Love, Power and Consistency: Scotus’ Doctrines of God’s Power, Contingent Creation, Induction and Natural Law

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Abstract I first examine John Duns Scotus’ view of contingency, pure possibility, and created possibilities, and his version of the celebrated distinction between ordained and absolute power. Scotus’ views on ethical natural law and his account of induction are characterised, and their dependence on the preceding doctrines detailed. I argue that there is an inconsistency in his treatments of the problem of induction and ethical natural law. Both proceed with God’s contingently willed creation of a given order of laws, which can be revoked and replaced with a new order of laws. In the case of ethical natural law God promulgated the Decalogue, for example; in the case of nature, there are physical laws that can be known by induction. Scotus exalts the freedom of God and the mutability of ethical natural law in order to explain exceptions to it disclosed by revelation (for example, the Old Testament command to Abraham to kill Isaac). Yet he treats ethical natural laws as (mostly) not universal and immutable. In contrast, he holds that we can arrive at knowledge of the universal and immutable laws of nature, except for those regularities that result from free will. Finally, I present several ways of characterising this tension between Scotus’ doctrines.

Keywords John Duns Scotus · Natural law · Power of God · Contingency · Transubstantiation · Induction

Introduction

Scotus is notable for developing a radical, unqualified, and emphatic conception of the contingency of creation and the absolute power of a free, loving God. His doctrine of creation is that the world could have been otherwise in such a way that
any specific part of it might not have existed. No separable part requires any other part to exist, unless we think of their connection as itself a feature of some ordering of the world—a feature that could itself have been otherwise. This view of the world’s contingency is the cornerstone of his theology, and underpins his more distinctive positions. In this paper I explore Scotus’ view of contingency. I first examine his account of pure possibility, then of created possibilities; I next consider his account of the contingency of creation itself, and the celebrated distinction between ordained and absolute power. This expository sequence brings out the ‘logic’ of Scotus’ position, enabling the analysis of some particular vexed questions in a final section.

An initial problem arises with Scotus’ arguments concerning contingency. His doctrine of created contingency is dependent on creation ex nihilo: at least for its illustration, if not for its proof. It is therefore a body of theory that requires, and presupposes, revealed doctrine. At best it requires a porous boundary between philosophy and theology. While created contingency may be admissible in mitigation against the charge (associated with the Radical Orthodoxy theorists) that Scotus precipitated a pernicious autonomy of philosophy, in contrast to its traditional subordination to theology (Vanhoozer 2003, 21; Milbank 1997, 45; Milbank et al. 1999, 5–6), it is still awkwardly accommodated as philosophy per se.

A second problem is that Scotus’ treatment of moral quasi-natural law precepts (e.g. the second table of the Decalogue) is strangely at odds with his treatment of physical laws. This is despite both treatments presupposing the same background theories of possibility, contingent creation, and a freely loving God. I argue that Scotus’ applications of his theory of possibility and contingent creation in the two realms are inconsistent.

Pure Possibility and Created Possibilities

Scotus’ account of the contingency of creation is best set in the context of his general theory of possibility. His account of the field of possibilities that God knows

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1 In contrast to earlier scholastics such as Aquinas, Scotus directly applied his conception of contingency to analyse the composition of created things as a 'tool' of analysis. For example, in Aquinas the site of contingency within creation is the sublunar world, with the human soul, angelic essences, and God being unable to go out of existence by virtue of a necessity intrinsic to their nature (Galber 2004). As Galber puts it: "...Aquinas separated his treatment of the logically possible, which he defined in terms of what God might will, from his treatment of contingent beings, which he argued arose within the created order as the result of secondary causes that sometimes failed in their causal efficacy. However, Aquinas did not subject either contingency or necessity to speculative analysis. In his view, the logical possibilities of God’s will ultimately lay beyond human fathoming. Moreover, while the existence of contingent beings requires explanation, they were not in themselves very interesting theologically because God’s direct causal activity in creating and sustaining the world functioned perfectly, thus necessarily and not contingently. Speculation about counterfactual possibilities was not of much theological point to Aquinas" (Galber 2004, 113). This is a result of his Neoplatonic conception of providence as a plenitude: "in governing the world, divine providence actualises all the appropriate grades of being by preparing necessary causes for some things, which are then necessary, and by preparing contingent causes for other things, which are then contingent. The principle of Plenitude thus operates relative to the particular order God has chosen, where it guarantees the presence of both necessary and contingent causes for the measure of perfection appropriate to God’s particular creation" (Galber 2004, 117–118). The literature on Aquinas, plenitude, and grades of being is abundant; Oliva Blanchette provides a good systematic survey (Blanchette 1992).

2 Oord, B. K. I, D. 45, q. 1, p. 359; q. 1, I, p. 10, n. 1, where “London” Scotus references will be to the modern, Civitas Latina: Typos Poly nineteenth-century Vivés édition: 0 (1891–1895), itself a modern reprint.

3 Note that for Scotus there is no incompatibility in his scheme, as C when reading Scotus and can work incompatibility are effectively

4 On structural instants in Scotus’
and can choose to actualise is the background for his explanation of God's contingent creations. He explains the creative possibilities by distinguishing two aspects of the status of possible things: as dependent on God, and as autonomous with respect to God. Possible things are intrinsically so (i.e. part of the concept of a thing is that it is possible). There is also a causal dimension to possibility: what is possible is what God could create, and creatableness determines possibility.

These two aspects of how something is possible are best elucidated in Scotus' description of how something is not possible. Two possibilia may not be formally possible at the same time (for example, simultaneous roundness and squareness in an object) because they are incompatible natures. This incompatibility of the two obtains independent of whether there is some causal power that could bring either one of them singly into existence. In addition to this formal incompatibility, there is causal incompatibility:

'Simply impossible' includes the incompatibles, which are incompatible because of their formal states [formalibus], and on this account they are also principiatively [i.e., causally] incompatibile... The incompatibility which two things have, they have formally from their own natures. They are also incompatibile in another way (i.e., principiatively) on account of what produced them.\(^2\)

Some incompatibles things are so formally,\(^3\) by virtue of their being intrinsically incompatible; on the other hand, causal (or in Scotus' terms 'principiatively', i.e. 'concerning the principle of') incompatibility is a matter of things being jointly impossible to bring about, even for God. Two possibilia might be formally incompatible, but causally incompatible for a given agent, due to the limits of that agent's power.

On the basis of this distinction between formal and causal incompatibility, Scotus describes a process by which two things come to be conceived and recognised as incompatible by God. This analysis is set in terms of a progression of steps within the divine mind, of 'structural instants'.\(^4\) These were an innovation in theology associated with Scotus, and were contested as violating the divine simplicity and as introducing something akin to temporal 'stages' in God. Yet analysis in terms of structural instants is one of his most important conceptual tools, allowing him to get to the root of issues of divinity, instead of merely stopping at a brute theological assertion that 'God does it'.

\(^2\) Ord.Bk. I, 243, q.1, f.16, p.359. My referencing for Scotus is in this style: Lect/Ord.Bk._D._(pt._) q._, f._, p._, where 'Lect.' is Lectura and 'Ord.' is Ordinatio; a unique quasidio is numbered as q.1. All Scotus references will be to the modern critical edition of his various Sentences commentaries: Opera omnia, Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1959-, unless otherwise marked. There is also the nineteenth century Vivès edition: Opera omnia: Edito nova lucis editione Bruxelli, Paris: L. Vivès (1891–1899), itself a modern reprint of the Wadding edition (1639). All translations from Scotus are my own.

\(^3\) Note that for Scotus there is strictly no intrinsically impossible thing; impossibility amounts to incompatibility in his scheme, as Calvin Normore (1996, 164–165) observes. This is to be borne in mind when reading Scotus and commentary on Scotus, since for him the terms impossibility and incompatibility are often effectively interchangeable.

The sequence of structural instants goes as follows. God first produces all possible things in his intellect as possible beings, and this range of entities (for example, redness, whiteness, being a rose, etc.) all has intelligible being. These are, as it were, the ‘atoms of possibility’, any one of which could exist. God recognises that some of these entities are formally incomposable—they cannot exist simultaneously, nor could a third thing be produced from them together. The incompossibilities are formally due to the relationships between the two possible entities. That is, they are impossible on account of the things themselves, independent of God (Hoffmann 2009, 379; for the nature of incompatibility in relation to the divine intellect, see his notes 4 and 5). But there is also a dimension of their incomposibility that is dependent on God. The incompossibilities are causally incomposable because no agent, including God, could bring them into real existence. Asking whether God produces their incomposibility is, as Hoffmann has rightly noted, an ill-considered question, and goes beyond what I need in elucidating Scoto’s view on contingency.

This range of possible beings as recognised by the divine mind is the basis of God’s power to create; or more stringently, it establishes the collections of things that are within the divine power. This allows for Scoto to account for that fourteenth century distinction with which he is associated: that is, the distinction between the absolute and ordained power of God (Courtenay 1984, 253–254). As we will see, the force of Scoto’s distinction between the absolute and the ordained power of God lies in whether we consider that two things can be composable in the abstract, and thus within the absolute power of God (because he can create all composites, and all created things are composable), or whether we consider God’s range of restricted possibilities relative to some given thing or collection of things being already established distinction between logical powers of de Leecq (1998), 91–96. Indeed, of it could underwrite common distinction between logical and

**Contingency of Creation**

Scoto defends an ‘official’ position I spell out below. Despite the contingency of created things as an original, it is based on how integral totality. The second de dictio will appear in new forms. Scoto’s official position on cannot be the conclusion of a cannot be demonstrated because argues for this self-evident state a priori that the world is contin of which one could construct a prove that something is necessary but one cannot establish that is necessary.

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5 Ord. Bk. 1, D. 43, q. 1, §16–7, pp. 359–360. It is not exactly clear what sort of existence ‘possible beings’ have as independent from ‘intelligible beings’—that is, the beings as understood in the divine intellect. Noreore (1996, 167–168) suggests that possible beings depend structurally on their recognition in the divine intellect. Siro Knautila (1996, 139–140) holds that the possibilities are not grounded in any reality, but ‘only belong to the non-existent preconditions of thinking and being, including the thinking and existence of the divine entity’. He also describes the preconditions as *transcendent* conditions. This strikes me as an undue Kantianisation of Scoto’s position. The kernel of truth in Knautila’s thesis is put best by Tobias Hoffmann: ‘...what God’s intellect produces is the edenic nature, in which possibility is inherent. The edenic nature can be considered a criterion of its own possibility only insofar as God cannot conceive of any edenic nature that is conceivable and thus he cannot produce the possibility of something which is intrinsically impossible’ (Hoffmann 2009, 379).

6 Faberius Mondadori gives a good account of Scoto’s position with regard to what we might call a Euclidean fork: if God discovers what is possible, he is not all-powerful; if he creates the limits on what is possible, then he is capable of caprice, because possibility itself is arbitrarily grounded in the divine will. Mondadori summarises Scoto’s avoidance of this sort of fork as follows: ‘...possibilita sunt as objects of discovery: not of pure discovery, however, since their ontological status is bestowed on them by the divine intellect, and, in this respect at least, they qualify as objects of invention (but not pure invention, since their modal and formal status is morally—as well as formally—indepent of the divine intellect)’ (Mondadori 2004, 323–324).


8 A corollary of God’s generating all possible things in this way is that we should not think of impossible being in the same way as we would think of God’s own being, because impossibility is reducible to incompatibility. Incompatibility is relational, not a characteristic of the ‘atoms of possibility’ themselves, whereas necessary being is a characteristic of God himself. See Ord. Bk. 1, D. 43, q. 1, §18, p. 360.

9 Ord. Bk. 1, D. 8, q. 1, pp. 165.


11 The first part of this claim (that one cannot exist) is visible in, and the various versions of Sent. Ord. I, (semi) critical edition of Wolter (1966), there is a contingent nature, than some (p. 42). If there is an effect, there is a first must be uncaused (Wolter 1966, §1.16 existent) (Wolter 1966, §1.3.21–2, pp. 53 §1.23.3–26, pp. 54–55).

The latter and more interesting idea the basis of a necessary existent is a fails not follow from a thing’s having a non necessary cause, or it could be a free, which will cause what is produced immediately necessarily, such that no contingent can be a free, a necessary, and also Ord. B length for this position that one cannot Scoto reconciles the notion of an existent, and the contingency of quasi-determinate though contingent will that causal agent, which can then cause causality, and naturally necessitated could be otherwise, and it makes no sense in this system. On the state of will (for an explanation would be in a kind of §1, ¶299–300, p. 313–314.)
things being already established as existing. The distinction also corresponds to a
distinction between logical possibility and real possibility, as discussed by Ria van
delecq (1998), 91–96. Indeed, part of the interest of Scoto’s system is that elements
of it could underwrite commonplaces of our philosophical ‘toolbox’, such as the
distinction between logical and real possibility.

Contingency of Creation

Scoto defends an ‘official’ position that the contingency of things is self-evident, which
I spell out below. Despite this self-evidence, two other considerations for the
contingency of created things can be discerned in his writings. The first, a merovalogical
consideration, is based on how the parts of the universe constitute a cosmos, an
integral totality. The second derives from the status of God as a choosing, loving,
willing agent. Such personal agency, argues Scoto, implies contingency.

Scoto’s official position on contingency is that the contingent status of creation
cannot be the conclusion of an Aristotelian demonstration, but is self-evident. It
cannot be demonstrated because it cannot be derived from other propositions. He
argues for this self-evident status by exclusion of the alternatives. One cannot prove
a priori that the world is contingent, nor is there any fact more obvious on the basis
of which one could construct an argument that the world is contingent. One could
prove that something is necessary were one to establish that something is contingent,
but one cannot establish that something is contingent on the basis that something is
necessary.11

11 The first part of this claim (that one can prove that the existence of a necessary existent can be proved
from a contingent existent) is visible in Scoto’s proofs for the existence of God in the De Primo Principio
and the various versions of Sent. Ord. Bk. 1, D. 2. I refer to Scoto’s De Primo Principio, in the best (but
semi) critical edition of Wolter (1966), giving the section numbers and pages. Scoto argues as follows. If
there is a contingent nature, then some nature among beings can produce an effect (Wolter 1966, q. 4–3.5,
p. 42). If there is an effect, there is a first efficient cause (Wolter 1966, q. 7–3.15, pp. 44–50). A first cause
must be uncaused (Wolter 1966, q. 16–3.17, p. 50, q. 5.18, pp. 50–51). An uncaused thing is a necessary
existent (Wolter 1966, q. 21–3.22, pp. 52–54), and there is only one necessary existent thing (Wolter 1966,
q. 23–3.25, pp. 54–58).

The latter and more interesting claim (that we cannot prove the existence of a contingent existent on
the basis of a necessary existent) is fleshed out in Sent. Bk. 1, D. 8, and Lect. Bk. 1, D. 39. Crucially, it does
not follow from a thing’s having a necessary existence that it must cause necessarily. It could be a natural,
necessary cause, or it could be a free, willing and contingent cause. If a first cause causes by necessity, it
will cause what it produced immediately by necessity. And that second thing will produce its effects
necessarily, such that no contingent causality can occur in the chain of causes (Ord. Bk. 1, D. 8, pt. 2, q. 1,
qv. 281–282, p. 313–314, and also Ord. Bk. 1, D. 2, q. 1–2, q. 79–88, q. 176–180). He produces arguments at
length for this position that one cannot have contingent effects from a thing that causes of necessity.
Scoto recovers the connection of necessary causes and necessary effects, God’s having a necessary
existence, and the contingency of creation as follows. God as the first principle has necessary being, but a
determinate though contingent will that could be otherwise. The will of God allows for a first contingent
causal agent, which can then cause contingent effects. The result is a dualism between wills and willed
causality, and naturally necessitated determined causality, where the will has a contingent state, that
could be otherwise, and it makes no sense to question further why it is one way rather than another; it is a brute
fact in his system. On the state of will as being inexplicable and certain inquiries are just therefore otiose
(for an explanation would be a kind of reason, which would be determinative), see Ord. Bk. 1, D. 8, pt. 2,
q. 1, qv. 299–300, p. 313–314.
Scotus' merology makes a good contrast to theologies of Neoplatonic exuitus-reditus, divine theophany, participation, and similitude, which one finds in earlier thinkers like Bonaventure and Aquinas, and which have recently been the object of hankering in some contemporary religious philosophies—for example, the radical orthodox school (Milbank and Pickstock 2001). It is also a rare instance of Scotus giving a view of the relationship between God and creation, considered as a 'whole universe' along with its constituents. The context is Scotus' discussion of the conventional scholastic position that there is a real relation from creation to God but not vice versa. Scotus argues that there cannot be a real 'directed' relation of God to the world because such a relation would compromise the immutability and simplicity of God. When spelling out this account of relations, he remarks on the unity of the world as a whole, and the contingency of its parts vis-à-vis that unified whole. The contingent relation of parts to whole is in contrast to the lack of contingency in God, and this difference is at the crux of Scotus' picture.

Scotus argues that every created thing has a potential to be unified with all other created things, to constitute jointly the one, singular universe. This potentiality is dependent upon the relation of part to whole. Every limited and bounded thing is a part of the whole; it has a real relation of this sort to the whole, but God cannot enter into any such relation, because he is unbounded, unlimited, and not properly speaking a part of the universe:

I say that just as a thing is said to be a part of some whole, so that thing is said to be a potential with respect to that whole, and to the unity it might have with that whole. Now, because of its unity of order the universe is indeed a whole. Therefore, whatever is a part of the universe is said to be a potential with respect to the unity of the entire universe. But every limited thing is a part of the universe; therefore, every limited thing is in potentiality with respect to its unity with the universe, and every single limited thing, inasmuch as it has a connection (through either causality or eminence) with some other part of the universe, is in potentiality with respect to the unity of the whole universe. So a relation can be founded on that [limited thing], even though there be no dependence of either thing on the other. This relation is not based on a part's being inclined toward or dependent on another; it is based rather on one part of the universe having some unity with another part through pre-eminence or causality, and the real relation follows from their natures. But neither God (who is unlimited) nor his action is a part of the universe, or in potentiality with respect to the unity of the entire universe. Therefore he does not have a real relation to anything in the universe. 

Because God is not a part of the universe, he does not have potential, and unlike the parts of the universe he is not contingent. The contingency of creation can be cast in terms of a contrast between the production of created things in potency to form part of a whole on the one hand and God as a being without limit on the other.

12 For an overview of Scotus' conception of different kinds of unity in relation to substances and accidents, see Richard Cross (1998, chapters 5 and 6).

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Every part of the universe must have a continual possibility of being (or of not being) a part of the universe, and is thus contingent.

As an important implication of this picture, it is clear that the world cannot be necessary as a whole while having contingent parts, because in terms of the mereological part-whole relation, the whole is merely an aggregate of its parts. There is a sort of atomism of the parts that constitute the world, which is a counterpart of the atomism about possible beings. Indeed, given that the created world is made up of chosen and actualised possibilia, the created aggregate and its counterpart possible aggregate will be congruent, homomorphic, and ‘mappable’.

Now, Scotus does not have a reductionist program for the categories comparable to Ockham’s; for Scotus, relations are real beings. Relations are potential parts of the universe, and accordingly they are contingent. The view that relations are just as contingent as their created relata allows Scotus to analyse created things, in their relation to one another, as contingent at an ultimate level, while recognising that there can be orderings or patterns of imposed necessary-and-sufficient conditions between things. This picture of created contingent things with contingent interrelations underwrites the distinction between absolute and ordained power (discussed below), and trumps the putative absolute necessity of natural causation.

Note that this account of parts in contingent potential to the whole is the more profound picture of the world in comparison with the apparently necessitated order of nature. For Scotus, there is no simple necessary natural connection between two things that stand in natural causal relation, despite their being elements in a network of causal relationships. Any imputed necessities in nature are merely so by qualification, but they are not as such part of the world:

... [A:] There is no natural connection of any cause to a thing caused by necessity without qualification [simpliciter] in creatures. [B:] Nor does any secondary cause produce its effect naturally or by necessity without qualification, but it only causes in a qualified way [secundum quid]. The first part of this claim [i.e., A] is apparent, because every single thing depends on a relation [habitudine] of first cause [i.e., God] to that caused thing. Similarly, no secondary cause produces an effect except with the first cause co-causing [concursante] that effect. This co- causality [of God] is naturally prior to the proximate cause. Yet that first cause only causes contingently. Therefore the secondary cause also causes contingently, because it depends on the causation of the first cause, which is contingent in an unqualified way. The second part [of this claim, i.e., B], namely about the qualified necessity [of secondary causes], is clear, because many natural causes, in their being considered as causes [quantum est ex parte earum], cannot fail to cause their effects. Therefore the necessity [of their causation] is only a necessity with qualification (as far we consider them as causes) and is not an absolute necessity. In this way, a fire, when we consider it of itself as a cause [quantum est ex parte sui] cannot fail to cause, yet it cannot produce heat considered absolutely, when God does not cooperate in causing it to heat. This possibility

14 For a discussion of Scotus’ strongly realist interpretation of the categories, including relation, their extra-mental existence, and their non-reducibility to each other, see G. Pini (2005, 64-65, 72, 79-83).
of failure to heat is obvious, as it was in the case of the three boys in the furnace.15

The idea is that natural causes require the cooperation of God as a primary cause. Even if there is a qualified necessity when we consider a cause in itself (for example, that fire must heat), this is only a qualified necessity. That the nature of that necessitation is qualified and not absolute is evident in those cases where it fails, as in the case of miracles.

In addition to his moralistic picture and his view that contingency is self-evident, Scotus also offers an account of contingency in relation to its source in God. God's condition, simply described, is that he wills contingently because there is no prior cause to his will that could determine it.16 Scotus locates contingency in the will of God by excluding the alternatives. Contingency cannot be due to the intellect of God, because God cognises everything naturally and necessarily. Were his intellect the source of the world by itself, creation would be necessitated; that is, it would be an emanation of the divine intellect. God's understanding of possible beings is a speculative knowledge and not a practical knowledge—God knows possible beings as things that could be made, not things that are to be made.17 So creation is not something that had to be done.

Scotus' model of God's will is supported by, and modelled on, comparison with the human will. He notes that at any one time we might will one action or its opposite. For example, at any given moment I can will either to love or to hate (apathy complications notwithstanding), even if I can never do both simultaneously.

To see how the divine will is a cause of contingency, we should first see how our own will is a cause of something contingent, when we consider it as a will. Our will is free regarding opposite acts (like willing or not willing, and loving and hating). Second we should notice that it is free... regarding opposite acts as means to ends [mediantibus actibus oppositis], and third, it is free regarding the effects it produces, either directly or by moving other executive potencies to produce them.18

We are free regarding a choice of opposing acts, choices of means to ends, and the effects of our will. This ability at any time to will one thing or its opposite is a perfection common to both humans and God, described in the secondary literature as the synchronic contingency of the will (Beck 1998, 127–129; Knuuttila 1981a, 441–445; Knuuttila 1981b, 163–257). But our will also has an imperfection that Scotus does not want to attribute to God. That is, we are receptive to new possibilities as a result of a series of changing occurrences across time (entailing a change of our states, and thus our mutability), effecting changes in what we might will.19

The respectively perfect (simultaneous) and imperfect (mutable) ways in which our will is contingent correspond to the two ways in which our willed choice can be replaced by its opposite: to have the power to will the opposite possibility of the will. To be used to analyse sentences black at a later time.20 This is, it assumes a will like any contrary or contradictory state is our mundane and banal we can do something because we exist.

Scotus notes that this sort of certain states of will that lack might be alternately (or alter) possibilities that exist before it only on the basis of faith. It exist is true before anything has to assume) even if the will is.

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Footnotes:

16 Ord.Bk. 1, D.8, pt.2, q.1, ¶300, p.325.
17 Lect.Bk. 1, D.39, q.1–5, ¶43, pp.492–493. Scotus turns this argument the other way around in Ord.Bk. 1, D.38, where he argues that the divine knowledge must be speculative, a knowledge of factibility and not of factioatra, because otherwise what is created would be necessary. See Ord.Bk. 1, D.38, q.1, ¶9–10, pp.306–307.
20 Lect.Bk. 1, D.39, q.1–5, ¶48, p.4
21 Lect.Bk. 1, D.39, q.1–5, ¶49, p.4
22 Lect.Bk. 1, D.39, q.1–5, ¶50, p.4
23 Lect.Bk. 1, D.39, q.1–5, ¶54, p.4
replaced by its opposite: to synchronic and diachronic contingency, respectively. We have the power to will the opposite of what we might will later, and this implies the changeability of the will. This diachronic and imperfect contingency of choices can be used to analyse sentences like ‘white can be black’ to mean ‘a white thing can be black at a later time’. This form of contingency is also an ‘event’ contingency. That is, it assumes a will like any other being that has a stable identity and successive contrary or contradictory states across time. In some respects diachronic contingency is our mundane and banal way of thinking about the will and about contingency: we can do something because we might will to do it earlier or later.

Scotus notes that this sort of diachronic contingency is not adequate to account for certain states of will that lack any stable object whose contrary or contradictory states might be alternately (or alternatively) chosen over time. He gives as his example the possibilities that exist before creation ex nihilo. Such logical possibilities are sustained only on the basis of faith. Scotus’ example is that the proposition ‘the world could exist’ is true before anything at all is created; before the world is actualised, and (one has to assume) even if the world were not ever to be actualised:

But another potency follows on from this [diachronic] freedom of the will, which is logical (to which a real potency also corresponds). Logical potency is just that case when two terms [extrema] are possible beings [possibilia] in such a way that they do not contradict each other but can be united, although this is not any possibility in a real thing. And in this way the proposition ‘a world can be’ was true before the world was created. If some created intellect had then somehow existed, it could truly have said ‘a world could be’, even though there was no reality of things corresponding to that truth.21

This logical possibility of a creation holds not for an existing will with successive states across time; it must be understood as holding for the will of an agent that in one moment can choose either to act or not to act.22

It is important to note that Scotus invokes a theological datum (creation ex nihilo) to justify another form of contingency beyond mere diachronic contingency. The possibility that ‘the world could be’ is an example of something that exists in possible being, and then being causally possible because God could make it. This possibility of a creatable world is, as it were, the extreme case of the notion that God creates logical possibilities and chooses among them, rather than the concept of what is possible being derived by reference to objects’ changes of state across time.

Scotus’ model of possibility at one instant is also particularly appropriate to describe the divine will, given its characteristics of being free, undetermined, simple, united, unique, singular, and without residual potency. Applied to the divine will, Scotus’ concept of contingency allows for it either to will or not to will a given outcome at the same instant, and accordingly, to produce or not to produce a given thing.23 On account of this conception of God’s free will (which is modelled on the basis of a doctrinal truth, creation ex nihilo), the world can only be

produced contingently, and so is constrained to be contingent. Yet because it is based on a revealed datum, this can be considered to be the philosophical explanation of a revealed position. It is not a notion that would be obvious in the normal course of human thinking about contingency, and not conceivable to 'philosophers' in the medieval sense, who were understood to be necessitarians. It could count as an instance of Christian philosophy in the sense of a proceeding from a set of presuppositions that are harmonious with faith and consonant with a Christian conception of divine love.

A Scotist could reconfigure the account to make it independent of revelation by starting instead from a premise of contingency as self-evident. But such a move could not resolve whether contingency can be cashed out diachronically rather than synchronically. A sounder way to free the account of contingency from reliance on revealed data is to start from the mereological picture: the parts of the universe have a potential to be unified with other parts, to constitute a unified whole universe. This continual potential is not intrinsically successive, even though it must be understood synchronically because the universe is a synchronous as well as a diachronic whole. But this strategy of proceeding from mereological considerations presupposes conceptual connections among potentiality, possibility, and unifiability, among other mereological commitments. One can justify this as a Christian philosophy—that is, as a set of starting points that are conducive and friendly to Christianity—even if not purely philosophically.

Absolute and Ordained Power

Scotus' account of created contingency is not usually explained starting with his account of a field of possible beings. Instead, the literature tends to focus on his definition of God's power in relation to the concepts of instituting and obeying law and synchronic contingency. The classic text explaining God's power in terms of law is Ord. Bk. 1, D.44, which concerns whether God can make anything other than what is ordained to come to be. It forms the doctrinal background to Scotus' discussion of natural law. It is not introduced as the background to his accounts of

24 For examples of associating philosophers with necessitarianism, see Lect. Bk. 1, D.30, q.1–2, 460, p. 416, and 488, p.419.
25 For a basic description of the relationship of Christianity to philosophy in Scotus, see David Burr (1972). This consonance with Christianity is strongly argued for by Antonie Vos (see especially Vos 2006, 293–301 and chapter 16). Vos also presents a powerful study of the historical retrieval of Scotism as a philosophy by ‘medieval philosophers’ (2006, chapter 13). See Vos (2003) for a collection that makes thematic the spirituality of Scotus' conception of God. The question of consonance and presupposition of faith is difficult. One can valorize the study of Scotus as Christian philosophy at least weakly, in the postmedieval terms suggested by Joseph Owens (1994). Owens suggests that no set of philosophical presuppositions can be proved, and Christians are free to adopt and examine different starting points consonant with their faith; I suggest that Scotism could be at least validated in these terms. A more robust (and interesting) sense in which Scotus is the Christian philosopher par excellence is proposed by Vos (2006), 573–608; he produces a narrative on necessitarianism in ancient and modern philosophy, and argues that Scotism can be traced to give a decisive refutation of the sort of necessitarianism that grounds most of western philosophy, except for Scholasticism.
26 Several authors discuss examples of the possibility considered by God being explained in terms of synchronic contingency and relation to a set law (Veldhuis 2000, 224–225 ff; Knuttila 1995, 127–143; Nenno 2003, 129–160).

27 Scotus notes that this is the use of the relationship of Scotus' appropriation.
28 Ord. Bk. 1, D.44, q.1, 46, p.364–
29 Ord. Bk. 1, D.44, q.1, 46, p.360–
30 Ord. Bk. 1, D.44, q.1, 511, p.367. Scotus knew that some modernists and others have supported the view that some philosophers have not set against his universal law.
31 On Scotus' alleged arbitrary voluntaries from the 1350s, for other characterizations answers the criticism that Scotus' diet in the 1920s (put it), by noting that if we cannot do evil, or make contradiction also that we are to take the case that Scotus does, they would be 'are creatures' (Brampton 1968, 570–571).

The point of his brief sketch is elaborated in better detail in Robert R.
induction and natural scientific knowledge. This difference in the background theory used to explain exceptions in the domains of natural law ethics and of nomic exceptions in the physical worlds, respectively, is perhaps the reason why the inconsistency of Scoto's manner of invocation of contingency in each of the domains is not obvious.

In Ord. Bk. 1, D. 44, where Scotus discusses whether God can make something that is not ordained to come to be, he distinguishes absolute from ordered power for all rational and willing agents in relation to a law. A rational, willing agent can conform to some law, or can alternatively institute a law to which conformity or non-conformity might be considered. What God could do in conformity to a law is exercise his ordained power (de potenti de ordinatia). When God acts outside or contrary to some law, he acts by his absolute power (de potenti de absolueta). 27 When setting the law itself is within the power of an agent, it is only a law because it is 'instituted' or instituted (statuta) by that agent. 28 As Courtenay notes: 'For Scotus, God as sovereign is [a] law maker and is not subject to the laws he has instituted except insofar as he wishes to oblige himself' (Courtenay 1990, 120). Note that the order that is being instituted can be either a general rule (as the term 'law' naturally suggests) or the instituting of a connection for a particular case (which is closer to being dicitio of that case than the making of a universal law). 29 Because of these two senses of setting an order, Scotus' conception of the phrase ordered power is better conceived as 'rule-governed' and 'already-connected' rather than as law, even though universal conformity to a rule once it is set is characteristic of the concept of law, and it is in this respect that the instituted orderings are truly lawlike. 30

As a result of making this distinction, we can discuss God's power on the assumptions that a pre-fixed rule holds, and that this restricted range of possible action is itself set by God's ordained power. God could also act outside a given rule he has instituted; in which case, he is only bound by the principle of non-contradiction with regard to composites discussed above. It is this absolute power of God, bound only by non-contradiction, that has given rise to the myth of Scotus as some sort of irrational 'voluntarist' with regard to God's power in relation to his wisdom. 31

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27 Scotus notes that this is the use of the canon lawyer (Ord. Bk. 1, D. 44, q. 1, f. 13, p. 368). On the relationship of Scotus' appropriation of the usage of canon law, see Courtenay (1990), 100–102.
30 Ord. Bk. 1, D. 44, q. 1, f. 11, p. 367. Scotus does compare the relation of God to chosen orderings to a king: if a king were to foresee that some person will not commit the crime of homicide, if he does not damn that person, he does not act against his universal law punishing homicide (Ord. Bk. 1, D. 44, q. 1, f. 11, p. 388).
31 On Scotus' alleged arbitrary voluntarism in relation to the power of God, see Pickstock (1998, 131–133, 135–136); for other characterisations of Scotus as a voluntarist, see Vos (2000, 214–218). Brampton answers the criticism that Scotus' distinction amounts to setting God up as an 'Aristotelian daemon' (as scholars in the 1920s put it!), by noting that Scotus carefully subjects that power within qualified limits (e.g. God cannot do evil, or make contradictions; one could add, God cannot also do anything worse). Brampton also notes that we are to take the counsel of Scotus' critics, and impose greater limits on God's action than Scotus does, they would be 'erecting barriers between the infinite goodness of the Creator and his creatures' (Brampton 1998, 570–571, 574). He also notes that Scotus' prioritisation of the will over the intellect was merely a result of overlooking the unfortunate consequences of divine illumination of the intellect. The point of his brief sketch of Scotus' naturalisation (and thereby, valorisation) of the intellect is elaborated in better detail in Robert Pannau's account of Scotus on cognition (Pannau 2003).
With this background of his views on the production of possible things and the distinction of ordered and absolute power, the case can be made that there is an inconsistency in Scotus' treatments of contingency concerning physical law on the one hand and ethical natural law in the other. If we characterise contingency in the latter domain in line with the distinction between absolute and ordained power, we risk concealing his inconsistent deployment of the theory of God’s power to create contingently in both theoretical realms equally.

Uncovering this inconsistency first requires understanding his solution to the problem of induction in a non-necessitated but regularly ordered world. Scotus’ solution to the problem of induction in nature is that we experience more-than-random patterns or correlations in the world, and can infer that they are the result of a natural cause, following what we can call the ‘natural cause’ principle: ‘Whatever occurs in a great many instances by a cause that is not free, is the natural effect of that cause’. \textsuperscript{32} Scotus also puts the same principle in slightly different terms: ‘nothing is a chance cause of an effect frequently produced from it, and so, if it is not free, it will be a natural cause’. \textsuperscript{33} The principle is validated by experience because a chance cause does not consistently produce a given effect; instead it produces an effect, or its opposite, or nothing at all. This natural cause principle seems reasonable in relation to chance causes, but Scotus merely brackets the question of how we ascertain whether a regular cause is natural or free once we have excluded (on the basis of its regularity) that it is not a result of chance.

The natural cause principle is self-evident because of the conceptual connection of nature and necessitation. One could even defend its usefulness in accounting for some non-trivial, non-"vis dormativa" explanations in post-medieval science. For example, one can infer (as Boyle himself did) his eponymous law on the basis of experiment. Yet the ideal gas law is actually a necessary truth, based on the interdefined concepts of temperature, pressure, and volume via the concept of velocity and the molar gas constant (itself a mere artefact of the need to settle on one arbitrary set of units). On the basis of the proposal that experience occasions knowledge of an analytic truth, which then explains its particular instances that were discovered in experience, Scotus uses the natural cause principle to infer the possibility of certainty of knowledge. This allows him to secure the stability of the natural order, based on the uniformity of the experienced natural order. \textsuperscript{34}

Now the interesting thing about the wording of the natural cause principle is that it includes a proviso concerning free causes, stated as: ‘ab aliqua causa non libera’ ("by any unfree cause"), or as a conditional: ‘si non sit libera, arit causal naturalis’ ("if it is not free, it will be a natural cause"). This proviso forestalls acceptance of the effects of actions of free agents as necessary and naturally caused. This account of induction within a natural order excluding free agents appears innocuous, until the natural cause principle is considered in relation to Scotus’ position that the whole of the natural order arises from the activity of a free, loving God. Indeed, the natural cause principle takes on a different complexion when one considers it in the light of

\textsuperscript{32} Expert knowledge of material things is validated by the principle coming to rest in our minds that "whatever happens in many instances from an unfree cause, is a natural effect of that cause" (Ord. Bk. 1, D. 3, pt.1, q.4, \textsuperscript{2} B35, pp. 142–143).

\textsuperscript{33} Ord. Bk. 1, D. 3, pt.1, q.4, \textsuperscript{2} B35, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{34} On Scotus’ solution to induction, see Ord. Bk. 1, Bk. 4, D. 3, q.4.

\textsuperscript{2} Springer
the distinction between absolute and ordained power, and Scotus’ account of the
latitude of God’s choices in creating. Consider the resulting recontextualisation. For
any pattern of physical events, it will have God as its primary cause and something
natural as its secondary cause, and any pattern of events will be due only to natural
causes once we exclude any willed causes. Yet the whole of creation is willed, but
‘stabilised’ by being part of an instituted natural order that God cannot interfere with
so long as he acts de potentia dei ordinata. I noted above that this stabilisation is not
absolute; indeed, as the possibility of miracles indicates, secondary causes are only
contingent and co-caused, with God’s action as the primary cause. The result of
considering Scotus’ natural cause principle in the light of his doctrines of contingent
creation and the generation of possibilities is that causes are only ever relatively
natural and necessitated: relatively, that is, to a contingently caused divine act of
adopting a given set of laws (stabilising some choice as an order of nature). Strictly
speaking, there are no natural causes, because there are no absolutely necessitated
created states of affairs at all, as noted above. Being a natural order is constituted by
being set as such by God.

This lack of absolute necessitation of the natural order is evident in Scotus’
view of transsubstantiation. Unlike other scholastics, he does not try to shoehorn
this event—regularly occurring but miraculously willed—into the natural order as
a kind of embarrassing exception. Instead, his account of transsubstantiation has
been read (rightly I think) as an insightful illustration of the ‘deep structure’ of
created reality rather than an ad hoc piece of theology to accommodate
Catholicism within Aristotelian naturalism. Scotus deems false a bald reading of
the Aristotelian thesis that an accident must inhere in its substance. The inherence
is a contingently caused event dependent on the action of God. The fact of the
normal, natural, and stable inherence of accidents in substances does not entail that
the inherence is absolutely necessary.

I turn now to Scotus’ account of natural law ethics to show how it is treated
inconsistently with his account of physical laws. Scotus’ account of natural law
employs a similar strategy to that used in his account of transsubstantiation. He
invokes the distinction between God’s absolute and ordained power, and relativises
the necessity of a given set of laws to the ordained order. Indeed, the tension is even
greater between his conclusions for natural law and his strategy for dealing with
induction (invoking the natural cause principle): the stabilisation of nature is
positively discounted, and contingency is enthroned.

The problem of natural law for scholastic theologians is to explain how universal
natural ethical laws, such as those of the Decalogue, can stand given that God

33 The distinction between absolute and ordained power fits with the distinction between primary and
secondary causes. It is in God’s absolute power to do directly (i.e., as a primary cause) anything that is in
fact done by a secondary cause. And one thing acting as a secondary cause can be replaced by another
thing; therefore there is no proper connection, considered absolutely, between two such things, and any
effect of a given secondary cause is possible in the absence of that specific cause.
34 See Giorgio Pini (2002, 311). These rearrangements have led to analyses suggesting that Scotus had
indeed overcome an Aristotelian substance metaphysics, which, while being retained in name, is
effectively redefined to the point of reconstitution. This is visible in Scotus’ theories of common natures,
individualisation, the formal distinction and the status of inherence. See Elkins (1995).
35 Scotus uses essential dependence to avoid arguments drawn from Aristotelian definitions of accident,
etc., for example at Ord.4, D.12, q.1, ¶13, pp.592-595 (Vives edition).
permits (or even commands) exceptions to them in the Old Testament. If they are genuinely precepts with universal moral force, God could not make it licit or even commission that they be violated, as in the case of ‘Thou shalt not kill’ and the command to Abraham to kill Isaac (Möhle 2003, 313). This is parallel to a problem for natural necessitarianism: if miracles can occur, then the laws of nature are not universally necessitated. In his theory of natural law, Scotus breaks with the traditional attempt to justify God’s apparent exceptions: as affirmations of the rationale for the precept despite violating its letter. In contrast to that tradition, he instead regards God’s permitting violations as genuine allowing of exceptions to the natural law. As part of his strategy, he explicitly rejects the inference from a particular instituted moral order to that order being a universal moral truth. Indeed, his purpose is to deny that a solid, unchangeable set of moral laws can be inferred from what God has instituted. It is a project, as Möhle puts it, to ‘denaturalise’ natural law (Möhle 2003, 314). To use my earlier terminology, he ‘destabilises’ natural law.

With regard to the ten commandments, Scotus’ natural law theory is that (aside from the first two precepts, which are self-evident by their terms) the other precepts of the Decalogue and other putative natural laws only hold relative to a given instituting law. We should not infer from the fact of there being a current collection of moral commands or prohibitions set by revelation to the conclusion that those commands or prohibitions are universal and immutable natural laws (except those precepts that are true by definition). Natural law precepts (lawlike and apparently universally generalised) do not bind necessarily, absolutely, and universally. Indeed, the universal force of such natural precepts only holds relative to God’s ordaining a certain selection of laws for a given time, with the institution of a new order being disclosed by revelation. That is, natural law precepts that are not analytically true only hold by the ordained power of God, and not by any necessity founded in nature, or by the absolute power of God. Given this characterisation, Scotus does not regard contingent precepts (such as ‘Do not steal’) as natural laws in the strictest sense, but only as consonant with natural law. Their contraries would also be consonant and could be (and sometimes were) wisely set as law by God, and these would then be taken to be exceptions to them. We can speculate about the rationale that might underwrite a given consonant precept and why it is that God’s setting of certain consonant precepts is wise rather than irrational, but we can have no direct access to the reason for a choice of one contingent precept to the exclusion of another, at any given time.

Inconsistencies and Induction

We are now in a position to clarify the problematic inconsistency in Scotus’ accounts of induction, transubstantiation, and natural law. Induction from experience or contingent circumstance to a universal, stable, inviolable, and necessary law seems valid for nature (as the natural cause principle allows). Yet the situation is not parallel for most ethical natural basis: that is, of Scotus’ accounts possibilities (as an act of normal order of created reality) then think of God’s creative violating that chosen order (that is only apparent: it is merely enacted by his absolute power). We would give the same status as the treaters they all draw upon the idea of

We can treat physical laws as creation by a loving God. But natural necessitarianism and philosophy of a creative logic: the laws of physical nature as they could have been different. We have no genuine knowledge of derived and contingent co system is that there are no such only contingently instituted absolutely necessary structures nature is supposed to be more

We can pose the inconsistent and natural law in several ways: cause principle, which exclude nature is ultimately depend on proper distinction of natural and be true, it is unhelpful for problem framing the problem is to read problem of induction has deliv with the theoretically idle oce

A third way of proceeding is natural world Scotus thinks we his solution to induction, he (indicating that a given cause of scintilla (of a quia cause), all example of an herb being apt connection with hominess is not

When we have an experience we cannot analyse, and disc we are left with is a ‘truth’ known by experience to be certain species is fiery and the means of which we can dam the subject [by definition]. V
parallel for most ethical natural law precepts, though both are set forth on the same basis: that is, of Scotus’ account of their same relation to God’s selection of compossibilities (as an act of his absolute power) and of this selection constituting a normal order of created reality. After one has specified the instituted order, one can then think of God’s creative choices as being in accord with, constrained by, or violating that chosen order (that is, in terms of his ordained power). Yet the violation is only apparent: it is merely the institution of a new natural order, which God can enact by his absolute power. Examples are miracles and revised sets of moral commandments. We would expect the treatment of physical laws in nature to have the same status as the treatments of transsubstantiation and natural law ethics, because they all draw upon the idea of orders being contingently instituted by choice.

We can treat physical laws and natural law precepts as instances of contingent free creation by a loving God. Both can then be exalted as examples that destabilise natural necessitarianism and the universal force of law in favour of a Christian philosophy of a creative loving God. Yet similar treatment of both would mean that the laws of physical nature are properly speaking only ‘contingently necessitated’: they could have been different if God had set the laws of nature differently. It means we have no genuine knowledge of the nuts and bolts of things, but only knowledge of derived and contingent correlations. This is because the core truth of Scotus’ system is that there are no such naturally necessary structures in creation: there are only contingently instituted natural structures. (Nor, incidentally, could there be absolutely necessary structures.) Yet Scotus’ account of our induction of the laws of nature is supposed to be more robust than this.

We can pose the inconsistency problem in relation to Scotus’ account of induction and natural law in several ways. First, we can declare Scotus’ proviso on the natural cause principle, which excludes freely caused actions, to be a sleight of hand. All of nature is ultimately dependent on a freely caused action, so one cannot make a proper distinction of natural and free causes. While the natural cause principle might be true, it is unhelpful for probing nature to discern natural causes. A second way of framing the problem is to read Scotus as simply pretending that his solution to the problem of induction has delivered a secure, necessitated physical order of nature, with the theoretically idle exception of freely willed causes.

A third way of proceeding is to scrutinise the forms of scientific knowledge of the natural world Scotus thinks we can have as a result of the natural cause principle. In his solution to induction, he regards mere knowledge of contingent correlations (indicating that a given cause has an aptitude to produce an effect) as the lowest form of scientia (of a quid cause), although a scientia that is still indubitable. He gives the example of an herb being apt to be hot, but where the explanatory cause of its connection with hotness is not known:

When we have an experience of a principle [=a cause] of a sort whose terms we cannot analyze, and discover a higher principle known from those terms, all we are left with is a ‘truth’ covering many cases, the concepts of which are known by experience to be frequently united: for example, that a herb of a certain species is fiery and hot. Nor do we discover any other prior concept, by means of which we can demonstrate proper quid that the attribute belongs to the subject [by definition]. We are simply left with it, just as we are left with
experience for the first thing we know in a causal relation. ... Perhaps we have no cognition of the actual causal connection of the concepts, and can only discover that two things have an aptitude to be united. If some things should have an attribute that is itself another thing, distinct from the first, that attribute would be separable from the first thing without contradiction. In that case, an expert would not have cognition quia of how it is, but of how it is apt to be by nature. 39

The way of division amounts to engaging in reasoning and trials to weed out extraneous events from true causes. If such a process is unsuccessful, one is left with a ‘truth’: that an effect is merely frequently associated with a given cause. That is, one is left with something akin to Hume’s constant conjunctions, rather than a knowledge of genuine causes explained by reference to a self-evident truth. Scotus gives the example of knowing an herb to be hot, but not being able to discover why that herb is hot, because one cannot analyse the connection of the herb and the heatness and derive a self-evident principle. In such a case, Scotus suggests, we do not have knowledge of a cause, but we do have knowledge of an aptitude for two terms (two ‘extremes’) to be joined together. In such a case where two things are separable without contradiction, an expert cannot have anything other than the lowest form of scientific knowledge, that the two things are apt to associate. This weak knowledge of aptitudes is distinguished from a true propter quid level of scientific knowledge, which is knowledge by virtue of a self-evident principle.

Now, this picture of strong propter quid knowledge and a weak knowledge of aptitudes needs to be re-examined in the light of Scotus’ doctrine of a contingent creation. While a given causal association might have a propter quid explanation within some selected order of compossibles (that is, relative to the ‘logic’ of some ordained set of laws), it is not propter quid knowledge at the level of God’s absolute power and his selection of some order for institution at a given time out of all compossibles. This is because the connection of an herb and its heatness lies in God’s instituting a contingent order, not in any absolutely necessitated structures. At the level of possible beings, Scotus’ atomic conception of possible beings sits uneasily with genuine causal connections between created things. As Scotus puts it in the excerpt quoted above, if two things can be separated without contradiction, then one can only have knowledge of their aptitude to associate, not of their real causal bond. So it seems that this is the only knowledge we can have of the natural world, since the mereological consideration indicated that all the parts have a potency to union.

A final way of framing the inconsistency is to focus on the status of self-evident analytic truths. Scotus thinks we do obtain knowledge of self-evident truths that are apprehended by the meaning of the terms, and these are the verifiers and explanators of natural events; the point of the natural cause principle is to allow such analytic truths to explain particular events. The process of analysing natural events to ascertain self-evident explanatory principles is as follows, with a planetary occlusion as the example:

Imagine that we encounter a result, for instance that the moon is frequently eclipsed, and then we suppose that result to be true (since it is indeed the case).


We examine the cause of the result by the way of division (=by analysis). When an expert is led from such a result to derive an explanatory principle known directly from the terms of that result [i.e., truth by definition], then from that principle she can apprehend the result more certainly than it was first known only from experience. That is, the result can then be understood with the first kind of cognition, as a truth deduced from a principle per se known. For example, it is a per se known principle that ‘an opaque thing, interposed between a visible thing and light, will impede propagation of light to that visible thing’. And if we discovered by division (=analysis) that the earth is such [an opaque] body, interposed between the sun and the moon, we will understand this fact by a most certain demonstration proprius quid, and not merely by experience as it was known before we discovered its explanatory principle.\(^{40}\)

Scotus describes an unexplained experienced event as a ‘conclusion’, because to explain it one seeks principles from which it can be derived. We move from a conclusion, back to a self-evident, necessarily true principle; and from there we can reconsider our experience, and see it as explained by a self-evident principle. We then have a most certain demonstration of the planetary occlusion, because we can explain it by reference to the self-evident principle concerning the light-blocking effect of opaque objects.

The problem here is that if a self-evident truth is in play, and one is validating the instance of it that we have experienced, then surely this means that the part of nature it describes should be likened to the self-evidently true and necessary precepts (i.e. the first two commandments) in the Decalogue, and not to the strictly contingent ones.

Scotus gives the impression that his account of induction is of great practical importance. But for this to be the case, there must be more analytically true statements of necessary causation in the physical world than the destabilised contingency of things seems to allow. The glue of nature cannot be found among the entirely contingent collection of parts required in Scotus’ treatment of transubstantiation, for example—or invoked without any theoretical price when we insist that fire only heats miracles notwithstanding. The price of a very contingent world is that its interrelated contingent parts are not connected by bonds that can be the medias in self-evident truths; the bonds can only translate into contingent aptitudes, which God has decided to set together in a given order. As a result, I conclude that there is an inconsistency of treatments in Scotus’ accounts of contingently natural causation, as we see him explain it in relation to induction, transubstantiation, and natural law.

The philosophical lesson is (as so often!) that one cannot have one’s cake and eat it too; one cannot have the marvellous freedom of a contingent collection of atomic possibilities along with the explanatory power and certainty provided by the immutable universal certainties of natural necessitation.

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