

DUNS SCOTUS ON THE COMMON NATURE*

Introduction



SCOTUS holds that in each individual there is a principle that accounts for its being the very thing it is and a formally distinct principle that accounts for its being the kind of thing it is; the former is its individual differentia, the latter its common nature.¹ These two principles are not on a par: the common nature is prior to the individual differentia, both independent of it and indifferent to it. When the individual differentia is combined with the common nature, the result is a concrete individual that really differs from all else and really agrees with others of the same kind. The individual differentia and the common nature thereby explain what Scotus takes to stand in need of explanation: the individuality of Socrates on the one hand, the commonalities between Socrates

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 26th International Congress on Medieval Studies, sponsored by the Medieval Institute, held at Western Michigan University 9–12 May 1991. All translations are my own. Scotus's writings may be found in the following editions: (1) Vaticana: *Iohannis Duns Scoti Doctoris Subtilis et Mariani opera omnia*, ed. P. Carolus Baliç et alii, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanae 1950–Vols. I–VII, XVI–XVIII. (2) Wadding-Vivès: *Joannis Duns Scoti Doctoris Subtilis Ordinis Minorum opera omnia*, ed. Luke Wadding, Lyon 1639; republished, with only slight alterations, by L. Vivès, Paris 1891–1895. Vols. I–XXVI. References are to the Vatican edition wherever possible, to the Wadding-Vivès edition otherwise. I follow tradition in referring to Scotus's revised Oxford lectures on Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* as '*Ordinatio*' when the text is given in the Vatican Edition and '*Opus Oxoniense*' when the text is only available in the Wadding-Vivès edition. Square brackets [...] indicate my additions based upon the text; Scotus's later additions to his texts are enclosed within ||§...§||.

¹ Scotus discusses the common nature and the individual differentia at length in four places: (1) *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 1–6 (Vaticana VII 391–494); (2) *Lectura* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 1–6 (Vaticana XVIII 229–293); (3) *Reportatio Parisiensis* IIA d. 12 qq. 5–11 (no edition); (4) *Quaestiones subtilissimae super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VII q. 13 (Wadding-Vivès VII 402–426), hereafter 'QSM'. Scotus's discussion is much the same in (1)–(3), making allowances for the abbreviated form of the lectures. His discussion in (4), although it covers the same topics, is organized differently and may include some difference in doctrine as well. In this article, I shall ignore the differences between these discussions and try to extract their common core, relying for the most part on (1): it is Scotus's most extensive discussion, to my mind the most sophisticated, and it is the direct subject of Ockham's critique (see the following note).

and Plato on the other hand. Yet individuality and commonness seem to be complete opposites. How can anything have two distinct principles that make it, respectively, really individual *and* really common?

Call this *Ockham's Problem*, since it plays a major role in Ockham's critique of Scotus.² Now Scotus does associate different kinds of unity with each principle—real numerical unity with the individual differentia, real less-than-numerical unity with the common nature – but this only casts Ockham's Problem in a new guise: how can anything have both real numerical unity and real less-than-numerical unity? Without further elaboration, this is nothing more than begging the question.

Does Scotus have an answer to Ockham's Problem? I think he does: individuality and commonness do apply to one and the same subject, but only in virtue of that subject being the actuality of a given potentiality—commonness applies in virtue of the potentiality, individuality in virtue of its actualization. In order to see how Scotus's view provides an answer to Ockham's Problem, after some preliminary remarks (§1) we have to take a

² See the critical edition of Ockham's non-political writings: *Guillelmi de Ockham opera philosophica et theologica*, cura Instituti Franciscani Universitatis S. Bonaventurae, moderator S. Brown (edidit Stephanus Brown, adlaborante Gedeone Gàl), S. Bonaventura, N. Y.: impressa Ad Claras Aquas (Italia) 1967–1985. (I adopt the convention of abbreviating the series of Ockham's theological works by 'OT' and his philosophical works by 'OPh'.) Ockham discusses Scotus's views at length in his *Ordinatio* I d. 2 q. 6 (OT II 160–225), where he presents seven arguments that attempt to show Scotus's position to be unacceptable (even granting Scotus the formal distinction). Five of these seven arguments depend on the supposed incompatibility of claiming that the nature is both singular (*i. e.* numerically one) and common (*i. e.* has a real less-than-numerical unity)—hence the name 'Ockham's Problem'. Ockham's first argument, stated at 177.10–19 and explored in 177.20–181.7, argues that Socrates's nature cannot both be denominated numerically one and denominated less-than-numerically one. Ockham's third argument, stated at 184.11–13 and explored in 184.14–189.9, argues that the really distinct natures of Plato and Socrates are thereby each numerically one and hence not common. Ockham's fourth argument, stated at 189.10–14 and explored in 189.15–190.17, argues that if the nature were really distinct from every individual differentia then it would have to be numerically one in itself. Ockham's fifth argument, stated at 190.18–22, and his sixth argument, stated at 190.23–191.4 and explored in 191.5–21, are complementary: the former claims that the individual differentia would be just as communicable as the common nature, the latter that the common nature would be just as singular as the individual differentia. (Ockham's second argument, stated at 181.8–13 and explored in 181.14–184.10, is that there would be as many genera and species as there are individuals—an argument that depends on identifying the numerically distinct common natures in numerically distinct individuals as each being a genus or species. Ockham's seventh argument, stated at 191.22–192.3 and explored in 192.3–20, is *ad hominem*: Scotus would have no way of denying a real univocation between God and creatures.)

closer look at the common nature (§2), the individual differentia (§3), and their combination (§4). We will then be in a position to consider Scotus's answer (§5) and, by way of conclusion, to see how Ockham misconstrued Scotus.

1. Preliminary Remarks

Scotus begins his discussion of the common nature and the individual differentia in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 by asking, in effect, whether his discussion is really necessary—whether there need be a principle that explains why an individual is what it is.³ (Scotus typically formulates the question as whether a material substance is of itself or by its nature a *this*.)⁴ In each case he concludes that there must be such a principle. He offers two arguments for his conclusion. First, if a material substance were necessarily individual, any conception of it as non-individual would be no more than a mistake—but this is false (n. 7 and n. 29). Second, the unity of an individual's nature is real but less than numerical unity, as Scotus proves in seven ways in nn. 11–28, and hence is necessarily not individual of itself (n. 8 and n. 30).⁵

³ The discussions in the *Lectura* and the *Reportatio Parisiensis* closely follow the *Ordinatio*. Scotus's development of the question in QSM VII q. 13 is somewhat different; there he begins by asking whether the *nature* of a material substance is individual of itself or by something extrinsic, first considering five versions of the view that the nature is individuated by something positive that is added to the nature, refuting all these by four general arguments. Only at this point does Scotus raise the possibility that the nature is individual of itself.

⁴ That is, whether a material substance is *de se haec*. This formulation is not very satisfactory, especially in Latin, since it does not distinguish two questions: (1) Is there anything that accounts for the individuality of this individual? (2) Is there anything that accounts for why this individual is this individual rather than that one? The first question asks what makes Socrates an individual rather than (say) a species, while the second question asks why Socrates is Socrates rather than Plato. Scotus confuses (1) and (2), apparently thinking that an answer to (1) must also be an answer to (2). We shall return to this point in discussing the individual differentia in §4 below.

⁵ More exactly, Scotus offers separate proofs of the major and minor premisses of this argument, in n. 9 and n. 10 respectively. The proof of the minor premise is then itself supported by the arguments for the existence of a real less-than-numerical unity. Now Scotus actually says that he proves this in “five or six ways” (*quinque vel sex viis*), but there are seven arguments: (*i*) nn. 11–15; (*ii*) nn. 16–17; (*iii*) n. 18; (*iv*) n. 19; (*v*) nn. 20–22, where n. 22 presents an alternate line of argument; (*vi*) nn. 23–27; (*vii*) n. 28. Arguments that parallel most of these can be found in QSM VII q. 13: for (*i*) see n. 11, 411a–b; for (*ii*) see n. 11, 411b; for (*v*) see n. 11, 411b; for (*vi*), see the first

Scotus's treatment of the question shows that individuality stands in need of explanation, that it cannot be taken as a primitive feature of individuals. Furthermore, he has established this by arguing that an individual's nature is of itself common. Scotus can now recast the problem as one of finding the factor or factors that need to be added to an individual's common nature in order to make it individual. (This is how he initially poses the question in QSM VII q. 13.) The metaphysical question, then, is what narrows down or *contracts* the nature from its intrinsic commonness to individuality in an individual. We can therefore speak of the nature more precisely as either the *uncontracted nature* or the *contracted nature*, and henceforth I shall use this terminology.

The factor that contracts the nature is, by definition, *the individual differentia*.⁶ Scotus's first thesis, then, can be stated as follows:⁷

[S1] The uncontracted nature is not individual of itself, but is made an individual by something else added to it, namely an individual differentia.

According to Scotus in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 2 n. 48, individuality is a matter of being unable to be divided into subjective parts.⁸ That is to say, no 'part' (broadly construed) can be the subject of a true proposition

proof in n. 10, 410b; for (*vi*) see n. 10, 410b–411a.

⁶ Scotus also calls the individual differentia a 'contracting differentia' and, more generally, a 'contractor'. The term 'haecceity' is traditionally used for the individual differentia, but has the inaccurate and misleading connotation that the individual differentia is an abstract quality (similar to, say, rationality). I prefer to avoid the term altogether, especially since there is some question whether it is Scotus's at all.

⁷ There is a complete list of Scotus's theses at the end of the paper, for the sake of convenience.

⁸ Scotus writes (*loc. cit.*): "Yet in the realm of beings there is something unable to be divided into subjective parts—that is, [there is something] to which 'being divided into many parts of which any given one is that thing' is formally incompatible. . . Therefore, the understanding of the question on this subject is: what is it in this stone through which, as by a proximate foundation, 'being divided into many of which any given one is it' is simply incompatible, as there is a proper division of the universal whole into its subjective parts?" The same account is given in QSM VII q. 13 n. 17 (417a): "It should be noted that one calls the *individual*, or *what is numerically one*, what is not divisible into many [parts] and is distinguished from all else according to number. The first part [of this account] is understood such that the division into subjective parts is incompatible with it. . . ." Scotus discusses the narrow and broad interpretations of 'part' in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 nn. 196–197, where he claims that individuals can reasonably be said to be 'parts' of their species. In *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 169 Scotus adds the proviso that 'not being designated as a *this*' is also incompatible with an individual—but this seems a consequence of individuality rather than a constitutive feature of it, so I will not pursue it any further.

where the predicate is the ‘whole’ to which it belongs. A genus can be divided into species as its subjective parts, and a species into individuals as its subjective parts. No part of an individual, however, can be characterized as the individual: Socrates’s hand is not Socrates. Therefore, the individual differentia must contract the nature by preventing any further division into subjective parts.

The remainder of Scotus’s discussion takes up various candidates for the role of individual differentia; he successively rejects the proposals that it is a negation (q. 2), actual existence (q. 3), quantity (q. 4), or matter (q. 5).⁹ We can sum up his results in the following pair of theses:

[S2] The individual differentia is something “positive and intrinsic” to the individual.

[S3] The individual differentia is neither an accident, nor actual existence, nor matter.

With these preliminaries, we can now examine Scotus’s more detailed claims about the common nature, the individual differentia, and the relation between the two, paying special attention to the nature of contraction.

2. The Common Nature

From Scotus’s earlier arguments, described above, we know that there is a real less-than-numerical unity that is suitable to the uncontracted nature:

[S4] There is a real unity that is less than numerical unity.

[S5] Real less-than-numerical unity is appropriate to the uncontracted nature.¹⁰

Yet [S4]–[S5] by themselves do not tell us very much about the ontological standing of the common nature. For this we need to look at Scotus’s own exposition of his doctrine.

Scotus begins explaining the positive content of his claims about the common nature by citing with approval Avicenna’s remark in his *Meta-*

⁹ When Scotus summarizes his results in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 170, he does not refer to quantity but says that the individual differentia cannot be an accident. The discussion in QSM VII q. 13, organized along different lines, explicitly rejects the further proposal that the individual differentia be a collection of accidents.

¹⁰ In *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 n. 34 Scotus gives a more accurate formulation: [S5*] Real less-than-numerical unity is an attribute (*passio*) of the uncontracted nature. Such unity is predicable of the uncontracted nature *per se secundo modo*. (A proposition is true *per se secundo modo* when the subject is contained in the definition of the predicate.) It is a necessary feature of the uncontracted nature, but not directly a part of its essence.

physics V.i (fol. 86va) that “horseness is just horseness—it is of itself neither one nor many, neither universal nor particular” in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 n. 31, and he spells out his reading of this dark saying as follows (nn. 31–32):

I understand [Avicenna’s remark in this way]: “[the nature] is neither of itself one” by a numerical unity, “nor many” by a plurality opposed to that unity; it is “neither universal” actually (namely in the way in which something is universal insofar as it is the object of the intellect), “nor is it particular” of itself.

Indeed, although [the nature] never really exists without some of these [features],¹¹ nevertheless of itself it is not any of them. Rather, [the nature] is naturally prior to all of these [features].

By ‘naturally prior’ Scotus must have essential priority in mind, since he admits that the nature does require some of these features in order to exist. (This is also the natural reading of the ‘of itself’ proviso.) Hence the last claim means that what it is to be a given nature does not include being one or being many, being universal or being particular. Furthermore, it cannot exclude these features, either, since the nature remains the nature when it is contracted and acquires some of these features. In a word, the nature is indifferent to these features: it may have or lack them equally and continue to be a nature. We can summarize these claims in the following thesis:

[S6] The uncontracted nature is naturally prior to being one or many and to being universal or particular.

Thus the uncontracted nature—the nature of itself, as Scotus says—is neither one nor many, neither universal nor particular.

Scotus does not let the matter rest there. He immediately tells us what features the uncontracted nature has (*Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 n. 32):

According to [this] natural priority, [the nature] (*i*) is the what-it-is *per se* of the object of the intellect; (*ii*) is *per se*, as such, is considered by the metaphysician; (*iii*) is expressed by the definition; (*iv*) propositions that are true [*per se*] *primo modo*¹² are true by the ratio of the quiddity taken in this way.

The ‘what-it-is’ (*quod quid est*) is an abbreviation for the essence of a thing, so (*i*) amounts to the claim that the essence of an object of the intellect is the uncontracted nature. Scotus repeats (*ii*)–(*iv*) in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 172: the common nature is one of the subjects taken up in

¹¹ That is, the ‘features’ one or many, universal or particular.

¹² A proposition is true *per se primo modo* when the predicate is contained in the definition of the subject. As Scotus goes on to say, “nothing is said *per se primo modo* of the quiddity except what is included in it essentially, insofar as [the quiddity] is abstracted from all those [features] that are naturally posterior to it” (n. 32).

metaphysics; it is what gets spelled out by a strict Aristotelian definition; it is that which makes claims about something true *per se primo modo*.

What is the ontological status of the uncontracted nature? Scotus has already told us that it cannot exist without being one or many, being universal or particular. Given [S6], the nature's inability to exist as such cannot be due to any essential feature of the nature, but must instead be due to the fact that the uncontracted nature does not meet the metaphysical requirements for real existence. A moment's reflection will show why this is so. The uncontracted nature, as such, is neither one nor many. Hence it is necessarily non-existent as such: one cannot simply add *esse* to it to get an actual thing. The uncontracted nature, as such, is not a merely non-existent object; it is no object at all. Thus we can say:

[S7] The uncontracted nature, as such, necessarily does not exist.

Thus *contraction cannot be a matter of instantiation*—the contracted nature does not 'instantiate' the uncontracted nature; further real features that are not contained in the uncontracted nature must be added to it to produce the contracted nature, much more than mere *esse* (the hallmark of instantiation).

Scotus explains this point in responding to the charge that the common nature is a 'universal in act', when he considers the basic test for universality (*Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 n. 37):¹³

I state that the "universal in act" is that which has some indifferent unity according to which it is itself, as the same, in proximate potency to being said of any suppositum whatsoever. For, according to the Philosopher (*Posterior Analytics* I.iv [73^b26–33]), the universal is what is one in many and of many.

Indeed, nothing in a thing—according to any unity whatsoever—is such that according to that precise unity it be in proximate potency to any suppositum whatsoever in a predication that says 'This is this'. The reason for this is that although *being in some singularity other than that in which it is* is not incompatible with something existing in a thing, nevertheless it cannot be truly said of anything lower-level that 'any given one is it'. This is only possible for numerically the same object actually considered by the intellect—which, as understood, has also the numerical unity of the object, and according to this it is itself, as the same, predicable of every singular by saying '*This is this*.'

Something is universal when it is truly predicable of what it applies to in a

¹³ See QSM VII q. 13 n. 19 419b–420a for a similar account of the "complete universal."

proposition that says what the subject is—roughly, when it is quidditatively predicable of many individuals. Note the strong form of Scotus’s claim here: nothing in an individual passes the test for universality. There are no universals as metaphysical constituents of things. The uncontracted nature, as such, fails the test as well. Universality requires numerically the same object to be predicable of numerically distinct individuals, but the uncontracted nature, as such, is not numerically one, and *a fortiori* is not predicable of numerically distinct individuals.

The nature is bound up with universality, though, as Scotus tells us at the end of this passage. For the nature, insofar as it has *esse* in the understanding, is naturally apt to be quidditatively predicated of many individuals. Hence “the same object actually considered by the intellect,” that is, numerically one concept, “is itself, as the same, predicable of every singular.” Universals are concepts, strictly speaking, but what confers the requisite generality on a concept in order for it to be universal is the presence of the nature in the intellect. Therefore, Scotus draws the following conclusion:¹⁴

[S8] The nature as it has *esse* in the intellect is universal, that is, quidditatively predicable of many individuals.

The nature in itself is not universal—only the nature in the intellect.

Scotus underlines his point with a distinction between universality and commonness. Something is *common* when it is able to be in some other singular than that in which it is, as Scotus says in the passage cited above. Universality is a feature of concepts; commonness is a feature of the nature:

[S9] The uncontracted nature is common.

As Scotus says in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 170, the nature is that by which distinct things formally agree. How and in what way the uncontracted nature is common will depend, in part, on the explanation of contraction. For the moment, we can conclude that contraction is not a matter of instantiation. Indeed, this is precisely the point of Scotus’s distinction between commonness and universality: the nature in itself is common but not universal, and instantiation characterizes the relation between universals and particulars, not natures and the individuals that have them.

¹⁴ Scotus argues in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 nn. 33–34 that universality accrues to the nature *qua* being in the intellect, and that it does not always characterize the nature when it exists in the intellect. Hence the statement of [S8] needs to be modified as follows: [S8*] Universality accrues to the nature insofar as it has *esse* in the intellect. The “primary understanding” of the nature does not include any particular ‘mode of understanding what is understood’, and universality is such a mode.

3. The Individual Differentia

In *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 n. 34, Scotus explicitly states what has been implicit in his discussion all along:

[S10] The uncontracted nature is prior to the individual differentia. He draws the conclusion that “it is not incompatible with [the nature] to be without that contracting [differentia].” The same point is made more sharply in QSM VII q. 13 n. 20 (420b):

Likewise, it is not incompatible with the nature in itself to perhaps be separated from all individual degrees (*ab omnibus gradibus individualibus*), since no contradiction is included in understanding the nature without them. Yet in *esse* it is incompatible with it that it be separated from all—but not that it separated from this one, for it is possible that it be in that one, and conversely.

The nature requires an individual differentia for its *esse*. But there is no particular individual differentia that it requires, and, in fact, being combined with an individual differentia is not essential to the uncontracted nature. Hence the following thesis holds:

[S11] The uncontracted nature is really different when combined with distinct individual differentiae.

The uncontracted nature could, in some sense, be any one of the individuals to which it is contracted.

In *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 176, Scotus proposes to clarify his position by introducing an analogy between the individual differentia and the specific differentia:

To further clarify my solution, [that material substance is individual through some positive beingness¹⁵ *per se* determining the nature to singularity], what that beingness is by which the unity is perfected can be made clear by an analogy to the beingness from which the specific differentia is taken.

The main outlines of the analogy should be clear: just as the species *man* is produced from the genus *animal* by the specific differentia *rationality* supervening upon it, creating a new specific essence from the genus, so too the individual Socrates is produced from the species *man* by the individual differentia supervening upon it, creating a new individual from the species.¹⁶ Indeed, this common functional role of the specific and the indi-

¹⁵ The term ‘beingness’ translates *entitas*, which is the abstract noun coined to correspond to *ens* (‘being’). The English cognate ‘entity’ has a concrete use that is not implied in the Latin term, although it may be, and by Scotus often seems to be, used in a concrete sense—as one might speak of this white patch as “a whiteness.”

¹⁶ The analogy can be misleadingly seductive. Just as the species *rational animal* is

vidual differentia—the production of a ‘new’ unity—is what allows Scotus to consider each a case of contraction: the specific differentia contracts the genus to the species, the individual differentia contracts the species to the individual.

The analogy suggests that contraction is *differentiation*. By ‘differentiation’ here I mean that the relation between the uncontracted nature and the contracted nature is the same relation that holds between a genus and a species, where the (specific) differentia produces the species by supervening upon the genus.

This proposal is tempting, and certainly suggested by the terminology: Scotus does call it the individual *differentia*, after all. But I think temptation is to be resisted here. There are good reasons to deny that the relation between the uncontracted nature and the contracted nature is differentiation, reasons that will become apparent as we explore Scotus’s analogy.

The genus is potential with respect to its species, and it is the specific differentia that actualizes the species (or ‘the specific reality’ as Scotus puts it). A similar point can be made about the species and the individual differentia (n.180):¹⁷

As for the case at hand, the individual reality is analogous to the specific reality, for it is (as it were) an act that determines the reality of the species as though possible and potential.

An individual is therefore a composite of potency and act in some sense. Hence we may add the following thesis:

[S12] The individual differentia actualizes the uncontracted nature, which are thereby related as act and potency.

The sense in which the individual differentia is an ‘act’ of the uncontracted nature is not that of actual existence, since this has been ruled out in [S3].¹⁸

produced from the genus *animal* by the addition of the specific differentia *rationality*, so too one might be led to think that this man is produced from the species *man* by the addition of *thisness*. (Presumably this is the origin of the term ‘*haecceitas*’.) However, *rationality* is unlike the individual differentia insofar as it is the name of an abstract quality that can have several instances, which is not possible in the case of the individual differentia.

¹⁷ Scotus’s most direct statement of this point is found in *Lectura* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 n. 171: “Just as the reality of the genus is in potency to the reality of the [specific] differentia, so too the reality of the nature insofar as it is the nature is in potency to the reality from which the the individual differentia is taken.” The uncontracted nature is in potency to being contracted by the individual differentia.

¹⁸ The same point can be made in another way, namely by pointing out that Scotus accepts non-existent possible individuals. Hence the individual differentia is an actu-

The obvious candidate, of course, is that the individual differentia stands to the uncontracted nature as form to matter—the paradigmatic case of an act-potency combination that produces a unity. Indeed, this candidate is even suggested by an extension of the analogy between the specific differentia and the individual differentia.

However, there are two points at which the analogy between the specific differentia and the individual differentia fails. The first is as follows (n. 180):¹⁹

Yet there is this disanalogy: [the individual reality] is never taken from an added form, but precisely from the ultimate reality of the form.

Scotus reiterates the same point, discussing the individual, in n. 188:

Therefore, this [individual] beingness is neither matter nor form nor composite, insofar as any one of these is the nature. Instead, [the individual beingness] is the ultimate reality of the being that is the matter, or that is the form, or that is the composite.

Individuality is “never taken from an added form,” and it is “neither matter nor form nor composite.” Rather, in each passage Scotus insists that individuality flows from the *actuality* of the object in question, and actuality is not a form. That is all to the good: there is no formal difference between the specific and individual realities – that is, the difference between the uncontracted nature and the contracted nature is not due to a form.²⁰ (If it

ality of the uncontracted nature: it reduces some of the potencies of the uncontracted nature, without thereby necessarily rendering the uncontracted nature an existent.

¹⁹ The same point is made in *Lectura* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 172: “The individual differentiae are taken from the ultimate perfection that is in the thing and in the nature.” The ultimate “perfection” is the final and complete reality of the individual.

²⁰ Here the account in QSM VII q. 13 seems to diverge sharply from the account in the *Ordinatio*, *Lectura*, and *Reportatio Parisiensis*. Scotus repeatedly calls the individual differentia an individual form in QSM VII q. 13 in contexts that are unambiguous—for example, in n. 13 (412b–413a): “From these remarks it can be inferred that the nature is a *this* by means of some substance that is a form and prior as *this stone*—and it is distinguished from another individual by means of the individual form.” Scotus uses the phrase some fourteen times in QSM VII q. 13, each occurrence being in nn. 13–16, the presentation of his own position. One possibility is that Scotus is using the phrase in an idiosyncratic way here: the ‘individual form’ he speaks of is not the individual differentia, but the ordinary substantial form of a composite that has been individualized by the individual differentia. However, this interpretation does not fit the texts, nor Scotus’s clear insistence that the individual form is that by which something is individual. I shall follow the common account Scotus gives in the other works, but it should be noted that the discrepancy between these works and QSM is serious.

were, each individual would be a species in its own right, which is not the case.) Hence we may add the following thesis:

[S13] The individual differentia is not a form (nor the principle of a form).²¹ Note that [S13] entails that the combination of act and potency that constitutes the individual, described in [S12], cannot be a form-matter combination.

It is clear that [S13] blunts the edge of the claim that contraction is a matter of differentiation. It suggests, instead, that contraction is a matter of actualization (as I shall argue in §4). The second point at which the analogy between the specific differentia and the individual differentia fails conclusively establishes that contraction cannot be differentiation (n. 181):

There is another disanalogy in the case at hand. The specific reality constitutes the composite of which it is a part in quidditative esse, since it is itself a certain quidditative beingness, whereas the individual reality is primarily diverse from any quidditative beingness.

Scotus asserts that “the individual reality is primarily diverse from any quidditative reality.” He reiterates this point several times.²² According to standard mediæval terminology, two items are said to *differ* from one another if there is some more general feature that they share, and to be *diverse* otherwise. Coordinate species of a genus, for example, are different, for they have a common genus, whereas the categories themselves are diverse. Therefore, to assert that the individual reality is primarily diverse from any quidditative reality is to say that no general feature univocally applies to individuals and to genera and species—that individuals are completely unlike genera and species.²³ In particular, the individuality of an individual, which is constituted by the individual differentia, positively excludes one of the defining characteristics of ‘quidditative beingness’: to be common to many as a universal (n. 181).

The individual differentia, then, must produce this primary diversity, and hence involve no general or categorial features in itself. Two consequences follow from this. First, the individual differentia does not affect or alter the formal content of the nature at all. Second, there is no way to spell out the content of an individual differentia in general terms; each must be

²¹ By ‘the principle of a form’ I have in mind the relation between, say, *rationality* and *rational*: the former is the principle of the differentia, the latter the actual differentia.

²² See for example n. 192 and n. 197, where Scotus insists that the quidditative beingness present in an individual is the specific beingness it has.

²³ This is not to say that genera and species do not apply to individuals, for they do. But if, as Scotus maintains, genera and species are ultimately conceptual, then the conclusion that individuals are completely unlike genera and species seems well-founded.

thoroughly individual in its own right, and therefore completely different from one another. Scotus explicitly endorses this latter claim in another thesis (n. 186):²⁴

[S14] Individual differentiae are primarily diverse.

Furthermore, from the claim that the individual differentiae involve no general or categorial features, we may conclude:²⁵

[S15] The individual differentia is not quidditative.

In combination with [S14] an important thesis follows:

[S16] Individual differentiae do not fall under the categories.

For Scotus, individual differentiae fall under the heading of what he elsewhere calls ‘ultimate differences’: non-categorial items, inherently diverse, that are combined with categorial items to produce difference and diversity.²⁶ In addition to individual differentiae, the transcendental differences that separate the ten categories from one another and specific differentiae that are irreducibly simple are also ultimate differentiae.

Now [S14]–[S16] entail that the individual differentia does not con-

²⁴ Similar claims about individual differentiae being primarily diverse are made in QSM VII q. 13 n. 18 (418a–b). Furthermore, in *Lectura* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 172 Scotus writes: “Individual differentiae are primarily diverse, not having anything said *in quid* of them (neither ‘being’ nor anything else).” This formulation makes the link to ‘ultimate differentiae’, described in the next paragraph, quite plausible.

²⁵ This thesis seems a trivial consequence of the claim that individual differentiae are not categorial. Of course, they are clearly ‘quidditative’ in the extended sense that they determine something to be an individual, but individuality, as Scotus has asserted above, is not a ‘whatness’ of anything: it is no form. Here too QSM VII q. 13 diverges sharply, since Scotus there says that the individual form belongs to the category of Substance.

²⁶ Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I d. 3 p. 1 q. 3 n. 131: “A differentia is called ‘ultimate’ because it does not have a differentia, since it is not resolved into a quidditative concept and a qualitative [concept], determinable and determining; rather, there is merely a qualitative concept of it, just as the ultimate genus merely has a qualitative concept.” The argument that ultimate differentiae do not include being and fall outside of the categories runs as follows. Suppose an ultimate differentia falls under a given category. Then it has a definition, namely its genus plus a differentia; but this contradicts the definition of “ultimate differentia.” Yet we must either posit ultimate differentia, by an infinite-regress argument, or claim that there are items which are infinitely (metaphysically) complex. For then, given any differentia, we shall always be able to resolve it further into a genus and a differentia. Now circularities are clearly not acceptable here; a circularity would cause the whole system of categories to collapse. While there is nothing, perhaps, metaphysically wrong with supposing that the chain of differentiae is infinite—indeed, it saves the intuition that the categories fundamentally classify all there is—in point of fact it lays Aristotelian science and knowledge to waste. Therefore, ultimate differentiae must be outside of the categorial scheme.

tract the common nature by differentiation. In fact, the consequences of [S14] are even worse. For the fact that individual differentiae are primarily diverse entails that there is no informative general statement about any individual differentia. Scotus seems to treat the individual differentia as a theoretical black box: a given individual differentia is that which produces a given individual from an uncontracted nature, and no more can be said about it.²⁷

It should be noted that Scotus is careful to argue that [S14] does not entail that the individuals that distinct individual differentiae constitute are thereby rendered primarily diverse (nn.184–186). The individual differentiae are impossible, in the sense that only one can be present in combination with the nature at a time, but the presence of the nature that the individual differentiae contract gives the individuals an element of real sameness that allows them to be grouped into species and genera.²⁸

Given that contraction is neither instantiation nor differentiation, and given that we are debarred from making any general statements about the individual differentia, what might contraction be? I have suggested above that I believe contraction to be a type of actualization. But without further elaboration, that does not get us very far. Fortunately, Scotus has some theoretical machinery that can be used at this point to clarify the relation between the nature and the individual differentia.

4. The Common Nature and the Individual Differentia

Scotus says little about the relation between the uncontracted nature and the individual differentia. His most explicit remarks are found in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq.5–6 n. 188:²⁹

²⁷ This does, however, suggest a useful way to think about individual differentiae purely in terms of their function. The individual differentia of Socrates is that which produces the individual Socrates from the common nature man. Hence Socrates's individual differentia is the 'Socratizer', which is primarily diverse from Plato's individual differentia as the 'Platonizer', and so on. This may be why Scotus does not bother to distinguish the two readings of the claim that an individual differentia makes something to be what it is: see Note 5 above.

²⁸ See also *Lectura* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 175, which is much clearer than *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 nn. 184–186.

²⁹ In *Lectura* II d. 3 p. 1 qq.5–6 n. 171 Scotus writes: "Accordingly, just as in the same thing there are diverse formal perfections or formal beingnesses (*e.g.* in whiteness), from one of which the intention of the genus is taken (*e.g.* the intention of color) and a different formal beingness from which the intention of the differentia (of whiteness) is taken, as stated in *Lectura* I—so too in the same thing there is a positive beingness from which the specific nature is taken, and a formally different beingness

The [individual] beingness is neither matter nor form nor composite, insofar as any one of these is the nature. Instead, [the individual beingness] is the ultimate reality of the being that is the matter, or that is the form, or that is the composite. The result is that anything that is common and yet determinable can still be distinguished, no matter how much it may be one thing, into many formally distinct realities, of which this one is formally not that one. This one is formally the beingness of singularity, and that one is formally the beingness of the nature. Nor can these two realities be as thing and thing, in the way in which the reality from which the genus is taken and the reality from which the differentia is taken can be. (The specific reality is taken from the latter [realities].) Instead, in the same [item]—whether in a part or in the whole – they are always formally distinct realities of the same thing.

Scotus therefore holds the following thesis:

[S17] The uncontracted nature and the individual differentia are really the same but formally distinct.

Contrary to many commentators I do not think this tells us very much. In a given individual such as Socrates, [S17] tells us that humanity in Socrates is formally distinct from Socrates's individual differentia (call it the Socratizer), *i. e.* that humanity does not explicitly include the Socratizer and that they are inseparable short of the destruction of Socrates. But we already knew the first of these by [S10], and the second is easily deduced from [S7] and [S12]. Nor does [S17] help us out with the underlying metaphysics, since it is unclear whether Scotus took the formal distinction to commit him to the existence of entities (the so-called 'formalities') above and beyond the things that have them. In his later works he seems to treat the formal distinction as a purely adverbial characterization, a way that things are related but not a thing itself.

Thus [S17] does not provide an answer to the question of how the uncontracted nature and the individual differentia are combined. It is not the appropriate theoretical tool to do so, since by definition a formal distinction explains how things are different, not how they are unified in combination.

There is, however, better theoretical machinery available for the job. I shall argue that Scotus holds the following thesis:

[S18] The contracted nature is an *intrinsic mode* of the uncontracted na-

from which the ultimate individual differentia is taken, which is entirely a this with which division is incompatible in every way." This suggests, but does not say, that the uncontracted nature has a formally distinct beingness from that belonging to the individual differentia.

ture.

Socrates's individual differentia, the Socratizer, modalizes human nature in an individual way, namely as Socrates—or, more exactly, as Socrates's human nature. This individual modalization of the uncontracted nature is diverse from any other such modalization, *e.g.* that brought about by Plato's individual differentia. A contracted nature is just as much a mode of an uncontracted nature as a given intensity of whiteness is a mode of whiteness, or a given amount of heat is a mode of heat. It is no accident that Scotus regularly speaks of an “individual degree” (*gradus individualis*), as in QSM VII q. 13 n. 20 (cited above).

Scotus is not particularly forthcoming about modes, although he does carefully describe the modal distinction in *Ordinatio* I d. 8 p. 1 q. 3 nn. 138–140 (translated in the Appendix to this article). Based on his account of the modal distinction in these paragraphs, there are, I believe, seven reasons to hold [S18].

First, modalization is neither a relation of instantiation nor differentiation, which have already been disqualified as candidates for explaining contraction. The relation between a “whiteness in the tenth grade of intensity” (or ‘whiteness₁₀’) and whiteness itself is not that of instantiation, since whiteness itself could never exist as such: it must always exist as some shade of whiteness. The determinable/determinate relation between a color and its shades rules out such modalization as being a kind of instantiation.³⁰ By the same token, it rules out differentiation; whiteness₁₀ is not a species of whiteness. Apart from the difficulty that if it were there would be an infinite number of coordinate species (assuming the continuity of the color spectrum), it seems clear that a given shade of a color is equally a case of the color itself. There is no *formal* element in whiteness that is affected by different grades of intensity. (The same point could equally be made with regard to heat and degrees of heat.) The relation between a reality, as Scotus terms it, and its intrinsic mode is not a matter of formal differentiation.

Second, it is clear that a reality cannot exist without its intrinsic mode. This follows directly from the previous claim about instantiation. There is no real heat that is not some given degree of heat, no real whiteness that is not whiteness of some given intensity. So too the uncontracted nature cannot exist as such, as stated in [S7], but only exists ‘in’ individuals (*i. e.* through the medium of individuals), which exhaust its being.

³⁰ Note that in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 188, cited at the beginning of §4, Scotus explicitly refers to the uncontracted nature as “common *and yet determinable*” (emphasis mine).

Third, distinct intrinsic modes of a reality seem to be different modes separated by primarily diverse distinguishing factors. That is, *whiteness*₁₀ and *whiteness*₁₇ are not quidditative realities apart from the whiteness that each modalizes, and there is no identifiable factor other than the brute fact of their diversity by which to characterize them as distinct shades of whiteness. Just as Socrates and Plato the individuals they are due to their individual *differentiae*, which are primarily diverse, so too are two shades of whiteness or two degrees of heat.

Fourth, the relation between a reality and its mode is a potency-act relation, one that produces a unity. *Whiteness*₁₀ is an actualization of potencies possessed by whiteness itself: whiteness is able to be *whiteness*₁₀ (or *whiteness*₁₇ for that matter). More exactly, that which modalizes whiteness to be *whiteness*₁₀ actualizes the potencies of whiteness, and *whiteness*₁₀ is an actuality of whiteness. So too the individual *differentia* actualizes the potencies of the uncontracted nature, and the product of this actualization—the contracted nature—is an actuality of the uncontracted nature, as described in [S12]. Furthermore, the result is a unity in the tightest sense possible: the link between a given reality with its potential and the same reality with its potencies actualized is even closer than the unity produced by the union of matter with form (and it is more general as well). *Whiteness*₁₀ is linked to whiteness itself by something very close to identity.

Fifth, despite the suggestion just made, it seems peculiar to characterize the relation between a potency and its corresponding act as ‘identity’. There is some sense in which identity is applicable here—the possible object Socrates is the same as the actual Socrates—but the relation of identity or non-identity seems far more at home on either side of the potency/act division than across it. There are deep reasons for this, having to do with the fact that the distinction between potency and act is a transcendental attribute of being, on a par with (yet distinct from) the division of being into the ten categories—but for now it suffices to note that questions of identity are rather peculiar when applied to a reality and its corresponding intrinsic mode. We shall return to this point in §5 below.

Sixth, while drawing the analogy between the specific *differentia* and the individual *differentia*, in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 179 Scotus says:

... some specific *differentia* has a concept that is not simply-simple (namely one that is taken from the form), whereas another [specific *differentia*] has a concept that is simply-simple ([namely] one that is taken from the ultimate abstraction of the form).

Scotus explains what a ‘simply-simple concept’ is in *Ordinatio* I d. 3 p. 1 qq. 1–2 n. 71:

A ‘simply-simple’ concept is one that is not able to be resolved into many concepts, *e. g.* the concept of ‘being’ or [the concept] of an ultimate differentia. Now I call any given concept ‘simple’, but not simply-simple, that can be conceived by an actual understanding of simple awareness, even though it could be resolved into many concepts that are separately conceivable.

If the concept of an individual were taken from “the last abstraction” of some form (such as the species or the common nature), it would be simply-simple. However, since the individual differentia is an ultimate differentia, it must itself be simply-simple, which entails that the concept of an individual cannot be simply-simple. And this is precisely what Scotus says about the concept of a reality along with its intrinsic mode (*Ordinatio* I d. 8 p. 1 q. 3 n. 138b-d):

When some reality is understood along with its intrinsic mode, the concept is not so simply-simple that the reality cannot be conceived free from the mode—but then the concept of the thing is imperfect. [The reality] can also be conceived under the mode, and then the concept of the thing is perfect. Example: if whiteness were in the tenth grade of intensity, howsoever much it were in every way simple *in re*, it could nevertheless be conceived under the *ratio* of *so-much-whiteness*, and then it would be perfectly conceived by a concept adequate to the thing itself. Alternatively, [whiteness] could be conceived precisely under the *ratio* of *whiteness*, and then it would be conceived by an imperfect concept that lacks the perfection belonging to the thing.

Furthermore, this distinction does *not* hold for the genus and the specific differentia: “the concepts of the genus and of the [specific] differentia require a distinction of realities, not merely of the same reality perfectly and imperfectly conceived” (n. 139c). The case of the genus and the specific differentia cannot be an instance of a modal distinction. Yet we know from the discussion in §3 above that the common nature and the individual differentia are precisely disanalogous to the genus and specific differentia on this score. Hence it is plausible to think that the uncontracted nature and the individual differentia, unlike the genus and the specific differentia, are related as a reality to its intrinsic mode.

Seventh, in the passage just cited, Scotus notes that there are two strikingly different concepts that may be correctly applied to a given reality: a concept of the reality alone, which is ‘imperfect’, and a concept of the reality along with its intrinsic mode, which is ‘perfect’. Scotus immediately proceeds to explicate the imperfection and perfection involved as a matter

of generality and propriety (nn. 138e–139b):

Furthermore, an imperfect concept could be common to this whiteness and to another; a perfect concept would be more proper. Therefore, a distinction is required between (*a*) that from which a common concept is taken, and (*b*) that from which a proper concept is taken—not as a distinction of reality and reality, but as a distinction of a reality and the intrinsic and proper mode of the same. This distinction suffices for having a perfect or an imperfect concept of the same [thing], of which the imperfect [concept] is common and the perfect [concept] proper.

This seems to me to be a clear description of why [S6] and [S8] hold. How can two distinct concepts—the concept proper to the individual, and the concept of the common nature—be derived from one and the same thing? Furthermore, if they are derived from one and the same thing, how can one be proper and the other universal? The answer to both questions is sketched in this passage: the concepts are derived from a thing that is a reality along with its intrinsic mode, a situation that permits the formation of two very different kinds of concepts. Furthermore, as Scotus points out, *the concept of the reality without the intrinsic mode is common* (or, to be more precise, universal). The concept of the uncontracted nature, which is the nature without the individual differentia that produces the intrinsic mode of the nature, is ‘common’, *i. e.* applicable to many objects.

For these reasons, I think we may take [S18] as well-founded. The uncontracted nature is related to the contracted nature as a reality to a modalized reality, where the individual differentia brings about the modalization.³¹

5. Scotus’s Answer to Ockham’s Problem

We can now return to Ockham’s Problem: how it is that real but less-than-numerical unity could be compatible with real numerical unity in what is really one and the same thing. Now the sense in which an individual has a real numerical unity is unproblematic. Socrates is an individual, one in himself and numerically distinct from all else. In what sense does he have a real less-than-numerical unity?

³¹ A further benefit of [S18] is that it provides an explanation for the fact that the individual differentia and the uncontracted nature are formally distinct, as described in [S17]. The formal distinction parallels the link between the uncontracted and contracted natures as a reality and its intrinsic mode: the two can never be separated in reality, not even by Divine Power.

I think the correct answer to this question is that Socrates is a modalized version of the same reality of which Plato is another modalized version. But it will require some work to see how this can be an answer to Ockham's Problem. First, a thesis that seems implicit in the Aristotelian approach:

[S19] An individual is its contracted nature.

From [S18] and [S19] we can directly infer the following thesis:

[S20] An individual is an intrinsic mode of its uncontracted nature.

Now [S20] seems trivially true, a mere consequence of the preceding theses. It is true, I think, but not trivial. The sense in which an individual is a mode of its uncontracted nature is just that an individual is, as it were, an uncontracted nature's way of being actual. The individual is the *actuality* of the uncontracted nature. As such, the individual is its uncontracted nature. But this sense of 'is' crosses the act-potency line, making questions of identity rather peculiar (a fact noted in §4 above).

The important feature of this peculiarity for our purposes is that it blocks transitivity. From the fact that X is potentially φ and potentially ψ , it cannot be inferred that X is both φ and ψ , or that φ and ψ are compossible. Equally, if X is a reality that includes potentiality, and X' is an actuality of X , it does not follow that whatever is attributable to X is attributable to X' , nor conversely. The potentialities possessed by X may include features ruled out by the actuality of X' , and conversely, while something may be X' and *a fortiori* be X as well.

In *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 n. 171, Scotus takes up a version of Ockham's Problem: he raises an objection that turns on the premise that "whatever is in numerically the same [individual]³² is numerically one." His answer to the objection involves precisely the kinds of considerations about potentiality and actuality discussed in the preceding paragraph, which Scotus here couches in terms of denominative predication (nn. 173–175):

It is noted elsewhere (namely in [*Ordinatio* I d. 8 n. 214]) that something can be called 'animate' [in two ways]: (i) denominatively—*e. g.* the body [is called 'animate' denominatively]; (ii) *per se primo modo*—*e. g.* man [is called 'animate' *per se primo modo*]. Thus a surface is called 'white' denominatively [according to (i)], and a white-surface is called 'white' *per se primo modo* [according to (ii)] (since the subject includes the predicate).

Thus I say [in the case at hand] that the potential, which is contracted by the actual, is 'informed' by the actual, and through this

³² I take the addition 'individual' here from Scotus's explicit use of it in n. 173, when repeating the objection in his reply to it.

it is informed by the unity consequent upon that actuality or that act. Thus [the potential] is one by the unity proper to the actual. However, [the potential] is thus *denominatively* one, but in this way it is not of itself one, nor [is it one] [*per se*] *primo modo*, nor [one] through an essential part. . .³³

I therefore grant that whatever is in this stone *is* numerically one—either (i) primarily, (ii) *per se*, (iii) denominatively, [as follows]: (i) ‘primarily’—perhaps as that by which such unity is suitable to the composite; (ii) ‘*per se*’—[as] this stone, of which what is primarily one by this unity is a *per se* part; (iii) ‘merely denominatively’—as the potential that is perfected by this actual, which (as it were) denominatively looks toward its actuality.

The attribution of numerical unity to the uncontracted nature is only a denomination “as the potential” (*viz.* the uncontracted nature) “is perfected by the actual” individual differentia. Socrates is *per se* numerically one; the Socratizer is primarily numerically one; the uncontracted nature is “merely denominatively” numerically one, that is, *numerically one insofar as it is actualized*. However, the uncontracted nature is non-denominatively one by a real less-than-numerical unity, as [S4] maintains. We can capture this as follows:

[S21] The uncontracted nature is merely denominated by real numerical unity.

There is no simple sense in which the uncontracted nature has a real numerical unity. However, the individual does have real numerical unity, as the following theses state:

[S22] The uncontracted nature is denominated ‘numerically one’ only as contracted.

[S23] The contracted nature is *per se* numerically one.

Since it is possible for something to have real less-than-numerical unity *in itself* and to have real numerical unity *merely denominatively*, the transitivity required to get Ockham’s Problem off the ground is blocked: these types of unity do not conflict because they properly apply to different subjects, one of which is the actuality of the other. In some sense, both types of unity

³³ Scotus states this point sharply in *Lectura* II d.3 p.1 qq.5–6 n.177: “And when it is said that it is numerical [unity] on the basis of which the [real less-than-numerical] unity is in [something] that is numerically one—It should be stated that this is true with regard to denominative predication, but not with regard to formal predication. Instead, speaking formally, the unity is different.” Scotus does not have anything further to say about denominative predication in the *Lectura*.

are equally present in the individual, as Scotus himself remarks.³⁴

A final question remains. Given that the nature is always fully contracted in every individual, how is there any basis *a parte rei* for real unity among individuals? Scotus himself gives us the clue in his discussion in the *Ordinatio*. In n. 37 he states that *being in another* is not incompatible with the nature, and in n. 38 and n. 187 he says that *being not-this* is not incompatible with the nature. Furthermore, by [S10] we know that the uncontracted nature is indifferent to individual differentiae: it can equally well be modalized by one as by another. This is what the commonness of the common nature amounts to.

Yet if Scotus's claims of non-incompatibility are to give a ground for a real unity among actual individuals, they cannot simply apply to the uncontracted nature. That would easily fall foul of the objection that it is a mere potential or conceptual commonness, as Ockham charges in his third argument against Scotus. Hence Scotus's claims must apply to the contracted nature. But this too seems to run into a difficulty: if the contracted nature and the individual differentia are really the same and only formally distinct, the contracted nature *cannot* be in another. Furthermore, the content of the 'non-incompatibility' must be something positive, as Ockham remarks in *Ordinatio* I d. 2 q. 6 (OPh II 180.20–23). Does Scotus have a way out of this dilemma?

I think he does, and that his way out depends on his theory of modality.³⁵ Scotus is notorious for introducing a 'non-evident power for opposites' into the analysis of potency and act. To speak graphically, this is a kind of potency that is not "used up" when actualized for one of a pair of opposites. Even when actualized for one of the pair of opposites, it is true to say that there is, at that very moment, a real potency for the other opposite. This is the ultimate ground for saying that an agent "could have done otherwise," but it is not restricted to powers involving free will. I propose that something similar is going on in Scotus's account of real commonness. The actualization of a common nature by an individual differentia does not "use up" the real potencies belonging to the nature, which are retained even while contracted. Just as an agent actually choosing one of a pair of opposites cannot, at that instant, choose the other opposite, but retains a real power to have done so and to be able to do so, so too a nature that is contracted to a given individual cannot metaphysically be contracted to a

³⁴ See, for example, *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 n. 30 and n. 34. Scotus makes the same point in QSM VII q. 13 n. 12 (412a).

³⁵ Warning: highly speculative reconstruction ahead!

different individual, but it retains a real power to have been and to be so contracted.

Socrates's human nature, as contracted, is not and cannot be the contracted nature of another: as contracted, it is always Socrates's humanity, and wherever it exists there Socrates is. Nevertheless, Socrates's contracted human nature retains a real potency to be the contracted nature of another, in the sense that the human nature we now identify as Socrates's could be actualized modally in a different way—by the Platonizer rather than the Socratizer, say, so as to be Plato's contracted nature.³⁶ The interest of this point is that it provides a way of saying that Socrates's contracted nature is the 'same' as Plato's contracted nature, despite the fact that contracted natures are completely individualized by the individual differentiae. Furthermore, the possession of these real potencies is a property of actual things; these potencies provide a certain kind of real unity, though not as tight a unity as numerical unity would be—it is a real unity that is less than numerical unity. Hence Scotus has a way of justifying a real less-than-numerical unity in addition to numerical unity.

Conclusion

Now that we have explored Scotus's position on the common nature and the individual differentia, we are in a position to consider how Ockham misconstrued Scotus—something that is all the more surprising, since when Ockham turns to criticize Scotus's position on the common nature and the individual differentia, in his *Ordinatio* I d.2 q. 6, his procedure is a model of textual scholarship. He sketches a position, and then states his intention to prove that it is Scotus's by careful citation (OT II 161.2–10):

It is said, as regards this question, that in a thing outside the soul the nature is really the same as the differentia contracting it to a determinate individual, yet formally distinct [from it]. And this [nature] of itself is neither universal nor particular, but rather it is incompletely universal in the thing and completely [universal] according to its being in the understanding.

And since that view is, I believe, the view of the Subtle Doctor, who excelled other [philosophers] in the subtlety of his judgment, I thus wish to set forth distinctly here that whole view (which he put forward scattered in different passages), not changing his own

³⁶ There is a genuine, though covert, appeal to identity here: Socrates's contracted nature could be Plato's while Plato remains Plato. It is a true but trivial interpretation that Socrates's contracted nature could be Plato's, if Plato were to be Socrates.

words that he puts forward in different passages.

And so he does: Ockham devotes the next twelve pages to a recital of Scotus's arguments for the existence of a common nature with real less-than-numerical unity and for the individual differentia, liberally extracted from Scotus's discussions in *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 q. 1 and qq. 5–6. He states most of Scotus's theses with great accuracy and acumen.³⁷ Yet despite these elaborate precautions, he nevertheless misconstrues Scotus.

Ockham's misconstrual of Scotus is evident even in his brief characterization of it cited above: the nature is only 'incompletely universal' in the sense that it is the ground for formulating a universal concept. But in that sense, so is the individual as a whole. Granting this point, it is clear that the ground has shifted under Ockham's feet: both he and Scotus can agree that there is no real universality. Scotus, however, maintains that there is real commonness. Presumably Ockham would continue to disagree on this score, however, since it is *prima facie* a violation of his principle that only individuals exist. Whether it is more than a *prima facie* violation depends on the explanation of contraction. And here again Ockham gets Scotus wrong, for he does not recognize [S12], much less [S18]–[S20]. These theses are the key to explaining contraction as a kind of actualization, which itself provides a way of showing how to avoid Ockham's Problem in [S21]–[S23]. In place of the latter Ockham offers two mistaken theses:³⁸

The common nature is not that which is immediately denominated by any given real unity. [164.3–4]

The common nature is, nevertheless, numerically one. [164.4]

These formulations are all the more surprising in that Ockham cites verbatim Scotus's account of denomination, from *Ordinatio* II d. 3 p. 1 qq. 5–6 nn. 173–175 (cited above), in his *Ordinatio* I d. 2 q. 6 (OT II 164.6–165.9).

Ockham is certainly one of the best critics a defender of Scotus could have to sharpen his wits on. That I accuse Ockham of misconstruing Scotus is no slight to Ockham: Scotus's position is sophisticated and complex, and there is much in Ockham's particular criticisms that seem to me to be of

³⁷ Ockham correctly formulates the following theses in his survey of Scotus's position in his *Ordinatio* I d. 2 q. 6: [S1] at 161.19, [S2] at 162.1–2, [S3] at 161.19–162.1, [S4] at 161.11–12, [S5] at 161.13, [S6] at 163.6–8 and 164.2, [S8] at 165.11–12, [S9] at 165.12–13, [S10] at 162.2–3 and 163.5, [S11] at 163.12–18, [S15] at 163.4, [S17] at 163.10–11.

³⁸ Ockham's formulation of the first of these two mistaken theses is rather puzzling, since he puts it as a matter of 'immediate denomination'. There is a sense, I suppose, in which any application of a name to a thing is a case of denomination, in which case the uncontracted nature is certainly not immediately denominated by real numerical unity. But to classify the univocal application of a term to a subject together with denomination is misleading at best and a piece of confusion at worst.

great value. Yet Scotus earned his honorific title of the *Doctor subtilis*, and it seems to me that he is entitled to keep it, even after Ockham's attempt to prove him wrong.

Scotus's Theses

- [S1] The uncontracted nature is not individual of itself, but is made an individual by something else added to it, namely an individual differentia.
- [S2] The individual differentia is something positive and intrinsic to the individual.
- [S3] The individual differentia is neither an accident, nor actual existence, nor matter.
- [S4] There is a real unity that is less than numerical unity.
- [S5] Real less-than-numerical unity is appropriate to the uncontracted nature.
- [S6] The uncontracted nature is naturally prior to being one or many and to being universal or particular.
- [S7] The uncontracted nature, as such, necessarily does not exist.
- [S8] The nature as it has *esse* in the intellect is universal, that is, quidditatively predicabile of many individuals.
- [S9] The uncontracted nature is common.
- [S10] The uncontracted nature is prior to the individual differentia.
- [S11] The uncontracted nature is really different when combined with distinct individual differentiae.
- [S12] The individual differentia actualizes the uncontracted nature, which are thereby related as act and potency.
- [S13] The individual differentia is not a form (nor the principle of a form).
- [S14] Individual differentiae are primarily diverse.
- [S15] The individual differentia is not quidditative.
- [S16] Individual differentiae do not fall under the categories.
- [S17] The uncontracted nature and the individual differentia are really the same but formally distinct.
- [S18] The contracted nature is an *intrinsic mode* of the uncontracted nature.
- [S19] An individual is its contracted nature.
- [S20] An individual is an intrinsic mode of its uncontracted nature.
- [S21] The uncontracted nature is merely denominated by real numerical unity.
- [S22] The uncontracted nature is denominated 'numerically one' only as contracted.
- [S23] The contracted nature is *per se* numerically one.

Appendix

Duns Scotus:

Ordinatio I d. 8 p. 1 q. 3 nn. 138–140

[The Modal Distinction]

[138a] ... I answer [as follows].

[138b] When some reality is understood along with its intrinsic mode, the concept is not so simply-simple (*simpliciter simplex*) that the reality cannot be conceived free from the mode—but then the concept of the thing is imperfect.

[138c] [The reality] can also be conceived under the mode, and then the concept of the thing is perfect.

[138d] Example: if whiteness were in the tenth grade of intensity, howsoever much it were in every way simple *in re*, it could nevertheless be conceived under the *ratio* of *so-much-whiteness*, and then it would be perfectly conceived by a concept adequate to the thing itself. Alternatively, [whiteness] could be conceived precisely under the *ratio* of *whiteness*, and then it would be conceived by an imperfect concept that lacks the perfection belonging to the thing.

[138e] Furthermore, an imperfect concept could be common to this whiteness and to another; a perfect concept would be proper.

[139a] Therefore, a distinction is required between:

- (a) that from which a common concept is taken
- (b) that from which a proper concept is taken

—not as a distinction of reality and reality, but as a distinction of a reality and the intrinsic and proper mode of the same.

[139b] This distinction suffices for having a perfect or an imperfect concept of the same [thing], of which the imperfect [concept] is common and the perfect [concept] proper.

[139c] But the concepts of the genus and of the [specific] differentia require a distinction of realities, not merely of the same reality perfectly and imperfectly conceived.

[140a] The [distinction] can be set forth [as follows].

[140b] If we were to postulate that some intellect is perfectly moved by color to understand the reality of color and the reality of the differentia, [then] howsoever much [the intellect] has a perfect concept that is adequate to the concept of the first reality, it does not have in this a concept of the reality from which the differentia is taken, nor conversely. Instead, it has here two formal objects (*duo obiecta formalia*), which are naturally apt to terminate

distinct proper concepts.

[140c] If, however, there were in fact only the distinction *in re* as [a distinction] of a reality and its intrinsic mode, the intellect could not have a proper concept of that reality and not have the concept of the intrinsic mode of the thing—§at least as of the mode under which it is conceived, though that mode is not conceived, just as ‘conceived about singularity and the mode under which it is conceived’ is said elsewhere [in *Ordinatio* I d. 2 p. 1 q. 3 n. 183 (Vaticana II 237–238)] §—but in that perfect concept it would have one object adequate to it, namely *the thing under the mode*.