the case with a genus such as ‘animal’, which is formally neutral with respect to its specific differentiae (‘rational’ and ‘irrational’)⁵⁴. Genus is formally neutral because its specific differentiae are not part of its essence, but added to it extrinsically.

In order to differentiate being and genus, Scotus distinguishes between *formal diversity*, which pertains to generic concepts, and the *diversity* which is proper to being. The formal diversity between the genre A and its specific differentiae B and non-B means that B and non-B are extrinsically added to A because A is neither formally B nor formally non-B. The consequence is that A cannot contain at the same time B and non-B. By contrast, the diversity between being and the extremes of the contradiction means that being can include two possibly contradictory concepts or things. In this way, Scotus defends the transcendental capacity of being to contain, thanks to its virtuality, the extremes of a contradiction as compossible things. Differently from what happens with a genus, there is nothing

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. *Met.*, V, 6, 1016a24-28.

⁵² Cf. *Met.*, VII, 3, 1028b36-37.

⁵³ Cf. *Phys.*, V, 1, 225a6-7.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 8, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. IV, p. 190, n. 81 : « Ad confirmationem ‘de neutro’ dico quod conceptus etiam communis duobus, est neuter formaliter, et ita concedo conclusionem quod conceptus entis non est formaliter conceptus creati nec increati ; si autem intelligatur quod iste conceptus est ita neuter quod neutrum contradictorium dicatur de eo, falsum est. Ita est enim de rationali et irrationali, quod conceptus animalis est respectu eorum neuter formaliter, et tamen illud quod concipitur non est neutrum, sed vere est alterum istorum. Alterum enim contradictorium dicitur de quolibet, et tamen non oportet quemlibet conceptum esse formaliter alterum conceptum contradictorium ».

outside being. For this reason every determination of being must be present in being itself, not in actuality of course, but only in a possible and virtual way. This presence must be understood in a negative way: there is nothing in being that prevents it from becoming one or the other horn of a contradiction. If every determination of being were present in actuality within being, in fact, the latter would be a contradictory object. In a parallel text from the *Reportata Parisiensia*, Scotus makes this point clearer, explaining that what contracts being is an intrinsic grade (*intrinsicum gradum*) or mode of being (*modum entitatis*). What contracts being is not extrinsic to it, while the specific differentia designates a different reality from the genus (*aliam realitatem a realitate generis*)⁵⁵.

The univocity of being is introduced by Scotus to make possible our talk about God. But from an epistemological point of view, the unity of being is more fundamental than its univocity. As seen above, the definition of 'univocal concept' is grounded on the concept of unity. Univocity refers to the predicability of being, while the unity of being indicates an essential characteristic of being that is independent of its predicability. For without the unity of being knowledge and predication are impossible. According to Scotus, being is a first intention, that is, a metaphysical concept like the concepts of any other common nature; it is not a second intention, that is, a logical concept. Being designates the necessary condition for conceptualization and predication because of its presence in every possible knowledge and in every possible predicate.

Scotus also relates the distinction between unity and univocity to the distinction between community and universality. This is a noteworthy feature of Scotus's metaphysics. Community signifies the possibility, for being, of being present in every thing. On the contrary, we can talk of universality when being is thought of and it is, then, able to be predicated of different things, so that being is, from the outset, indifferent to predication⁵⁶. As noted by Giorgio Pini, univocal or equivocal concepts are first intentions, but univocity is a second-intention property. A concept is called 'univocal' because it refers to some beings that have

⁵⁵ Cf. *Rep. Par.*, I, d. 9, q. 5, ed. Vivès XXII, p. 172b, n. 17: « Ex praedictis patet quod ens contrahitur ad Deum et creaturam per infinitum et finitum, non tamen sequitur quod ens sit genus, quia minus distat hoc contrahens a contrahibili quam differentia a genere, quia contrahens, ut infinitum, sive finitum, non dicit nisi intrinsicum gradum, sive modum entitatis; differentia autem non sic, sed dicit aliam realitatem a realitate generis, ad quam realitas generis est in potentia, ut actuetur ».

⁵⁶ For an emphasis on this distinction in Scotus, see A. DE LIBERA, *La querelle des universaux de Platon à la fin du Moyen Age*, Seuil, Paris 1996, pp. 329-332. See also O. BOULNOIS, *Réelles intentions: nature commune et universaux selon Duns Scot*, « Revue de métaphysique et de morale », 97/1, 1992, pp. 3-33.

been cognized by means of it. For this reason, univocity is a second-intention property which pertains to something inasmuch as it is cognized⁵⁷.

But what kind of unity does being have? According to Scotus, the unity of being is a real unity (*unitas reale*), but not a numerical one. Numerical unity is typical of every individual being, whereas real unity refers to what has an entity (*entitas*) in general⁵⁸. For this reason, real unity is weaker than numerical unity.

The unity of being is also necessary for the intellect. As explained above, there is an essential relationship between every faculty (*potentia*) and its proper object. The object of a faculty must be adequate (*adaequatum*) to the faculty, that is, must have the same capacity as the faculty, and this is possible only if the first object is just one.

2. FROM THE UNIVOCITY OF BEING TO BEING AS ABSOLUTE POSSIBILITY

It is not easy to interpret Scotus's view on being as formulated in the *Ordinatio*. This is because Scotus does not address in this work the issue of the distinction between being as the first object of the intellect and being as the subject-matter of metaphysics. The fact that this distinction has not sufficiently been argued perhaps explains why Scotus reconsiders his position and modifies it. As said in the introduction, in Scotus's works there is a shift from *univocal being* to *possible being*. Possible being designates the most common extension of being, for it includes not only infinite being and finite being, but also the being of reason (*ens rationis*). This development emerges if one looks at the *Reportata Parisiensia* and the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*. In this second part, we shall discuss the genesis of this change in Scotus's doctrine of being as the first object of the intellect.

2.1. *The Possible Being in Reportata Parisiensia, II, d. 24, q. un.*

In order to understand the rising importance of the concept of possible being in Scotus's doctrine, it is necessary to consider what Scotus says in the *Reportata Parisiensia*, II, d. 24, q. un.⁵⁹. In this context, Scotus answers the question

⁵⁷ Cf. PINI, *Scoto e l'analogia*, p. 83.

⁵⁸ This is the case of every *common nature*.

⁵⁹ On the reliability of *Reportata Parisiensia* for the interpretation of Scotus's thought see H. BARNABA, *Il problema delle 'Reportationes' nell'eredità dottrinale del B. Giovanni Duns Scotus OFM*, in M. C. NUNEZ ed., *Giovanni Duns Scotus. Studi e ricerche nel VII centenario della sua morte*, 2 vols., Antonianum, Roma 2008, vol. I, pp. 59-128. See also, G. LEIBOLD, H. KRAML, *Text und Überlieferungsprobleme der Reportata Parisiensia des Johannes Duns Scotus*, in L. HONNEFELDER ET AL. eds., *Johannes Duns Scotus 1308-2008. Die philosophischen Perspektiven seines Werkes / Investigations into His Philosophy. Proceedings of "The Quadruple Congress" on John Duns Scotus, part 3*, The Franciscan Institute - Aschendorff, St. Bonaventure, N. Y. - Münster 2010, pp. 187-195.

concerning the difference between superior reason (*ratio superior*) and inferior reason (*ratio inferior*)⁶⁰. At the beginning of his solution, Scotus holds that a faculty is distinguished from another in virtue of its formal object⁶¹. For example, the formal object of seeing is color and no other faculty has color as its proper object. Specifically, the formal object of seeing is not a particular species of color, like white or black, but the genus *color*. Generally speaking, the formal object of a faculty has the same extension as its faculty. Nevertheless, the faculty of seeing does not perceive *color* in general, but only specific colors such as white, black and so on. As a result, the formal objects of the faculties that depend on a physical organ (*potentiae organicae*) are nothing but abstractions produced by the human intellect⁶². In particular, organic faculties have no formal object in common.

Faculties that are not bound to an organ (*potentiae inorganicae*) have formal objects that share the common feature of being ontologically separated, although not in virtue of an operation of the human intellect. For this reason, every non-organic faculty is, as Scotus says, *totius entis*, that is, relates to *all being*⁶³. But if this is true, what is the first object of the human intellect? Scotus's answer is that univocal being is the first object of the intellect, and this object is common both to infinite being and to finite being. The human intellect can abstract it from everything that is knowable, but being does not become the first object of the human intellect in virtue of an act of psychological abstraction⁶⁴. The psychological abstraction is only the means by which the intellect can gain awareness of the first object of the intellect.

However, all the thinkers who reject this position — like Henry of Ghent — maintain that the first adequate object of the intellect is God or, as an alternative, a confused concept of being that seems at first univocal but is analogical after closer inspection. If this were the case, Scotus continues, being would not be an analogical concept, but rather an equivocal one. For Scotus, neither God nor analogical being can be the first adequate object of the intellect. Those thinkers could continue to defend their position in two ways: either by admitting that

⁶⁰ Cf. *Rep. Par.*, II, d. 24, q. un., ed. Vivès XXIII, p. 112.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115a, n. 11: « cum dicitur potentiae distinguuntur per obiecta, dicitur quod verum est per obiecta formalia; visus enim non distinguitur per obiecta materialia, cuiusmodi sunt album et nigrum, sed per obiectum formale adaequatum ».

⁶² *Ibid.*: « Unde forte visus nunquam videret colorem, nisi quia album, vel nigrum. Unde illud obiectum abstractum, quod est obiectum adaequatum potentiae, fit sic abstractum per intellectum ».

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 115a-b, n. 11: « Ideo dico quod dissimiliter est de potentiis non organicis, quia sicut potentiae non organicae sunt abstractae a materia, hoc est, non requirunt talem complexionem alicuius organi, sicut obiecta sunt abstracta; ideo quaelibet potentia non organica est totius entis ».

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115b, n. 12: « Dices, quod igitur est primum obiectum ipsius intellectus? Dico, sustinendo quod ens univocum ad ens creatum, et increatum, est primum obiectum, non tamen propter abstractionem fit ipsum obiectum intellectus. Sed unus conceptus potest abstrahi a quolibet, quod est intelligibile ».

there is no univocal concept for all beings, or by denying that there exists a first adequate object of the intellect. According to Scotus, this second answer looks more probable insofar as it respects the perfection of the faculty⁶⁵.

In the last part of the text we are considering, Scotus seems to introduce an alternative doctrine. He observes that non-organic faculties have no univocal object in common and that the omnipotence of God does not concern a real and univocal being, but only possible being; in the same vein, the first object of the human intellect must be identified with possible being. Nevertheless, Scotus makes it clear that possible being is only an intellectual object⁶⁶, although it is not reducible to a *being of reason*. Thus, possible being constitutes the horizon of both God's omnipotence and the human intellect's cognition. But first of all, possible being is an object of God's intellect.

In order to understand how this alternative theory differs from the theory of univocal being, consider that, for Scotus, a particular object, before it is in relation with the act of human intellection, is said to have only a possible being. At the same time, the act of human intellection would be contradictory if it were not intentionally related to the object, for otherwise the human intellect would be an absolute form⁶⁷ just like the divine intellect. In the *Ordinatio*, however, Scotus does not consider a possible alternative doctrine to the theory of univocal being as the first object of the intellect; possible being occurs simply as synonymous with what precedes the act of intellection and the original term of intellectual activity. It is probable that when introducing the alternative theory of possible

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: « Vel secundum dicentes quod ens non est univocum, oportet dicere quod primum obiectum intellectus nostri sit Deus, quod tamen non credo, et tunc oportet eos dicere quod non oportet primum obiectum intellectus univocum omnibus, quae sunt intelligibilia. Vel oportet eos dicere quod non est primum obiectum adaequatum intellectui, quod videtur mihi probabilius propter perfectionem potentiae ».

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 115b-116a: « Quia sicut videmus quod a sensibus partialibus abstrahitur commune obiectum, ut qualitas sensibilis, et ultra a sensibus exterioribus, et interioribus, tandem convenit concedere quod nullum unum obiectum sensibile univocum potest esse commune omnibus sensibus. Sic etiam obiectum omnipotentiae divinae, obiectum dico operabile, non potest esse aliquid adaequatum, nisi tantum ens possibile, quod non est unum in re, sed si aliquo modo hoc tantum est in intellectu, quia non potest esse aliquid univocum reale omnibus operabilibus a potentia divina, sic propter perfectionem intellectus ad tot se extendit, quod nullum unum obiectum univocum habet sibi adaequatum ».

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 2, ed. Vat. III, p. 327, n. 546: « Opinio est quod intellectus est principium intellectionis quantum ad substantiam, sed obiectum est principium quantum ad modificationem seu specificationem actus. — Contra: nihili nullum est principium; intellectio, circumscripta modificatione seu specificatione, nihil est; ergo etc. Maior intelligitur de nihilo quod includit contradictionem. Minor probatur, quia prius natura intellectum praecise est aliquid 'possibile esse': sed intellectio sine hoc quod in eodem 'nunc' naturae sit alicuius obiecti, est contradictio, alioquin intellectio esset forma mere absoluta ».

being as the first object of the human intellect, Scotus wished to account for the common experience condition of a thing that is thinkable but not yet thought in actuality. Following this idea, it seems clear that the possible being, since it is common to every particular cognition before any act of intellection has been generated, cannot be considered as a product of a cognitive operation.

In the *Ordinatio*, Scotus already clarified the meaning of the expression ‘possible being’. He explained that possible being signifies being in potency (*ens in potentia*) and distinguished possible being from cognized being (*ens cognitum*). Possible being has a potentiality oriented towards being in actuality, while cognized being has only a relative and accidental mode of being (*esse secundum quid*)⁶⁸. In particular, possible being has only a logical possibility, called also *potentia logica*, which consists in a non-repugnance among the predicates of the same thing⁶⁹.

2.2. *The ens communissimum in the Quaestiones quodlibetales*

In the *Reportata Parisiensia*, Scotus seems to advance two possible responses to the question of the first object of the intellect. This reveals the increasingly deeper attention paid by Scotus to this topic, an attention that gives rise to a change of view in his final work, the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*⁷⁰. In the third question, Scotus unequivocally states that being, taken in its greatest extension (*ens communissimum*), is the first object of the intellect. The reason is that the first object of the intellect must refer to whatever is knowable by our intellect, so it must include both the being of reason (*ens rationis*) and real being (*ens reale*). Following this idea, Scotus holds that every science focuses on *ens* from a particular point of view. What matters for our argument is that, for Scotus, the term ‘being’ taken in its greatest extension signifies nothing but the absence of contradiction, and this condition simply indicates the pure intelligibility or non-contradictoriness of being⁷¹. Scotus explains that this concept of being is not

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ord.*, II, d. 1, q. 2, ed. Vat. VII, p. 49, n. 93 : « formaliter esse cognitum non sit esse possibile, quia ‘esse cognitum’ est esse in actu secundum quid, — esse autem possibile, est esse in potentia ad esse simpliciter, et non in actu ».

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, I, d. 7, q. 1, ed. Vat. IV, pp. 118-119, n. 27; *Lectura*, I, d. 7, q. un., ed. Vat. XVI, p. 484, n. 32.

⁷⁰ This is a set of twenty-one disputed questions held at Paris probably either in Advent 1306 or in Lent 1307. On this, see T. B. NOONE, H. FRANCIE ROBERTS, *John Duns Scotus’ Quodlibet : A Brief Study of the Manuscripts and an Edition of Question 16*, in C. SCHABEL ed., *Theological Quodlibeta in the Middle Ages : The Fourteenth Century*, Brill, Leiden 2007, pp. 131-159.

⁷¹ Cf. *Quaestiones quodlibetales* (= *Quaest. quodl.*), q. 3, Vivès, Paris 1891-1895, vols. XXV-XXVI, vol. XXV, p. 114b, n. 2 : « Et isto intellectu communissimo, prout res vel ens dicitur quolibet conceptibile quod non includit contradictionem, [...] posset poni ens primum obiectum intellectus, quia nihil potest esse intelligibile quod includit rationem entis isto modo, quia ut dictum est prius, includens contradictionem non est intelligibile, et isto modo, quaecunque scientia, quae non solum vocatur realis, sed etiam quae vocatur rationis, est de re, sive de ente ».

that to which Avicenna refers in his *Metaphysics*⁷². It is necessary to point out that, according to Scotus, what is intelligible and non-contradictory corresponds to what is possible, that is, what has no intrinsic repugnance to being (*esse*)⁷³.

In the *Quaestiones quodlibetales* the topic of the univocity of being decreases in importance. Evidence of this is that Scotus no longer characterizes the first object of the intellect as univocal being. As a matter of fact, Scotus observes that it is irrelevant to decide whether being understood as common to the being of reason and real being is univocal or analogical.⁷⁴ Up until the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, q. 3, Scotus identified the first object of the intellect with being as common to every first intention (God and creature, substance and accident, and so on). Now, Scotus identifies it with being as common to first intentions (real being) and second intentions (being of reason). By such a move, Scotus extends the field of the first object of the intellect to every possible knowledge, to every intelligible.

In the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, q. 3, Scotus considers the first object of the intellect as the ground and the condition of possibility for every science. The first object of the intellect, i.e. being in its community (*ens in sua communitate*), is the end of the intellect's natural inclination, whereas the first object of the intellect ordinarily (*in via*) is the essence of the material thing (*quiditas rei materialis*), which expresses only a limited portion of being (*ens limitatum*)⁷⁵. In this text, Scotus also distinguishes between two senses of 'adequate object of the intellect', with respect to the particular state of man before or after the original sin. It is worth noting that, for Scotus, the *viator's* condition is not a natural state, but a state of

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 114b, nn. 2-3: « dicitur res, quod habere potest entitatem extra animam. Et isto modo videtur loqui Avicenna I Metaphys. cap. 5 quod ea quae sunt communia omnibus generibus, sunt res, et ens. Habemus ergo primum membrum sic, scilicet communissime, bipartitum, in illud scilicet quod non includit contradictionem quaecumque esse habeat, et in illud quod habet, vel habere potest, proprium esse extra intellectum, et isto modo, vel utroque modo, vel saltem secundo modo, accipit Avicenna res et ens, ut dictum est ».

⁷³ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 43, q. un., ed. Vat. VI, p. 354, n. 7: « possibile, secundum quod est terminus vel obiectum omnipotentiae, est illud cui non repugnat esse et quod non potest ex esse necessario ».

⁷⁴ Cf. *Quaest. quodl.*, q. 3, ed. Vivès XXV, p. 114b, n. 2: « sive illa communitas sit Analogiae sive univocationis, de qua non curo modo »; *ibid.*, ed. Vivès XXVI, p. 40, n. 11: « ens in sua communitate, sive sit univocationis, sive analogiae, non curo modo, etsi ponatur obiectum adaequatum cuiuscumque intellectus creati ».

⁷⁵ Cf. *Quaest. quodl.*, q. 14, ed. Vivès XXVI, p. 40a, n. 11: « Diceretur quod obiectum primum naturale potest dupliciter intelligi. Uno modo, ad quod potentia inclinatur. Alio modo, ad quod potentia potest naturaliter attingere, scilicet, ex concursu causarum naturalium: ens in sua communitate, sive sit univocationis, sive analogiae, non curo modo, etsi ponatur obiectum adaequatum cuiuscumque intellectus creati, loquendo de obiecto adaequato primo modo: non tamen de obiecto adaequato secundo modo, imo sic pro quocumque statu, cuiuscumque intellectus creati praecise, ens limitatum est obiectum adaequatum, quia praecise illud potest attingi virtute causae naturaliter motivae intellectus ».

penalty (*poenalis*) because of the original sin⁷⁶. In the natural state, the first and adequate object of the human intellect is being while, after the original sin, the adequate object is a limited being, that is, the essence of the material thing⁷⁷. In conclusion, in the *Quaestiones quodlibetales* the first object of the intellect is not a metaphysical concept, but what is able to include every metaphysical and logical concept. In that, Scotus's solution in the *Quaestiones quodlibetales* substantially differs from the one in the *Ordinatio* and the *Lectura*.

2.3. *Ontological and Psychological Abstraction*

Scotus often uses the expression 'ens secundum totam indifferentiam'⁷⁸ to refer to being as the first object as cognized by the human intellect. Such an expression refers to being as a concept produced by the human intellect by means of an act of psychological abstraction. As said above, according to Scotus, the human intellect is an active substance⁷⁹ which is able to produce universal concepts. However, for Scotus, a real universal concept is not obtained through an act of psychological abstraction from a finite number of concepts of individuals, because it is impossible to find a more universal concept in a less universal concept⁸⁰. For example, it is

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 46b-47a, n. 12: « objectum adaequatum intellectui nostro ex natura potentiae non est aliquid specialius objecto intellectus Angeli, quia quidquid potest intelligi ab uno, et ab alio, et hoc saltem concedere debet Theologus, qui ponit istum statum non esse naturalem, nec istam impotentiam intelligendi, respectu multorum intelligibilium, esse naturalem, sed poenalem ». See also *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. cit., p. 113, n. 186.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Quaest. Quodl.*, q. 14, ed. Vivès XXVI, p. 46b, n. 12: « Dico igitur, quod obiectum naturale, hoc est naturaliter attingibile adaequatum intellectui nostro, etsi pro statu isto sit quiditas rei materialis, vel forte adhuc specialius, quiditas rei sensibilis, intelligendo non de sensibili proprie solum, sed etiam de incluso essentialiter, vel virtualiter in sensibili ».

⁷⁸ Cf. e.g. *Ord.* I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, ed. Vat. III, p. 77, n. 124; *Quaest. quodl.*, q. 14, ed. Vivès XXVI, p. 47b, n. 13.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 2, ed. Vat. III, p. 323, n. 541: « Intellectus ergo possibilis, secundum quod est illud in quo recipitur forma intelligibilis vel intellectio, vel illud secundum quod species recipitur in anima, non erit purum potentiale, sed erit aliquid in actu primo ».

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 1, pp. 221-222, n. 365: « universalis numquam apprehenditur secundum suam indifferentiam totam, quando apprehenditur in suo inferiore. Tota enim indifferentia universalioris est secundum quod ipsum, ut conceptum, est idem cuilibet suo inferiori; numquam autem communius ut conceptum in inferiore aliquo, est idem inferiori cuilibet, sed praecise illi in quo concipitur; ergo quodcumque universale conceptum in singulari, vel communius in minus communi, non concipitur secundum totam indifferentiam suam: potest autem intellectus concipere illud secundum totam indifferentiam suam, igitur non concipitur praecise communius in minus communi vel universale in singulari, — et ita non praecise universale in phantasmate. Phantasma enim non est proprie nisi ipsius singularis, et hoc in quantum est singulare speciei specialissimae »; *ibid.*, *adnotatio interpolata*, *Appendix A*, p. 363, n. 221, 17: « Universalis secundum totam indifferentiam suam non potest intelligi nec representari in representativo minus universalis; sed species phantastica est per se et primo representativa individui ut est hoc; igitur in eo non potest representari universale secundum totam indifferentiam quam habet ad sua individua omnia ».

impossible to obtain the universal concept *human being* in its total indifference by abstraction from its inferiors. Scotus seems to think that it is impossible to obtain a universal concept in its total indifference from a less universal concept. In this case, it is only possible to obtain a concept that is *common* to a series of human beings, not including all the other human beings. By speaking in this way, Scotus wants to provide the human intellect with a real operation completely detached from sensible knowledge, for Scotus claims that the human intellect is able to conceive a universal concept in its total indifference (*secundum totam suam indifferentiam*)⁸¹. This indifference refers to the capacity of a universal concept of being identically present in any other less universal concept⁸².

Nevertheless, being considered as the first object of the human intellect is not a product of a psychological abstraction. When Scotus uses the expression ‘ens secundum totam indifferentiam’, he refers to the first object of the human intellect as cognized by the intellectual faculty. But, as seen above, the human intellect is naturally oriented toward being taken in its greatest extension and the first object of the intellect is said to precede any cognitive operation. As noted, in Scotus’s texts there is a sense of the term ‘separated’ (*abstractum*) that is different from the meaning associated to the psychological operation of abstraction. Being as the first object of the intellect is the principle that activates the intellect; for this reason it cannot be caused by the cognitive relation it comes to entertain with the intellect. As illustrated when discussing above the *Reportata Parisiensia*, II, d. 24, being is called ‘separated’, but not because it is produced through an act of psychological abstraction.

2.4. *Habitus, Memoria and the First Object of the Human Intellect*

In order to understand better Scotus’s position about the first object of the intellect, it is necessary also to consider what kind of connection exists between the intellect and the intellectual habit (*habitus*) or science, on the one hand, and their first and adequate objects, on the other hand⁸³. Until now we have considered the specific characteristics of the first object of the intellect and the relation of this object with the human intellect. But the intellect is a cognitive faculty related with the habit of science, which includes logic, physics, metaphysics and theology. In this context, the habit must be understood as a disposition to every scientific knowledge and not as the combination of the many pieces of knowledge possessed by a particular man⁸⁴.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*: « numquam cognoscitur magis universale secundum totam indifferentiam suam nisi quando cognoscitur ut unum cognoscibile, idem omnibus suis inferioribus ».

⁸³ Cf. R. HOFMEISTER PICH, *Der Begriff der Wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis nach Johannes Duns Scotus* (Ph. D. thesis), Bonn 2001.

⁸⁴ For this distinction, see e.g. *Met.*, V, 20, 1022b4-14.

According to Scotus, the habit is an essential perfection of the soul and is also the first act or form of the intellect. On the contrary, the second act of the intellect is an accidental perfection and consists in the single act of knowing⁸⁵. Like the first object of the intellect, the first object of the habit must be adequate to the capacity of the habit. Thus, the fundamental characteristic of the first object of the habit is to be what first and virtually contains in itself all the truths of the habit of the science⁸⁶. Furthermore, Scotus holds that the habit of the science is the intelligible species of the first object and « its formally adequate object is the quiddity of which it is the species »⁸⁷. As in the case of the intellect, Scotus holds that the first object of the habit has an essence (*quidditas*). Secondly, the intelligible species of the first object is an essence that is cognized with the habit of science (*habitualiter*)⁸⁸. The intelligible species of the first object of the intellect can be considered as the intellectual representation of the first object. But the first object by itself is an essence. Moreover, for the object, 'to contain virtually' is a capacity independent of another object or a particular intellect⁸⁹. As Scotus writes, the first object of the habit contains every truth thanks only to its nature⁹⁰.

In the Prologue of the *Ordinatio* Scotus assumes that the first object of the intellect and the first object of a science are one and the same, and he does so by discussing the relation that the habit of the science entertains with memory.

⁸⁵ Cf. e.g. *Quaest. super Met.*, I, prol., OPh. III, pp. 5-6, n. 8 : « Sicut est duplex actus, primus et secundus, ut patet ex II *De anima*, ita est duplex perfectio, prima et secunda : prima est forma vel habitus, secunda est operatio ; et unumquodque naturaliter appetit utramque perfectionem, cum operatio sit finis habitus. Haec ergo propositio 'unumquodque naturaliter suam perfectionem appetit' concludit propositum tam de scientia, de qua processit prima ratio, quam de intelligere, de quo processit secunda. [...] potentia dicitur aequivoce de potentia essentiali quae est ad formam, et accidentali quae est ad operationem ».

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ord.*, I, Prol., pars 3, q. 1, art. 2, ed. Vat. I, pp. 96-97, nn. 142-143 : « dico quod ratio primi obiecti est continere in se primo virtualiter omnes veritates illius habitus. [...] Declaro idem secundo sic, quia primitas hic accipitur ex I Posteriorum, ex definitione universalis, secundum quod dicit adaequationem ; obiectum non esset adaequatum habitui nisi virtualiter contineret omnia illa ad quae consideranda habitus talis inclinatur, quia si non, habitus excederet obiectum illud ».

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97, n. 145 : « Ille habitus qui dicitur scientia est species intelligibilis primi obiecti. Ille respicit veritates immediatas et mediatas, non formaliter sed ex consequenti, et suum obiectum adaequatum formaliter est quidditas cuius est species ». According to Scotus, the habit is always an intelligible species and can be described as a dispositional cognition. On this, see Cross, *Duns Scotus's Theory of Cognition*, pp. 90-95.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97, nn. 142-143.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97, n. 144 : « Expono quod dixi 'primo virtualiter', quia illud est primum quod non dependet ab alio sed alia ab ipso ; ita igitur 'primo continere' est non dependere ab aliis in continendo sed alia ab ipso, hoc est, quod, per impossibile, circumscripto omni alio in ratione obiecti, manente intellectu eius, adhuc contineret obiective ».

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* : « nihil aliud autem continet nisi per rationem eius ».

According to Scotus, this proposition: 'What is known with the habit of science (*habitualiter*), for example A, contains virtually the actual knowledge of B' is equivalent to this statement: 'The intelligible species of A in memory is able to generate the knowledge of B'. Following this idea, 'to know habitually' signifies 'to be present in memory'. If we consider the first object of the intellect, we can say that being habitually known contains virtually every other knowledge and is able to generate every other knowledge. But what is able to generate every particular knowledge is also the first object of the intellect. Therefore, the first object of the habit and the first object of the intellect are one and the same object⁹¹.

We must also stress the equivalence assumed by Scotus between the presence of the intelligible species in memory and the habitual cognition⁹². In line with Augustine's *De Trinitate*, the first two perfections of the human soul are taken to be memory (*memoria*) and knowledge (*intelligentia*). The former consists in a first act with respect to the knowledge that is generated (*notitia genita*), while the latter is a second act whereby the intellect can receive the knowledge that is generated⁹³. Now, according to Scotus, the soul has a first total act (*actus primus totalis*) which precedes the act of knowledge. This first total act is a synthesis of something that is proper to the soul (*aliquid animae*) and of the object that is present to the soul under its intelligible being (*in ratione intelligibilis*)⁹⁴. The former is the faculty of the intellect, while the latter, as said above, is the habit of the science, that is, the intelligible species of the first object⁹⁵ and, then, of the every other particular object. Scotus calls this synthesis "perfect memory" (*perfecta memoria*).

In Scotus's epistemology, the intelligible species of the object is an accidental form added to the possible intellect, which is something in first actuality, although this actuality is different from the actuality of the agent intellect. The actuality

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97, n. 145: « Immo idem est speciem intelligibilem a continere virtualiter notitiam b, et ipsum a ut cognitum habitualiter, continere, quod est, speciem intelligibilem ipsius a in memoria posse gignere notitiam b in intelligentia. Secundum hoc igitur idem est obiectum primum intellectus et scientiae ».

⁹² On the role of memory in Duns Scotus's theory of knowledge, see DE LIBERA, *La querelle des universaux*, pp. 324-329; PIZZO, *Intellectus und memoria nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus*; BOULNOIS, *Être et représentation*, pp. 98-122.

⁹³ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 4, ed. Vat. III, p. 343, n. 580: « Anima habet in se aliquam perfectionem secundum quam est actus primus respectu notitiae genitae, et habet in se perfectionem aliquam secundum quam formaliter recipit notitiam genitam, et habet in se aliquam perfectionem secundum quam formaliter recipit volitionem. Istaes tres perfectiones dicuntur 'memoria', 'intelligentia' et 'voluntas', — vel 'anima' in quantum habet ipsas ».

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: « Anima ergo in quantum habens actum primum totalem respectu intellectionis — aliquid scilicet animae et obiectum sibi praesens in ratione 'intelligibilis' — dicitur 'memoria', et hoc 'memoria perfecta', includendo tam intellectum quam illud quo obiectum est sibi praesens ».

⁹⁵ See above, note 85.

of the possible intellect only consists in its ability to receive actual knowledge⁹⁶. Nevertheless, as explained above, the habit, considered as the intelligible species of the first object of the intellect, is an essential form which makes an ontological synthesis with the possible intellect, called 'memory' or 'habitual knowledge' (*cognitio habitualis*). All that leads Scotus to hold that the human soul is ontologically composed of the intelligible species (or habit or form) of the first object of the intellect and the possible intellect.

According to Scotus, for a thing, being present to the intellect amounts to being in the intellect according to an objective modality of existence (*esse in intellectu obiective*)⁹⁷. By such terms as *praesentialiter*, *praesentia* and *praesentialitas* Scotus indicates the relationship holding between the knower and the thing known, between the subject and the object⁹⁸. The object known is present to the intellect, but since being is not produced by an act of knowledge, it is originally present to the intellect and its *praesentialitas* coincides with the habit of science. Now, for Scotus, presence and universality of the object are two necessary conditions for actual knowledge. This is the reason why Scotus maintains that there is always an intelligible species in the memory which precedes any act of cognizing (*actus intelligendi*) and represents the universal in actuality as universal⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 2, ed. Vat. III, p. 322, n. 541: « intellectio autem sive species intelligibilis non est forma substantialis, sed accidens: ergo quod est immediate receptivum illius, est aliquid in actu substantiali, aut saltem quod est mediate receptivum, — et tunc quod immediate recipit erit aliquis actus accidentalis, sicut se habet superficies ad albedinem. Intellectus ergo possibilis, secundum quod est illud in quo recipitur forma intelligibilis vel intellectio, vel illud secundum quod species recipitur in anima, non erit purum potentiale, sed erit aliquid in actu primo, licet ipse respectus potentiae non sit aliquid in actu ».

⁹⁷ Cf. *Rep. Par.*, prolog., q. 1, art. 2, ed. Vivès XXII, p. 13, n. 11: « Nihil potest esse in intellectu obiective nisi vel obiciatur intellectui praesentialiter in se ipso vel in aliquo repraesentativo eius realiter existente ». See J. BIARD, *Intention et présence: la notion de presentialitas au XIV^e siècle*, in D. PERLER ed., *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, Brill, Leiden 2001, pp. 265-282. See also, O. BOULNOIS, *Être, luire et concevoir. Notes sur la genèse et la structure de la conception scotiste de l'esse objective*, « Collectanea Franciscana », 60/1-2, 1990, pp. 117-135; Id., *La présence chez Duns Scot*, in L. SILEO ed., *Via Scoti. Metodologica ad mentem Joannis Duns Scoti*, Atti del Congresso Scotistico Internazionale, Roma 9-11 marzo 1993, Antonianum, Roma 1995, pp. 95-119.

⁹⁸ See *Ord.*, I, pars 3, q. 1, ed. Vat. III, p. 232, n. 382; *ibid.*, *adnotatio interpolata*, Appendix A, p. 366, n. 232, 19.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 1, p. 225, n. 370: « Ad quaestionem dico quod necesse est ponere in intellectu ut habet rationem memoriae, speciem intelligibilem repraesentantem universale ut universale, priorem naturaliter actu intelligendi, — propter istas rationes iam positas ex parte obiecti, in quantum universale et in quantum praesens intellectui: quae duae condiciones, scilicet universalitas et praesentia, praecedunt naturaliter intellectionem ». See also *ibid.*, p. 217, n. 359: « universale autem in actu praecedit actum intelligendi [...], quia obiectum sub ratione obiecti praecedit actum ».

Scotus at times refers to being as to a universal concept¹⁰⁰. In Scotus's doctrine there are three kinds of universal: the second intention, which indicates a relation of reason that obtains between the universal predicable and the subject of predication; the first intention considered as indifferent and opposed both to universality and to singularity; the first intention considered as an intelligible object that is predicable of many things. The third kind is what Scotus calls the universal in the proper and complete sense (*complete universale*), what is included essentially (*quidditative*) in every inferior. It precedes the second intention and is indeterminate, although not opposed contradictorily to the possibility of predication¹⁰¹. As seen above, the first object of the human intellect is universal in this third sense. According to Scotus, the universal in the proper and complete sense exists in the intellect in an objective way. Moreover, this kind of universal is known in the habit and not by an act of intellection¹⁰².

Scotus points out that the universal in the proper and complete sense is abstracted by the active intellect but, as demonstrated above, being as the first object of the intellect is not a product of human abstraction. This entails that being must be considered as a *sui generis* universal. It precedes every single act of knowing because it is an essential constituent of the first act of the soul, specifically of memory or habit.

In *De Trinitate*, Augustine called memory « a certain kind of mysterious knowledge (*arcana quaedam notitia*) »¹⁰³. I think that Scotus's notion of the habit as the intelligible species of being is a mysterious knowledge and is very close to Augustine's conception of memory. Following Augustine, Scotus holds that

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. *Quaest. super De an.*, q. 16, OPh. V, pp. 150-151, n. 18; *Quaest. super Met.*, IV, q. 1, OPh. III, p. 51, n. 308.

¹⁰¹ *Quaest. super Met.*, VII, q. 18, OPh. IV, p. 347, nn. 38-41: « Circa huius quaestionis solutionem, primo distinguendum est de universali. Sumitur enim vel sumi potest tripliciter: Quandoque pro intentione secunda, quae scilicet est quaedam relatio rationis in praedicabili ad illud de quo est praedicabile, et hunc respectum significat hoc nomen 'universale' in concreto, sicut et 'universalitas' in abstracto. Alio modo accipitur universale pro illo quod denominatur ab ista intentione, quod est aliqua res primae intentionis, nam secundae intentiones applicantur primis. Et sic accipi potest dupliciter: uno modo pro illo quod quasi subiectum remotum denominatur ab ista intentione; alio modo pro subiecto propinquo. Primo modo dicitur natura absolute sumpta universale, quia non est ex se haec, et ita non repugnat sibi ex se dici de multis. Secundo modo non est universale nisi sit actu indeterminatum, ita quod unum intelligibile numero sit dicibile de omni supposito, et illud est complete universale ».

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, *adnotatio interpolata*, p. 350, n. 45: « Tertium est universale dictum contrarie, et illud est universale completum, abstractum per intellectum a determinatione. Et dicitur contrarie ad differentiam naturae ut determinatae ad singularitatem, quae dicitur ut sic privative universale quia est apta nata fieri universale sive indeterminate in actu. Istud tertium universale habet esse in intellectu obiective et non necessario subiective. Obiective, inquam, non actu sed habitu, vel non actu secundo necessario, sed actu primo ».

¹⁰³ Cf. AUGUSTINUS HIPPONIENSIS, *De Trinitate*, XIV, VI, 8.

memory, intellect, will and their acts are images of God¹⁰⁴. But, as seen above, memory and intellect are constituted by the presence of their first object, that is, being. Now, according to Scotus, God is the « *ratio* of the first object of the intellect, namely being (*ens*), and this in the highest degree »¹⁰⁵. Here the Latin term 'ratio' should be understood as 'fulfillment' of the first object of the human intellect. However, the first object of the intellect is different from God.

2.5 *Being and the Three Orders of Primacy*

Until this point, we have considered being from two different points of view : being as the first object of the intellect and being as a concept produced by the intellectual activity. The former can be considered abstract because it does not coincide with any particular being and any particular intellect. Being as the first object precedes and lays the basis for any intellectual activity. In this sense, being is the most adequate object of the human intellect, because it satisfies the capacity of the intellect *in via* and makes possible the beatific vision. Being as the first object is present in memory as an habitual, not as an actual cognition. On the contrary, being as a concept produced by the intellectual activity, that is, being in its total indifference, is a universal concept indifferent to every form of determination and obtained through an act of psychological abstraction. Such a concept represents being as cognized by the human intellect, so it necessarily follows the intellect's activity. On account of this, from a temporal point of view, being in its total indifference cannot be the first concept understood in actuality by the human intellect.

If our interpretation is correct, we can say that being is not always the first object of the intellect in every order of primacy. Scotus has paid attention to clarifying this topic in order to prevent some possible misunderstandings. Specifically, Scotus distinguishes three orders of primacy in the field of what is intelligible : 1) origin or generation ; 2) perfection ; 3) adequation.

The first cognized in actuality in order of origin or generation is the lowest species which cannot be further specified (*species specialissima*), although it is cognized in a confuse way. In fact, the first known in a distinct way in order of origin is being because it is an absolutely simple concept (*conceptus simpliciter simplex*) and every inferior concept cannot be known without the concept of being¹⁰⁶. But, in order of

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 4, ed. Vat. II, pp. 344-345, n. 583. See also AUGUSTINUS HIPPONIENSIS, *De Trinitate*, X, X-XII.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 2, pars 1, q. 1-2, ed. Vat. II, pp. 209-210, n. 138 : « in tali cogitabili [Deo] summe quiescit intellectus ; ergo in ipso est ratio primi obiecti intellectus, scilicet entis, et hoc in summo ».

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55, n. 80. An absolutely simple concept is not composed of other more simple concepts. See *ibid.*, I, d. 3, q. 2, a 6, ed. Vat. III, p. 336, n. 21 : « Conceptum simpliciter simplicem voco, qui non est resolubililis in plures conceptus, ut conceptus entis vel ultimae differentiae ».

origin, there is also a habitual and virtual cognition. What is habitually cognized is present inside the intellect in an intelligible manner in such a way that the intellect can generate an immediate act of knowledge about it. What is virtually cognized, instead, is included in what is cognized in actuality, but not as the proper term of the intellection. For example, when the concept *man* is known, also the concept *animal* is virtually known because it is a part of the concept *man*¹⁰⁷. We must remember here that being is what virtually includes every other cognition, but it is also important to stress that, according to Scotus, the first habitually and virtually cognized in order of origin is what is most common, that is, being¹⁰⁸.

The first known in order of absolute perfection (*ordo perfectionis simpliciter*) is God, but what is sensible is more perfect proportionally (*ordo perfectionis secundum proportionem*) to the human intellect¹⁰⁹.

Finally, the first cognized in order of adequation is being, as we have explained in this article.

Following these distinctions, we can say that being is the first because: 1) it is distinctly cognized in actuality because of its simplicity; 2) it is habitually and virtually cognized because its intelligible species and the habit are the same thing and it virtually includes every inferior cognition; 3) finally, being is the first concept in order of adequation because it is equivalent to the extension of the intellect.

In conclusion, by considering being in common to God and creature, substance and accident, first intention and second intention, as the first and actually only necessary condition for knowledge and science, Scotus gives to his epistemology a solid philosophical ground. As has been shown by many scholars, Scotus reaches this result by rejecting the interpretations of such influent thinkers as Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, and of some theologians of the Franciscan tradition, like Bonaventure.

3. CONCLUSION

Scotus's texts show a shift in his doctrine on the relationship between being and the human intellect. We pointed out that the focus on univocal being that is the

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60, n. 92: « 'Habitualem' voco quando obiectum sic est praesens intellectui in ratione intelligibilis actu, ut intellectus possit statim habere actum elicited circa illud. — 'Virtuaalem' voco quando aliquid intelligitur in aliquo ut pars intellecti primi, non autem ut primum intellectum, sicut cum intelligitur 'homo', intelligitur 'animal' in homine ut pars intellectum, non autem ut primum intellectum sive ut totale, terminans intellectionem. Hoc satis proprie vocatur 'intellectum virtualiter', quia est satis proximum intellecto actu: non enim posset esse actualius intellectum nisi esset propria intellectione intellectum, quae esset ipsius ut primi et totalis termini ».

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60, n. 93.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63, nn. 95-98.

hallmark of the *Ordinatio* is rejected in later works like the *Reportata Parisiensia* and the *Quaestiones quolibetales*. Scotus gives up speaking about being as an univocal concept and refers to being as what comes before any possible knowledge. The possibility of being concerns both the metaphysical level and the logical one.

Scotus underscores the *formal* background of predication in which the *ratio entis* is formally convertible with *intelligibility*. In this way, the expression *ratio entis* acquires a sort of indifference compared to the metaphysical and the logical meaning of being, that is, to its division into being in the soul and being outside the soul. This *formal* background of every particular science shows that being is an exception when compared with others essences or concepts¹¹⁰. Being is evident in itself due to its simplicity¹¹¹. But being is also the condition of possibility for human thought. For this reason, being is the *form* and the *object* of human intellect¹¹². Olivier Boulnois has noticed that, according to Scotus, « *la noétique fonde la structure transcendantale de la métaphysique* » and « *l'articulation transcendantale de la métaphysique repose, d'une manière analogue à celle de Kant, sur un fondement critique* »¹¹³. But it is important to make it clear that, for Scotus, being cannot be explained as a sort of rationalistic *a priori* or Kantian

¹¹⁰ After Scotus, some authors will notice this peculiarity. Francis of Marchia, for example, will talk about *being* as a 'neutral intention' (*intencio neutra*). Cf. FRANCISCUS DE MARCHIA, *Quodlibet*, q. 3, ed. N. MARIANI, Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, Grottaferrata 1997, p. 71 : « *quedam vero, sunt neutre : neque prime, neque secunde, sed communes ad utramque sicut est forte intencio entis, que includitur formaliter in utraque intencione tam prima quam secunda* ». On this, see also S. FOLGER-FONFARA, *Das 'super'-transzendente Und Die Spaltung Der Metaphysik. Der Entwurf Des Franziskus Von Marchia*, Brill, Leiden 2008, ch. 1.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Ord.*, I, d. 3, pars I, qq. 1-2, ed. Vat. III, pp. 91-92, n. 147 : « *De prima ostenditur, quia aut intellectus est certus de aliquo tali quod sit ens, dubitando utrum sit hoc vel illud, tamen non est certus quod sit ens quiditative, sed quasi praedicatione 'per accidens'; vel aliter, et melius : quilibet talis conceptus est simpliciter simplex, et ideo non potest secundum aliquid concipi et secundum aliquid ignorari, — sicut patet per Philosophum IX *Metaphysicae*, in fine, de conceptibus simpliciter simplicibus, quod non est circa eos deceptio, sicut est circa quiditatem complexorum, — quod non est intelligendum quasi intellectus simplex formaliter decipiatur circa intellectionem quiditatis, quia in intellectione simplici non est verum vel falsum. Sed circa quiditatem compositam potest intellectus simplex virtualiter decipi : si enim ista ratio est in se falsa, tunc includit virtualiter propositionem falsam. Quod autem est simpliciter simplex, non includit virtualiter, proximo, nec formaliter propositionem falsam, et ideo circa ipsum non est deceptio : vel enim totaliter attingitur, vel non attingitur, et tunc omnino ignoratur. De nullo ergo simpliciter simplici conceptu potest esse certitudo secundum aliquid eius, et dubitatio secundum aliud » ; *Qq. De anima*, q. 16, ed. cit., pp. 150-151, n. 18 : « *Prius distincte illud cognoscitur quod intrat definitionem alterius, per quod aliud distincte cognoscitur ; sed ens quod est universalissimum intrat definitionem omnium, cum conceptus entis includatur in conceptu cuiuslibet — ipsum autem non habet conceptum nisi distinctum, quia non habet in quo possit confuse et indistincte conosci ; igitur, etc.* ».*

¹¹² On this topic, see BOULNOIS, *Être et representation*, pp. 100-101.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

function of judgment¹¹⁴. Thanks to its original presence in the soul, being is better understood as a form in the Aristotelian sense. Being provides the human intellect with the horizon of knowledge, in virtue of its indeterminate *praesentialitas* which can subsequently be determined by particular acts of intellection. We can also say that being as the first object of the intellect expresses a unity of *praesentialitas* whereby every being can be present and then become an object for the intellect.

¹¹⁴ See SOLIANI, *Rosmini e Duns Scotus*.

ABSTRACT

Duns Scotus on the First Object of the Human Intellect. From the ens univocum to the ens possibile

This article reconsiders the evolution of Scotus's position about the first and most adequate object of the human intellect in some of Scotus's works. I also try to demonstrate that only Scotus's last solution to the problem of the first and most adequate object of human intellect is coherent with his epistemology. This solution represents a point of departure from Avicenna's thought and shows the decreasing importance of the univocity of being in the characterization of the first and most adequate object of the human intellect. Finally, I point out that being as the first and adequate object of the human intellect is not a product of a psychological abstraction, but it is present originally in the human memory and intellect as the condition of possibility for human knowledge and science.

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