

Making Room for the Virtual Distinction

Bartolomeo Mastri between Scylla and Charybdis

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Introduction

Bartolomeo Mastri (1602–1673), the Prince of Scotists, cultivated the persona of a faithful disciple of the Subtle Doctor; in reality, however, he often significantly departed from the positions of his master. One such case is Mastri’s position on the matter of distinctions. Unlike Duns Scotus (and many of his followers), Mastri admitted not only the “Scotistic” formal distinction, but also the “Thomistic” virtual distinction as a possible basis for abstracting a univocal universal concept. In another paper,¹ I have proposed a thorough analysis of Scotus’s arguably most profound and developed philosophical (as opposed to theological) reasoning in favour of the necessity of the formal distinction, found in his *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VII, q. 19. In this paper, I follow up with an analysis and an assessment of the force of Mastri’s defence of the virtual distinction *vis-à-vis* Scotus’s arguments. I will start with briefly outlining Mastri’s innovative position on distinctions. Then I will provide a summary of Scotus’s reasoning for the necessity of admitting the formal distinction (which is elaborated in the other paper) and point out the problems it poses for Mastri’s attempt to secure room for the virtual distinction in a Scotist setting. Finally, I will seek to determine if Mastri can provide a solution to these problems.²

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¹ Novák, “*Qui melius scit exponere, exponat!* Scotus’s Metaphysical Case for the Formal Distinction.” That paper and this present one originated as two parts of a single presentation at the conference Cognitive Issues in the Long Scotist Tradition (Faculty of Theology, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, 11–13 February 2021) and belong together.

² For a systematic exposition of Mastri’s theory of distinctions, see Andersen, *Metaphysik im Barockscotismus*, 657–839; cf. further Knebel, “What About Aureol?,” especially 429–36. I use the 1727 edition of Mastri and Bonaventura Belluto’s *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti Cursus integer*. Mastri’s *Disputationes ad mentem Scoti in duodecim libros Metaphysicorum* (henceforward abbreviated as *Met.*) was first published in two volumes in 1646–1647; his (and Bellu-

1. Mastri's Innovation

The view on the metaphysical prerequisites of the possibility of abstraction which Scotus bequeathed to his followers was that the abstraction of a universal concept is made possible by the existence of a *distinctio a parte rei* (viz. “in the thing itself” or “in reality”) between that which is being conceived, on the one hand, and that from which is being abstracted, on the other – for example, a distinction *a parte rei* between the formality of animality and the formality of rationality (and the individual differentia) makes it possible to abstract the concept *animal* from Peter. In Mastri's times, this was commonly expressed in terms of the so-called *objective precision*: in order that objective precision can take place – that is, in order that on the level of intentional objects one aspect of the conceived thing (e.g., the formality of animality) can be conceived without other aspects of that thing (e.g., rationality or individuality) being conceived thereby –, the conceived aspect must be actually distinct from the unconceived aspects, prior to the work of the conceiving intellect.³

This actual distinction in reality may come in various kinds, of which the two generally recognized ones are the *formal distinction*, obtaining between two *a parte rei* distinct but really identical formalities, and the *modal distinction*, obtaining between a formality and its intrinsic mode (*modus intrinsecus*). But regardless of the differences in detail, the crucial tenet of this “orthodox” position is that in forming universal concepts, the intellect does not (and cannot) *draw* the required distinctions but *finds them in reality as already actual*.

Mastri significantly departs from this “orthodox” Scotist wisdom and argues extensively that not only the formal distinction (and its weaker sibling, the modal distinction) is to be admitted in a Scotistic metaphysical and epistemological repertory, but also the “Thomist” virtual distinction (*distinctio virtualis*), or the distinction of reasoned reason (*distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*), also often called “distinction of reason with a foundation in reality” (*distinctio rationis cum fundamento in re*).⁴ Strictly speaking, the virtual distinction and the distinction

to's) *Disputationes in Aristotelis Logicam* (henceforward called *Logica*) was first published in 1639. Both of these works are contained in the *Cursus*.

3 For an analysis of the notion of objective precision and its bearing on the realism–nominalism dispute, see Novák, “Confusion or Precision? Disentangling the Semantics of a Pair of Scholastic Terms”; for the notion of objective precision in Mastri, see Renemann, “Mastri on ‘*praecisio obiectiva*’,” and Andersen, *Metaphysik im Barockscotismus*, 833–39.

4 I have not done extensive research on how universally and how explicitly this view had been accepted by the Scotists before Mastri, but there certainly was a widespread common sense that the virtual distinction is a “Thomist” thing, whereas Scotists insist on the formal distinction; and the way Mastri presents the problem makes a clear impression that despite his assertions that it is *his* view which is in accord with Scotus, he is well aware that he is in fact going against the Scotist mainstream: cf. *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 15, art. 1, n. 271, 318a–b: “[O]stendo

of reasoned reason are not the same thing (despite being often so treated by the Scholastics. The virtual distinction is that which is in the thing itself, prior to, or independently of, its being conceived; so, it is something *real*, but – unlike the Scotist formal or modal distinctions – merely *potential*. In virtue of this distinction its terms are not actually distinct, but rather *distinguishable* by the intellect. The virtual distinction is, so to speak, an occasion for the intellect to actually *draw* a distinction where, in reality, there is none. The distinction of reasoned reason, on the other hand, is the result of this activity of the intellect. It is, already, an actual distinction – but it does not exist in reality (i.e., between two aspects of a thing inasmuch as they exist in and for themselves, independently of being conceived), but merely intentionally (that is, between two aspects of a thing, inasmuch as they are conceived separately by the intellect). In other words: the virtual distinction is real but merely potential, while the distinction of reasoned reason is actual but merely intentional – the virtual distinction being its *fundamentum in re*. Still, in a sense it is one and the same distinction, considered now in potency, now in act – and for that reason even the Scholastics often neglect the difference and use the terms *distinctio virtualis* and *distinctio rationis cum fundamento in re* interchangeably: a distinction that is potentially in the thing, and comes to be actualized only in the conceiving intellect.⁵

Now according to Mastri, it is not so that objective precision *always* requires an *actual* distinction on the part of the thing itself. An actual distinction (typically the formal distinction) is only needed for the abstraction of *categorical* concepts – that is, genera, species, and differentiae. *Transcendental* concepts, i.e., concepts applicable to more than one category or to a category and to God, only require a *potential* distinction in the thing in order that they may be abstracted – that is, the “Thomistic” virtual distinction. Besides, Mastri agrees with the common realist (as opposed to nominalist) wisdom that where there is not even a virtual distinction in the object at the appropriate place, the intellect cannot abstract two different concepts from it but is only capable of conceiving one

Scotum, quidquid est de Scotistis formalizantibus, agnovisse et approbasse acceptionem distinctionis ratiocinatae, in sensu scilicet, quo de ea loquuntur Thomistae [...].” Cf. also Mastri and Belluto’s review of Scotist positions in *Logica*, disp. 1, q. 5, art. 1, nn. 87–95, 91b–93b, where they defend the distinction of reasoned reason as rather *implied* than *explicitly taught* in Scotism, and Andersen, *Metaphysik im Barockscotismus*, 833: “Die *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae* wird [...] wie ein Fremdelement behandelt, das stets als ‚thomistisch‘ bezeichnet wird [...]”; cf. further the survey of positions at *ibid.*, 705.

⁵ For Mastri’s exposition of the notion of *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*, see *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 15, art. 1, nn. 269–79, 317b–21b; cf. especially n. 274, 319a–b: “[D]istinctio illa virtualis coincidit prorsus cum distinctione rationis ratiocinatae, aut certe est fundamentum eius, dicitur distinctio virtualis, quatenus praecedat huiusmodi fundamentum in re dicitur vero ratiocinata, quando per actum intellectus inadaequate concipientis, et praescindentis ista virtualitas distinctionis reducitur ad actum formando de eadem re simpliciter plures conceptus inadaequatos.”

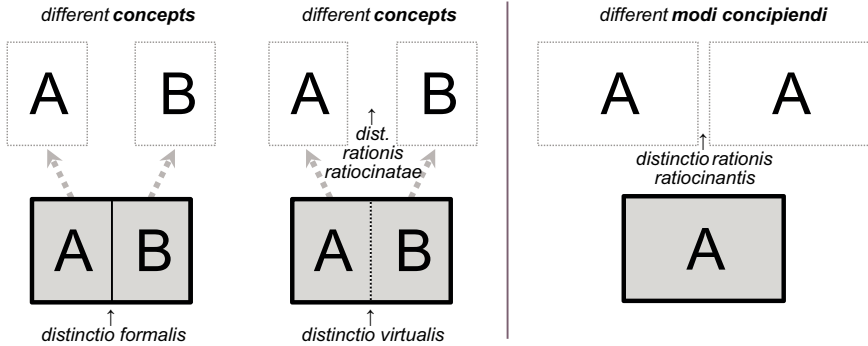


Fig. 1.

and the same thing/concept in two different ways (e.g., once as a subject and once as a predicate, as in the identical judgement “Peter is Peter”), by means of two *modi concipiendi*. Figure 1 summarizes (the relevant part of) Mastri’s repertory of distinctions.

Mastri’s generous approach to other schools’ (and especially the Thomists’) conceptual resources can be seen as a sign of open-mindedness and commendable willingness to give credit wherever it is due. On the other hand, the integration of elements foreign to the native Scotism into the system may have repercussions. Specifically in the case at hand, one can immediately think of two connected worries that need to be addressed: viz. 1) *Will Mastri be able to avoid, on the transcendental level, the force of Scotus’s general arguments for the necessity of the formal distinction?* And 2) *Will he be able to do so without thereby compromising the force of the same arguments, or any arguments, on the categorical level?* The present paper aims to provide a detailed answer to these two questions.

2. Scotus’s Case for the Formal Distinction

So, what are Scotus’s arguments? Scotus’s case for the formal distinction falls apart into two distinct reasoning strategies, linked with the formal distinction’s two main areas of application. In the first place, Scotus employs the formal distinction in *theology* to explain the Holy Trinity (and other things divine). On this level, the gist of his reasoning is that the formal distinction is needed to *resolve contradictions* that would otherwise emerge, such as the divine essence both having and not having certain properties. The other area of the application is *metaphysics*; and here Scotus argues that the formal distinction is needed as a

sine qua non of the possibility of the abstraction of distinct concepts – that is, in late scholastic terms, as a metaphysical condition of objective precision.

In this paper, I am only concerned with Scotus's *metaphysical* case for the formal distinction: the point is to see whether and how Mاستri's innovations can square with it. As has been mentioned, Scotus's most elaborate presentation of his metaphysical case for the formal distinction is contained in his *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, Book VII, q. 19, "Whether the concept of a genus is different from the concept of a differentia."⁶ However, Scotus is actually not focusing on the question of whether a generic concept and a differential concept differ (this is resolved fairly quickly in the affirmative), but on *what the metaphysical prerequisites of their differing are*.

The core of the *quaestio* consists in Scotus's complex and detailed evaluation, and ultimate rejection, of Henry of Ghent's thesis that a sufficient prerequisite for the possibility of abstracting two distinct concepts, a genus and a differentia, is the *intentional distinction* (*differentia intentionis*). Interestingly, Henry's notion of intentional distinction (at least qua understood by Scotus) is practically identical to the later Thomists' (and Mاستri's) *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae* (sometimes, simply called *distinctio ratiocinata*). Scotus's discussion of Henry's theory therefore is of direct systematic relevance for Mاستri's reception of the Thomist notion.

Scotus's engagement with Henry is complex and its adequate presentation is beyond the scope of this paper.⁷ For the purposes of comparison with Mاستri, we only need to understand what I call Scotus's "Final Blow Argument," viz. his ultimate rebuttal of the most refined formulation of Henry's case resulting from the preceding discussion.

In that discussion, Scotus had constantly turned his virtual Henrician opponent's (and readers') attention back to the *epistemic* aspect of the issue (as opposed to the *causal* one, highlighted in the opponent's approach). For it may not be a problem to explain how two different cognitive acts (*notitiae*, viz., the mental concept of a genus and that of a differentia) can be caused in the intellect by a single, undistinguished real thing: it *is* a problem, however, to explain, how there can be two irreducibly distinct *cognized conceptual contents* or *intentional objects* which, nevertheless, must be identical to the external thing (otherwise we would not be cognizing the thing itself but something else).

6 The phrases 'the concept of a genus' and 'the concept of a differentia' are to be understood in the sense 'the concept which is a genus' and 'the concept which is a differentia,' not in the sense 'the concept *genus*' and 'the concept *differentia*.' In other words, they refer to first intentions, concepts such as *animal* (a genus) and *rational* (a differentia), not to second intentions, the predicables *genus* and *differentia*.

7 What here follows is a brief summary of my paper cited in note 1.

Now the explanation to which Scotus's Henrician opponent was finally obliged to resort – virtually his last chance of vindicating the sufficiency of the intentional distinction for abstraction – was the following: the conceived object is completely one and the same *really*, that is, according to its single *real being*, but it makes for two objects in the intellect according to its two distinct intentional beings or *esse obiective*. Thus, one and the same real thing (say, Socrates) is conceived as two objects: once (qua *animal*) by the concept of genus, and once (qua *rational*) by the concept of a differentia. In this way, the distinction between *animal* and *rational* only obtains on the level of intentional being – it is a mere intentional distinction in Henry's terms –, whereas in reality there is a perfect identity.

Scotus's Final Blow Argument consists in showing that this "explanation of last resort" is untenable – and again on epistemic grounds.⁸ Scotus points out that if the only respect in which the single real thing is two is its twofold *esse obiective*, then, epistemically speaking, there will not be two distinct cognized objects but only one. The reason is that the twofold *esse obiective* is not part of that which is being cognized. The *esse obiective* is a property of the conceived object qua such, but it is not part of its conceptual content.⁹ A real object receives objective being in virtue of being conceived, but that which is conceived, by a real, first-order cognitive act ("formal concept" in later terminology), is just the real stuff coming from "out there." In order to conceive the object together with its *esse obiective*, another cognitive act (formal concept) would be needed: a reflexive, second-order concept such as *the concept of animal* or *the concept of rational*. Such a concept, however, would not be predicable of the real object (Socrates) – i. e., it would not be a genus or a differentia.

⁸ Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VII, q. 19, n. 38 (OPh IV), 368: "Sed per omnia dicta non videtur prima difficultas soluta quomodo duo obiecta formaliter in quantum obiecta et tamen una essentia, si illa essentia aliquo modo cognoscatur. Quia illa essentia una, si tantummodo per duo esse in intellectu est duo obiecta – et secundum illa non cognoscitur, quia illa accidunt obiecto –, non videtur quomodo erunt duo in quantum obiecta."

⁹ This is more or less the point stressed by Avicenna in the famous passage in his *Metaphysics* V, c. 1 (ed. Verbeke), 228–29, providing a moderately-realist solution to the problem of universals which came to be almost universally accepted in the Latin High Scholasticism (including Scotus). Avicenna claims here that "equinity is just equinity" – meaning that the predicable conceptual content of the concept *horse* contains only the conceptual marks belonging to the specific essence of horseness, everything else being merely accidental to this "essence as such," the predicable content of the concept. And this "everything else" includes, on the one hand, the real individuating features of individual horses, and, on the other hand, the merely intentional properties imparted to the essence of horse inasmuch as it is conceived by the intellect as a universal – in other words, everything that belongs to its being conceived, i. e., in Scotus's terminology, to its objective being.

But that which formally specifies formal concepts (intellective acts) and distinguishes them from one another is precisely the conceived conceptual content, nothing else. Therefore, it follows that the plurality of *esse obiective* cannot be the source of the differentiation of the objective concepts to which this *esse* belongs. In short – under the proposed scenario, we would not have two distinct concepts but merely one and the same concept conceived twice.

Thus, Henry’s position appears to be demolished, and Scotus concludes: “Qui melius scit exponere differentiam intentionis, evadendo dictas difficultates, exponat.”¹⁰

3. The Problems for Mastri

Now let us turn back to Mastri. Now, Scotus’s metaphysical case for the necessity of the formal distinction is quite broad-scoped: it is not confined to this or that special case but concerns the possibility of abstracting two distinct concepts from one and the same object in general. Mastri, on the contrary, asserts that the formal distinction is only needed as a ground for the possibility of abstracting categorial concepts, whereas for the possibility of abstracting transcendental concepts a mere virtual distinction is sufficient. This immediately provokes the two already mentioned worries that motivate this entire paper:

- (1) Can Mastri avoid, on the transcendental level, the force of Scotus’s argument for the formal distinction, and how?
- (2) Can Mastri do so without *eo ipso* compromising the force of the very same argument on the categorial level?

Let us see how Mastri fares in navigating through this narrow strait between the Scylla of making the need of the formal distinction for abstraction universal and the Charybdis of making it entirely unjustified.

4. Avoiding Scylla: “*Melius exponere*”?

To avoid the Scylla of ending up asserting what Scotus implies, viz. the universal need for the formal distinction as the only possible foundation in reality for the possibility of abstraction, Mastri must face Scotus’s challenge and provide some “better explanation” of the possibility of a genuine distinction between two concepts which is not based on an *a parte rei* distinction of their formal objects, or conceived contents inasmuch as they exist in reality – a distinction, let us recall, that had been called “intentional distinction” (*differentia intentionis*) by Henry

10 Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VII, q. 19, n. 42 (OPh IV), 369.

and Scotus and “distinction of reasoned reason” (*distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*) by Mastri (and late Scholastics in general). I have already mentioned that for Mastri, who in this point follows the Thomists’ ways, the possibility of this distinction is based on its having a certain foundation in the intrinsic reality of the thing, called “virtual distinction” (*distinctio virtualis*).¹¹ In order to see whether Mastri is capable of specifically vindicating the possibility of merely rationally distinct transcendental concepts, we have to explore the merits of this notion. So: what is a virtual distinction? What is it precisely that its “virtuality” involves?

‘Virtual’ (*virtualis, virtualiter, (in) virtute*) is a tricky term in scholasticism, as it tends to be used in various closely connected yet distinct senses – at least three of them:

- (1) “A virtual X” or “being virtually X” can mean as much as being X merely potentially or merely *in virtute*: the chance of bringing it about that the respective thing becomes X is there but it is not (yet) actualized. This meaning of “virtual” seems to be peculiar to the usage of “merely virtual distinction” in contrast to a *distinctio actualis a parte rei*.
- (2) “Being virtually X” can also mean “being capable of producing X.” This meaning is primarily present in the notion of “virtual containment,” contrasted against “formal containment”: an essence contains “formally” the formalities that constitute it (i. e., its genera and differentiae), and it contains “virtually” the *propria* or *proprias passiones* which necessarily “flow” from the essence but are not constitutive of it. In this sense, a man is “virtually” capable of laugh, because this capability flows from his essence (but he is “formally” rational, because his essence is constituted by rationality).
- (3) Finally, “being virtually X” can also mean “behaving like X (but not in fact being X),” that is, “performing the causal functions of X.” The classical scholastic example is the Sun which is not in fact (“formally,” in a different sense than the one opposed to the previous sense of

11 Mastri seems to concede that a contributing factor to the distinction of reasoned reason’s foundation in reality may be a diversity of “extrinsic connotations.” Still, the presence of an “intrinsic” virtual distinction is required at any rate. See Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 15, art. 2, n. 283, 323b: “Media via nobis capienda est, ut scilicet dicamus cum Thomistis pro fundamento distinctionis ratiocinatae necessariam quidem esse ex parte obiecti virtuales aliquam distinctionem, seu eminentiam rei, non tamen omnino spernendam esse diversitatem extrinsecam connotatorum [...]. Palam igitur est, quomodo sententia nostra mediet inter placita Thomistarum, ac nominalium [...].”

“virtually”¹²) hot, according to the Aristotelian physics (because dry heat is the property of fire which is not found in the supra-lunar realm), but it causally *behaves as though it were*. This is also the sense in which Aquinas claims that inferior substantial forms are “virtually contained” in a superior form – e. g., the form of elements or a vegetative soul in a human rational soul.¹³ A human soul is not a vegetative soul, but it can perform the functions of one.

Now it seems that in the notion of virtual distinction, inasmuch as it is conceived by Mastri, *all* these three senses are somehow present, although Mastri never explicitly distinguishes them:

- The two quasi-formalities which are merely virtually distinct are not, of course, distinct actually *a parte rei*: so, in the thing itself, the distinction is there merely *potentially*, and this potentiality is only actualized by the conceiving intellect (sense 1).
- At the same time, the thing is, in virtue of having a virtual distinction in itself, conceived as *causally (co-)responsible* for bringing about the actual distinction in the intellect (actually, this sort of a “causal” explanation of the possibility of having two distinct concepts of a thing which is *a parte rei* one and the same was the main strategy underlying the Intentional Distinction Theory as criticized by Scotus):¹⁴ the thing has the *virtue* of producing two distinct cognitive acts in the intellect, and, by consequence, two distinct objective concepts (sense 2).
- And, finally, the thing *behaves*, epistemically, *as if* it were of itself actually distinct, even though it is not (sense 3).¹⁵

On the other hand, Mastri is well aware of the force of Scotus’s Final Blow Argument which establishes that mere different objective beings cannot distinguish two objective concepts epistemically, because they are not part of the conceived

12 Both properties contained sense(2)-formally and properties contained sense(2)-virtually in an object are contained in that object sense(3)-formally: a man *truly is* capable of laughter, just like he *truly is* rational or an animal. On the other hand, the Sun is *not* truly hot, the quality of heat is neither contained in its essence nor does it flow from it as its necessary property.

13 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I, q. 76, art. 3, co. (ed. Leonina V), 221b.

14 For details, see Novák, “*Qui melius scit exponere, exponat!*”

15 Cf. Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 14, n. 263, 315a: “[D]istinctio ratiocinata versatur circa rem, quae licet a parte rei sit una, tamen ob sui eminentem naturam aequivalet pluribus rebus, ac formalitatibus [...], et haec virtualis multiplicitas [...] dicitur *fundamentum, unde movetur intellectus* ad formandos diversos conceptus [...].” (My italics.)

conceptual content, or the objects-qua-conceived. And not only that – Mastri even himself explicitly argues against such a position (defended by Zaccaria Pasqualigo, † 1664), asserting that a direct cognitive act (a formal concept grasping something real) does not *conceive* the actual plurality of merely virtually distinct (quasi-)formalities, but *causes* it:¹⁶

For although by these two cognitive acts the plurality and distinction of these formalities is not cognized, [...], the plurality and distinction of formalities is caused by this twofold cognition [...].¹⁷

To *conceive* (as opposed to *produce*) this plurality produced by the first, direct act, a *second, reflexive* act would be needed:

16 For Mastri's critique of Pasqualigo's position, see Knebel, "What About Aureol?" Knebel makes several intriguing claims on the relationship between Pasqualigo, whose position he significantly traces back to Auriol, and Mastri. Although I find his linking of Pasqualigo to Auriol correct, I disagree with Knebel's general optics, which, in my opinion, exaggerates the differences between authors by placing selective emphases on different elements of their doctrines; this also leads him to several quite inadequate theses, such as his characterizing the Auriol-Pasqualigo position as a sort of aprioristic phenomenology. In my view, the crucial difference between the "Auriol-Pasqualigo" and the "Scotus-Mastrian" position stems from Auriol's contention that the *esse obiectivum* (or *apparens*) is cognitively *inseparable* from the appearing content: a claim based on a rather "Berkeleyan" argument that an unconceived thing is inconceivable (under pain of contradiction). Cf. Petrus Aureolus, *In II Sent.*, dist. 3, q. 2, art. 4, 70bD. Cf. also the brief exposition of Mastri's account by Renemann, "Mastri on '*praecisio obiectiva*,'" 405–6. However, Renemann, although he correctly rejects the misguided traditional label "conceptualist" for Auriol, seems to tentatively ascribe to him the theory of "abstraction by means of confusion" (as opposed to objective precision). In fact, Auriol's theory of universals (well presented, albeit once again under the misnomer of "conceptualism," by Friedman in sect. 3 of his article on Auriol in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) involves objective precision in everything but a name – and objective precision is the hallmark of (moderate) realism (see Novák, "Confusion or Precision?," 171–78). "Confused," as applied to a concept, can mean as much as "universal" without any nominalist implications (*ibid.*, especially 160 and 180–82). This is confirmed by the fact that Mastri does not attack Pasqualigo's Aureolian position as "nominalist" (conceptualism is called "nominalism" in late scholastic jargon), but as a lame defence of realism (which leads to nominalism). For a vindication of Auriol's being a realist, cf. Amerini, "Realism and Intentionality," 250. Amerini (252–59) also stresses an analogical point about Auriol's relation to Hervaeus Natalis: Auriol is not less realist (universals-wise) than Hervaeus, but unlike him he denies (confusedly, according to Amerini) the possibility of distinguishing the cognized thing from its being cognized. It seems to me that Amerini's criticism of Auriol's misunderstanding of Hervaeus is ultimately the same point Mastri makes against Pasqualigo. See also Lička, "Perception and objective being," for a convincing vindication of Auriol's direct realism and general closeness to Scotus.

17 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 16, art. 2, n. 304, 333a: "[Q]uamvis enim per illas duas cognitiones non cognoscatur pluralitas, et distinctio illarum formalitatum, sed tantum per actum reflexum, adhuc tamen illa pluralitas, et distinctio formalitatum per duplicem illam cognitionem causatur [...]" (Quotation continued in note 21.)

It must be said that prior to the direct act by means of which the intellect divides one and the same object into a plurality of formalities, a virtual and fundamental distinction pre-exists in the object. This distinction is only reduced to act and completed by the act of cognition. And just like it was said to exist subjectively in reality [...] while it was still virtual, so also after it has been made actual, it must be said, as far as this foundation is concerned, to exist subjectively in reality and objectively only in the intellect. Still, it is true that by means of this direct act the formalities are not *perceived as* actually many – rather, by means of that act, they *become* actually many. The former is only accomplished in virtue of a reflexive act by means of which the formalities are cognized as actually many and distinct. In virtue of the direct act they are cognized as merely virtually many and as fundamentally distinct – even though they become actually many and distinct by means of that act.¹⁸

The *esse obiective* or *esse intentionale* which is produced by a cognitive act is not, therefore, cognized by that very same act, and so it cannot serve as the distinguishing factor of the objective concept that terminates this act – which is precisely Scotus’s point in his Final Blow Argument:

When, in virtue of the distinction of reasoned reason, [the formality] *animal* is cognized in a man while [the formality] *rational* is left uncognized, [the formality] *animal* is not cognized according to some intentional being which it has in virtue of being cognized, but according to its real being – although by means of such an act it is not cognized as actually prescinded from [the formality] *rational* (as that would require a reflexive act), but it is being actually prescinded from [the formality] *rational* by that very act. It is therefore wrong to say that the distinction of reasoned reason accounts for a distinction in the object precisely inasmuch as it exists intentionally in the intellect, and that in this way one and the same real object can terminate distinct acts of cognition, *viz.* according to its distinct intentional beings. Proof of the assumption: [...] By prescinding *animal* from *rational*, I cognize the animal inasmuch as it is an ensouled sensitive substance and inasmuch as it is endowed with sensitive operations; but these and similar predicates belong to it inasmuch as it exists in reality and not according to some objective and intentional being.¹⁹

18 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 16, art. 2, n. 304, 332b: “[D]icendum est antecederet ad actum rectum, quo intellectus partitur idem obiectum in plures formalitates, praecedere in obiecto distinctionem virtualem, et fundamentalem, quae ad actum reducitur, et completur per ipsam cognitionem, et sicut quando erat virtualis dicebatur subjective in re, et in obiecto, sic etiam ratione talis fundamenti, postquam facta est actualis, dici debet esse subjective in re, et obiective solum in intellectu. Verum est tamen per illum actum rectum non attingi formalitates illas ut actualiter plures, immo potius per ipsum fiunt actualiter plures; sed hoc habetur solum ex vi actus reflexi, quo cognoscuntur illae formalitates, ut actualiter plures, et distinctae; ex vi autem actus recti cognoscuntur solum ut virtualiter plures, et fundamentaliter distinctae, licet per ipsum fiant actualiter plures, et distinctae [...]”

19 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 16, art. 2, n. 313, 336a: “Quando ex vi distinctionis ratiocinatae cognoscitur animal in homine non cognito rationali, tunc non cognoscitur animal secundum aliquod esse intentionale, quod habeat ex vi cognitionis, sed secundum esse reale, licet per

In short, a direct cognitive act – that is, a formal concept directed at something real qua real – only grasps the real aspects of its object, i. e., those that had been out there prior to its being conceived. Intentional or objective being (Mastri uses these terms interchangeably) is not among them.

But what is then the source of the actual plurality of the cognitive acts, and, consequently, of the objective concepts intended by these acts – if not the plurality of objective beings? Mastri's response is that it is sufficiently founded by a "virtual plurality of the object(s)":

The plurality of cognitions derives also from the virtual plurality of the object. For an effect can perfectly well depend, according to its formal being, on a virtual cause – as for example heat comes from the virtual hotness of light, and a creature from God qua virtually containing their [viz. creatures'] perfection [...]. Wherefore [...] it is to be said that prior to its being cognized, the object has of itself a virtual capacity to terminate a plurality of inadequate cognitions according to various formalities; and for that reason, this twofold termination is grounded in the object rather than in the intellect.²⁰

This "virtual plurality" is something that exists really in the object, and so – unlike the distinct intelligible beings – it can be part of the conceived content, it can "terminate the cognition":

For although by these two cognitive acts the plurality and distinction of these formalities is not cognized, [...], the plurality and distinction of formalities is caused by this twofold cognition, and what is only perceived by it is a virtual and fundamental plurality. Therefore, [...] it is to be said that these cognitions terminate neither at objects distinct actually *ex natura rei* prior to being cognized, nor at the object inasmuch as it has an actual

talem actum non cognoscatur, ut praecisum actualiter a rationali, quia ad hoc requiritur actus reflexus, sed eo ipso actu praescinditur a rationali, ergo falsum est ex vi distinctionis ratiocinatae derivari distinctionem in obiecto praecise, quatenus intentionali modo existit in intellectu, et hac ratione idem obiectum reale secundum diversa esse intentionalia posse diversas terminare cognitiones. Probatur assumptum [...] quia in praecisio animalis a rationali cognosco animal, secundum quod est substantia animata, sensitiva, et secundum quod ei conveniunt operationes sensitivae, sed haec, et similia praedicata ei competunt, secundum quod est a parte rei, non autem secundum aliquod esse obiectivum, et intentionale." Note that Mastri's argument here assumes his opponent's view that the distinction between *animal* and *rational* is merely virtual – which, of course, is not his own position.

²⁰ Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 16, art. 2, n. 304, 332b: "[I]psa quoque cognitionum pluralitas actualis pendet a virtuali pluralitate obiecti, bene enim potest effectus secundum suum esse formale dependere a causa virtuali, ut calor est a calore virtuali Lucis, et creatura a Deo, ut virtualiter continente perfectiones illarum [...]. Quare [...] dicendum obiectum anteceder ad cognitionem habere virtualiter, quod possit plures terminare cognitiones sui inadaequatas secundum diversas formalitates, atque ideo duplex illa terminatio potius ex parte obiecti se tenebit quam ex parte intellectus."

plurality in virtue of its being cognized, but at the object inasmuch as it has a virtual plurality and distinction prior to its being cognized.²¹

This “virtual and fundamental plurality” which is not “actual and formal plurality” therefore, according to Mastri, suffices to enable abstraction by means of objective precision:

Thus, although prior to the cognitive act by means of which, e.g., *animal* is prescinded from *rational* – or, to use an example conceded by all,²² prior to the act by means of which the calefactive power of the Sun is prescinded from its exsiccativa power there are no *ex natura rei* distinct formalities in the Sun, still they precede the act as distinct virtually and fundamentally. And from this virtual plurality of objects also derives the plurality of acts: for these acts, being confused and inadequate, tend to their objects not inasmuch as they are really and formally *a parte rei* one, but inasmuch as they are virtually many and distinct. And by this antecedent virtual distinction in the object, objective precisions made by the intellect are vindicated. For by means of a direct act of intellect one [formality] is so prescinded from another that although in reality it is formally one and the same thing and *realitas*, still, owing to the virtual distinction and multiplication, it terminates distinct acts of cognition so that one [formality] terminates an act which the other does not terminate. And so it is clear that objective precisions arising from the “reasoned” distinction would not be successfully vindicated by saying that the distinct formalities terminate distinct acts of cognition according to their distinct intentional beings – for the distinction of reasoned reason is not a distinction between two beings of reason. Rather, [objective precision] is vindicated precisely by means of a diversity of formalities pre-existing in the object: not, to wit, an actual and formal diversity, but a virtual and fundamental one.²³

21 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 16, art. 2, n. 304, 333a: “Quamvis enim per illas duas cognitiones non cognoscatur pluralitas, et distinctio illarum formalitatum [...], adhuc tamen illa pluralitas, et distinctio formalitatum per duplicem illam cognitionem causatur, et per illam attingitur pluralitas tantum, et distinctio virtualis, et fundamentalis; unde [...] dicendum est illas cognitiones neque terminari ad obiecta distincta actualiter ex natura rei ante cognitionem, neque ad obiectum ut habet pluralitatem, et distinctionem ex vi cognitioni, sed ad obiectum, ut habet pluralitatem, et distinctionem virtualemente ante ipsam cognitionem [...]” (This is a continuation of the quotation given in note 17.)

22 Again, Mastri has been assuming here the Thomist position which posits the virtual distinction on the categorial level.

23 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 16, art. 2, n. 314, 336a: “Quare [...] licet antecedenter ad cognitionem, qua animal v. g. praescinditur a rationali, vel ut utar exemplo ab omnibus concessio, qua virtus calefactiva in Sole praescinditur ab exsiccativa, non praecedant in Sole huiusmodi formalitates ex natura rei distinctae; praecedunt tamen ut distinctae virtualiter, et fundamentaliter, et ex hac virtuali pluralitate obiectorum pendet etiam pluralitas actuum, nam isti actus tendunt in illa obiecta, non quidem ut unum realiter, et formaliter a parte rei, quia sunt actus confusi, et inadaequati, sed ut virtualiter plura, et distincta. Et ratione istius distinctionis virtualis in obiecto praecedentis salvantur praecisiones obiectivae per intellectum factae, nam per actum intellectus rectum ita una praescinditur ab alia, quod licet a parte rei sit una, et eadem

So, what are we to make of all this? It is clear that Mastri concedes Scotus's main point against Henry, viz. that a plurality of cognitive acts presupposes a certain plurality on the part of their objects. Moreover, he concedes Scotus's point that this plurality on the part of the objects cannot be reduced to the plurality of intentional beings which, being produced by these acts, is posterior to them and thus already presupposes the plurality of acts as established on some other grounds. An object considered qua existing intentionally in the intellect is a being of reason – i. e., something that *as such* is not real: it is an objective concept, not a real thing; therefore, it is not that which real concepts (such as “animal” and “rational”) intend.

The crucial ingredient of Mastri's position is, therefore, the notion of “virtual plurality” and his contention that an *actual plurality of acts* can be derived from a merely *virtual plurality of objects*. The notion of virtual plurality is designed to open a loophole in Scotus's argument as an alternative he had not considered. But is there room for such an alternative at all? Can the notion of virtual plurality be given such a meaning as to justify Mastri's attempt to avoid the Scylla of a universal need for the formal distinction as a *sine qua non* of objective precision?

It is clear from what I have said so far that to understand “virtual plurality” merely in sense (1) – that is, in the sense of “potential plurality” – would not help at all. For to say that “the object has a virtual capacity to terminate a plurality of inadequate cognitions” would in this sense mean that the object has a merely *potential* capacity to terminate a plurality of cognitions, that is, that the object *can* have the capacity but *does not actually have it* – and therefore it actually *is not capable* of terminating a plurality of acts. To be present potentially is, in plain English, not to be in fact present, and so a plurality which is merely potential is not, as a matter of fact, a plurality. To do the required job, therefore, virtuality must mean something more than mere potentiality.

What about adding sense (2)? Thus interpreted, “virtual plurality” would, in addition to meaning (1), include a capacity to produce a plurality of acts. This interpretation is strongly suggested by Mastri's only attempt to anchor his assertions concerning virtuality in a general principle: viz. when he says that “an effect can perfectly well depend, according to its formal being, on a virtual cause.” But this is simply the “causal strategy” considered by Scotus and found wanting

res, et realitas formaliter, tamen ob virtualement distinctionem, et multipliciter varias terminat cognitiones, adeo ut una hanc numero cognitionem terminet, quam non terminat alia. Et sic patet, quomodo praecisiones obiectivae ortae ex vi distinctionis ratiocinatae non per hoc bene salventur quod distinctae formalitates terminent distinctas cognitiones, secundum diversa esse intentionalia, quia [...] distinctio rationis ratiocinatae non cadit inter diversa entia rationis, sed salvatur praecipue ob diversitatem formalitatum praecedentem in obiecto, non quidem formalem et actualement, sed virtualement et fundamentalement.”

on epistemic grounds: we must explain not only how the plurality of cognitive acts is possible causally, i. e., how it is possible that one and the same thing causes more than one cognitive act, but how it is possible *epistemically*, viz. how there can be two altogether distinct *conceptual contents* which are both perfectly identical to one and the same external reality. And on interpretation (1+2), the object *is* one and the same reality or formality – because being “virtually” many does not mean anything beyond (1) being capable of being multiplied but not in fact multiplied and (2) being capable of producing many cognitive acts. “To grasp the object according to its virtual plurality” would therefore just mean to grasp it according to its non-existent plurality, and so any two concepts of such an object would have perfectly identical content – they would be just one and the same concept thought several times over, as we have seen.

Interpretation (3) seems to be the most promising one. Accordingly, an object having a virtual plurality means that the object is actually one but it *behaves as if it were many*: and, on that account, it is capable of terminating many cognitive acts. For clarity’s sake, let us imagine how that would work on the categorial level.²⁴ For example, the one and actually undistinguished (let us assume that for the sake of argument) formality of *man* might present itself to the intellect either as the (quasi-)formality *man*, or as the (quasi-)formality *animal*, or as the formality *rational*, or as any of the higher-generic formalities such as *substance* or *living being*. Thus, it seems, we would finally have what we had been striving for: viz. several distinct concepts which truly differ according to their conceptual content, yet grasp a formality which is really and formally one and the same. Mastri, of course, would not apply this notion of virtual plurality on the categorial but on the transcendental level, but this is not our concern here: the hypothetical application to categorial concepts only serves to clarify the notion itself.

Unfortunately, the feasibility of this interpretation is just an illusion: for it merely attempts to solve the problem by a *fiat*, so to speak. The notion of virtual plurality in this sense simply stipulates the desired solution, without, however, securing any conceptual room for it.

For what does it mean that one and the same formality *behaves* or *presents itself* as though it were many? Does the formality *man* which presents itself now as if it were the formality *animal*, now as if it were the formality *rational*, now as if it were some other higher genus, merely *pretend* to be these distinct objects

²⁴ I am taking the same liberty as Mastri by exploring this notion of virtual plurality on the categorial level, although an example true to Mastri’s actual views would have to involve transcendental, not categorial concepts. But the scope of application is not at issue here: we are exploring the very notion of virtual plurality as such, and categorial concepts just serve as an uncomplicated hypothetical example. For, unfortunately, in Mastri the transcendental level involves additional problems which I would like to avoid here – see my “Scoti de conceptu entis doctrina” and note 36 below).

without actually being them? If so, it would seem that the concepts *animal* and *rational* are in fact fictitious – they grasp not something real but something fake. Or shall we say that when the formality *man* presents itself as *animal* or as *rational* it also *truly is* these formalities? Then the concepts *animal* and *rational* will be real, they will indeed grasp something that truly is out there – but as a matter of fact, they will be one and the same concept. For if the formality *man* is the same both as the formality *animal* and as the formality *rational*, then, by transitivity of identity, *man* and *rational* are one and the same formality, one and the same conceptual content. Ultimately, the dilemma is precisely the one repeatedly stressed by Scotus.²⁵ No matter how the formality *man* presents itself or what it pretends to be, either what is grasped by the concepts *animal* and *rational* is identical to that selfsame and actually undistinguished formality, and then they are one and the same concept, or it is not, and then it is not anything that can be essentially predicated of a man.

It seems, therefore, that while Mastri's notion of virtual plurality captures the *desideratum* of his (or, rather, the Thomist) theory, it ultimately fails to provide any actual *vindication* of that theory and is open to the same sort of devastating critique which Scotus poured upon the poor Henry.

5. What about Charybdis?

If my analysis is correct, Mastri failed in his attempt to secure a conceptual place for objective precision without the formal distinction and so fell victim to the abovementioned Scylla. But let us now suppose, for the sake of analysis, that he succeeded. Perhaps I have made a mistake, perhaps there is a way to conceive the virtual distinction or a virtual plurality so as to slip through the net of Scotus's reasoning. Assuming that Mastri can avoid Scylla, we can still ask: is there a way that doing so he may escape Charybdis? Assuming that Scotus's arguments proving the necessity of the formal distinction can be thwarted *somewhere*, how do we avoid the same strategy being successful *everywhere*? If the formal distinction is *not* a necessary condition for objective precision, how shall we ever prove its existence at least somewhere? Or, more specifically:

- (1) Can Mastri, on this assumption, make Scotus's argument for the formal distinction from the possibility of objective precision work *somewhere*?
- (2) And, if 1) is not possible, can he possibly prove the formal distinction in some other way?

²⁵ Cf. Novák, “*Qui melius scit exponere, exponat!*,” figures 2 and 3 depicting the “Argument form Veridicity.”

5.1 An Argument from Objective Precision?

In Mastri's treatment of the matter I can discern the following main arguments for the formal distinction:²⁶

- (1) *From diversity of definitions*: a difference in definition presupposes a distinction between formalities;²⁷
- (2) *From distinct adequate conceivability*: distinct adequate concepts presuppose distinct formalities.²⁸
- (3) *From composition of created things*: created things cannot be as simple as God is, therefore they must be *a parte rei* composite;²⁹
- (4) *From order of metaphysical grades*: a genus is *ex natura rei* prior to a differentia, therefore they must be *ex natura rei* distinct;³⁰
- (5) *From contradiction*: contradictory predicates presuppose *a parte rei* distinct subjects;³¹
- (6) *From Holy Trinity*: God's one essence must be formally distinct from the relations that constitute the three Persons.³²

Now since we are inquiring about Scotus's *philosophical* arguments for the formal distinction, we can disregard argument (6). Of the remaining five, the first two can be interpreted as slightly modified incarnations of Scotus's argument from possibility of abstraction; and, as a matter of fact, Argument (1) ultimately boils down to Argument (2). Mastri first formulates Argument (1) in the following way:

The first argument is from definitions: many items which are really identical have different definitions [...]. Therefore, since a definition expresses the formal and quidditative being which the thing has in reality prior to any work of the intellect whatsoever, an actual distinction in reality must be conceded between these items, one that is stronger than a distinction of reason or a virtual distinction but weaker than a real distinction. This is confirmed because separability indicates a proportionate distinction of the separable items. Therefore, just like real separability proves a real distinction between what is thus separable, so separability according to conceivability required actually *ex natura rei*

26 See esp. Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 214ff, 296a ff., and the places cited below. In my presentation, I am systematizing Mastri's rather chaotic treatment dispersed over several places.

27 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 214, 296a–b.

28 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 218, 297a.

29 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 218, 297b; cf. also Mastrius / Bellutus, *Logica*, disp. 5, q. 3, art. 2, n. 127, 182b, and Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 8, q. 6, art. 2, n. 187, 61a–b.

30 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 8, q. 6, art. 2, n. 188–189, 61b–62a.

31 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 215–216, 296b–7a; but also *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 12, n. 242, 306b, and Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 8, q. 6, art. 2, n. 190–193, 62a–63a.

32 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 217, 297a.

proves an actual distinction *ex natura rei* between thus conceivable contents which is stronger than a distinction of reason and weaker than a real distinction.³³

This argument is certainly prone to criticism in many respects. It seems to be a concise version of Scotus's Argument from Veridicity – the veridicity of distinct concepts or definitions somehow implies the *ex natura rei* nature (i.e., mind-independence) of the distinction between their contents – but it is nowhere as elaborate and explicit as Scotus's. It remains hazy why the fact that the *contents* (*rationes*) expressed by the distinct concepts are extra-mental should imply that the *distinction* between these contents is extra-mental as well. And one cannot help suspecting that the required conclusion is somehow smuggled in by conceptual separability being qualified as “required actually *ex natura rei*” – we are never told what exactly this phrase means.

But the greatest problem of this argument is that it appears to prove too much for Mastri. For concepts have distinct definitions not only on the categorical level, but also on the transcendental level – where, as we know, a mere virtual distinction suffices to ground them.

Indeed – the same argument is commonly used by Scotists to prove the formal distinction *even on the transcendental level*, as can be seen, e.g., in the Prague Scotist Bernhard Sannig (1637–1704), who argues:

I say, fourth, that the objective concept of being is metaphysically prescinded from the special objective concept[s] of its subordinates and its modes and is formally distinct from these concepts. [...] The second part is proved: First, because being and its subordinates and modes have different definitions [...]; therefore, the objective concept of being is formally distinct from the objective concept[s] of its subordinates and its modes. The inference holds because, in Scotism, different definitions of two identical things prove the formal distinction.³⁴

33 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 214, 296a: “[P]rima est via definitionis, nam multa realiter identificantur, quae tamen variis definitionibus explicantur [...]. [C]um igitur definitio explicet esse formale, et quidditativum, quod habet res a parte rei antecedenter ad quodcumque opus Intellectus, concedenda est inter illa plura aliqua distinctio actualis a parte rei, quae sit maior distinctione rationis, et virtualis, et minor reali. Conf. quia separabilitas indicat proportionatam distinctionem in extremis separabilibus, sicut ergo separabilitas secundum rem arguit inter extrema sic separabilia distinctionem realem, ita separabilitas secundum conceptibilitatem exigita actu ex natura rei arguit actualem distinctionem ex natura rei majorem distinctione rationis, et minorem reali inter rationes sic conceptibiles.”

34 Sannig, *Schola philosophica scotistarum*, tom. III, *Met.*, disp. 2, q. 1, n. 11, 177b: “Dico quarto: conceptus obiectivus Entis est metaphysice praecisus a conceptu obiectivo speciali suorum inferiorum, et modorum; ac formaliter distinctus a conceptu eorundem. [...] Probatur secunda pars: Tum quia Ens, eiusque inferiora, et modi habent diversas definitiones, ut patet ex alibi dictis, ubi Ens, substantiam, accidens etc. suis locis definivi: Ergo conceptus obiectivus Entis est formaliter distinctus a conceptu obiectivo inferiorum, et modorum. Consequentia tenet; quia diversae definitiones duarum rerum identificatarum arguunt distinctionem formalem in via Scoti.”

But a formal distinction between being and its subordinates is precisely what Mastri rejects; and so, he needs to restrain the scope of the argument from definitions somehow. He does so immediately:

However, to tread this path of demonstrating the necessity of the formal distinction correctly, we must be aware that “definition” must be understood as one composed of adequate concepts: for such [a definition] truly expresses the thing altogether as it is in reality prior to any work of the intellect whatsoever. A definition composed of inadequate concepts, on the other hand, does not express the thing altogether as it formally is in reality, and therefore a plurality of such definitions does not prove a formal and actual distinction between the many items, but merely a virtual and fundamental one. And this is why we said above that the formal distinction is concluded from separate conceivability by a perfectly conceiving intellect: for if such an intellect says that one content is not another, certainly such objective contents cannot be altogether identical in reality, or else such cognition would not be true and perfect.³⁵

So, not every distinction of concepts or definitions is sufficient to prove the formal distinction, according to Mastri: they must be *adequate* concepts. And what is an adequate concept? It is a concept that grasps the formality or reality which it grasps *in its entirety*. The concept *animal* is adequate because it grasps the entire formality *animal*. The concept of being, according to Mastri, is *not* adequate, because it does *not* grasp any formality in its entirety, but it grasps *partially* both the formality of Infinite Being (God) and the formality of finite being. There is no such item as the formality *being as such* to be adequately conceived because the *ratio entis* is *not*, according to Mastri, formally distinct from its contracting principles.³⁶

35 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 214, 296a: “Verum ut hac via recte incedamus ad ostendendam necessitatem formalis distinctionis, advertendum est, id intelligendum esse de definitione, quae traditur per conceptus adaequatos; haec enim est, quae vere rem exprimit omnino ut se habet a parte rei ante quodcumque opus intellectus, definitionem autem, quae traditur per conceptus inadaequatos, non exprimit rem omnino, ut se habet a parte rei formaliter, et ideo pluralitas talium definitionum non arguit inter plura distinctionem formalem et actualem, sed tantum virtualem, et fundamentalem; et ideo supra diximus distinctionem formalem sumi ex separatione conceptibilitatum in ordine ad intellectum perfecte concipientem, si enim talis intellectus dicit unam rationem non esse aliam, non utique possunt tales rationes obiectivae a parte rei esse omnino idem, alias cognitio illa non esset vera, et perfecta.”

36 There seems to be a serious confusion in Mastri concerning what exactly these contracting principles are: viz. whether they are the intrinsic modes of finiteness and infinity or rather some essential formal *rationes*, unknown to us, upon which the formally-modally distinct intrinsic modes are grounded (which I believe is his actual, ill-expressed view). Cf. Novák, “Scoti de conceptu entis doctrina”, 254–57; and the critical response in Forlivesi, “The Nature of Transcendental Being.” Mastri agrees with Scotus in calling the concept of being “inadequate” and “imperfect,” but it is not clear whether he means the same thing as Scotus by these terms – in particular, whether in Scotus it has the implication of the lack of *any a parte rei* distinction, even

The distinction between adequate and inadequate conceivability is therefore crucial for the argument, and so Argument (1) really boils down to Argument (2). But this precisely is the trouble: for how are we to discern which concept is

a modal one, as it seems to have for Mastri. For Scotus, the concept of being is inadequate and improper simply because it abstracts from the intrinsic *modi* of finiteness and infiniteness (and not from differentiae); cf. *Ord.* I, dist. 8, p. 1, q. 3, nn. 138–42 (ed. Vat. IV), 222–24. However, the distinction between a reality/formality and its intrinsic mode is not a mere distinction of reason but is *a parte rei*, both for Mastri and for Scotus – cf. *ibid.*, n. 140 (ed. Vat. IV), 223: “Si autem tantum esset distinctio *in re* sicut realitatis et sui modi intrinseci, non posset intellectus habere proprium conceptum illius realitatis et non habere conceptum illius modi intrinseci rei [...] sed in illo perfecto conceptu haberet unum obiectum adaequatum illi [...]” (Italics mine.) Mastri, however, seems to be committed to an incoherent triad: (i) the distinction between an intrinsic mode and what it modifies is *ex natura rei*; (ii) *being* is contracted by intrinsic modes; (iii) the distinction between *being* and its contracting principles is not *ex natura rei* but merely virtual. Forlivesi (272–81) retorts that Mastri’s position can be made coherent sense of, suggesting (279) that the contracting principles are intrinsic modes which are, exceptionally, merely virtually distinct from the inadequately conceived *ratio entis* (while in other cases intrinsic modes are *ex natura rei* distinct from what they modify, in agreement with Mastri’s standard teaching on the nature of modal distinction). But this contradicts Mastri’s explicit teaching that intrinsic modes are not constitutive parts of an essence (cf. “Scoti de conceptu entis doctrina,” 254). Moreover, Mastri never ever hints at the existence of any *distinctio virtualis modalis* in his catalogue of distinctions (instead, he clearly associates the modal distinction, which is *ex natura rei*, with the contraction of *being* by the modes of finitude and infinity). At the same time, however, he claims elsewhere (as Forlivesi himself notes on p. 275) that an *ex natura rei* distinct common reality would have to be contracted by *differentiae* and generally seems to conceptually associate contraction by modes with a mere rational distinction (which in turn he associates with “inadequate conceiving”). But that would rule out an *ex natura rei* modal distinction altogether, everywhere. So, I do not find Forlivesi’s vindication of the coherence of Mastri’s doctrine successful – but a satisfactory response would require a separate paper (hopefully to be written, sometime). Andersen, *Metaphysik im Barockscotismus*, 492–93, focuses on another aspect of the controversy and supports Forlivesi’s view that the problem is somehow sidestepped by pointing out that according to Mastri, there is no common *realitas* of being to be contracted, in the first place – the contraction only takes place in our intellect. This is true, of course, but even a mere conceptual contraction would require a *virtual* composition *in reality* of one contracted *ratio* and one contracting *ratio*, merely virtually distinct from each other – and the question is, what these *rationes* are like, and, if the contracting ones are intrinsic modes, how that squares with Mastri’s general doctrine on modal distinction which is *ex natura rei* and not merely virtual. (Andersen verbally endorses Forlivesi’s explanation of Mastri’s doctrine, but by acknowledging (492) that for Mastri, finitude and infinity are modes not of *being* but rather of the primarily diverse *realitates* of God and creature, he implicitly acknowledges my thesis that according to Mastri, the inadequately conceivable, merely virtually distinct *ratio entis* must be contracted to the adequately conceivable reality of either God or creature by *some unspecified principles that are prior to the modi* – which contradicts Forlivesi’s position that the virtually distinct contracting principles are *the modi*.) In the present paper, I simply assume that according to Mastri there is a virtual distinction between *being* and its contracting principles and bracket the question of what their exact nature might be.

adequate and which is inadequate – *without knowing first where there are formal distinctions in reality and where there are merely virtual ones?* If the epistemic criterion of the formal distinction is adequate conceivability, then the criterion of adequate concepts cannot be that they are based on formal distinctions – such an account would be circular. And it seems that the circularity is there indeed – for Mastri explicitly defines “formality” by means of adequate conceivability:

Formality is commonly defined by the Scotists as an objective content in a thing conceivable by a perfect and adequate concept, distinct from a concept by means of which another formality of the same thing is conceived. [...] And it is said “by a perfect and adequate concept” because an objective content which is conceivable inadequately cannot properly be called a formality – such as, e.g., the ratio of being, of good, and any transcendental grade. For such contents are not conceivable in reality by a perfect and adequate concept but only by an inadequate one [...].³⁷

Thus, an adequate concept is such that it grasps a formality in its entirety, and a formality is that which is conceivable by an adequate concept – there seems to be no independent criterion of a concept’s adequacy. At any rate it seems clear that as far as the logical and epistemic nature of the respective concepts is concerned, adequate concepts do not differ from inadequate ones, as both are perfectly univocal, perfectly prescinded from their contracting principles etc.

The upshot is that by confining the efficacy of Scotus’s argument from the possibility of objective precision to adequate concepts, Mastri effectively *rejects* this argument, because he *no longer* regards the possibility of objective precision *as such* as a sufficient ground for vindicating the formal distinction. By moving from separate conceivability to separate *adequate* conceivability, Mastri in fact drifts away from Scotus’s original principled reasons why the formal distinction is necessary in metaphysics. For him, any argument capable of establishing the formal distinction must be derived from the *specific* cases of its application, such as the genus–differentia composition, the relation of an essence to its *propria passio*,³⁸ or the Trinity. The answer to the first question of this section must therefore be *no*: Mastri *cannot* possibly adopt, or adapt, Scotus’s main metaphysical argument for the formal distinction.

37 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 213, 295b: “Hinc apud Scotistas Formalitas definiri solet esse rationem obiectivam conceptibilem in re aliquo conceptu perfecto, et adaequato distincto a conceptu quo concipitur alia formalitas eiusdem rei. [...] [D]icitur autem conceptu perfecto et adaequato, quia ratio obiectiva inadaequate conceptibilis proprie nequit dici Formalitas, ut ratio entis, boni, et cuiuscumque gradus transcendentis, istae enim rationes non sunt conceptibiles in re conceptu perfecto, et adaequato, sed tantum inadaequato [...]”

38 For brevity’s sake, I leave aside the discussion of this application. Mastri’s treatment can be found at *Logica*, disp. 5, q. 4, art. 1, nn. 180–83, 192a–b, and *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 218, 297b.

Moreover, the argument from adequate conceivability is as such circular. It can only be upheld if it is reduced to some other argument that might provide an independent justification of Mastroi's claim that *only* categorial grades are adequately conceivable.

5.2 Other Arguments?

The insufficiency – i.e., ultimate circularity – of the argument from adequate conceivability can be seen from the way Mastroi tends to reduce it to his other arguments. The following is one example:

The opponents concede that there can be a distinction in reality between items that have an adequate conceivability but not between those that have a merely inadequate one. But the generic and the differential grade are such that they have different adequate conceivabilities – therefore, etc. Proof of the minor premise: [The formality] *animal* existing in the man has of its nature one and the same conceivable content [*ratio*] as that which is in the horse; and it can be adequately conceived according to its entire actual perfection without [the formality of] *rationality* being conceived. For if it could not be thus adequately conceived, it would include in its perfection some [additional] determining feature and so it could not possess intrinsically one and the same conceivable content [*ratio*] both in the horse and in other species.³⁹

Mastroi clearly starts with the adequate conceivability argument but is forced to vindicate the crucial premise – viz. that the genus and the differentia indeed are adequately (and not merely inadequately) conceivable. How do we know that? Well, because otherwise the formality that we grasp by means of a generic concept would in reality include *more content* than is grasped by the concept – for example, the formality grasped by the concept of *animal* would, in the man, also include the *ratio* of the differentia *rational* (since there would be no distinction *a parte rei* between the two), but in the horse it would include the *ratio* of some other differentia – and so the formality conceived by a generic concept would be *a parte rei* different in each species.

The problem is, however – why is this a problem? How do we know it is not in fact so? For this is precisely how Aquinas and the Thomists understand

³⁹ Mastroi, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 218, 297a: “Adversarii concedunt posse reperiri distinctionem a parte rei inter illa, quae habent diversimodam conceptibilitatem adaequatam, non autem quae habent inadaequatam, sed ita se habent gradus genericus, et differentialis, quod diversam habent conceptibilitatem adaequatam, ergo etc. Probatur minor, quia animal quod est in homine ex natura sua est unius, et eiusdem rationis cum eo, quod est in equo, et adaequate concipi potest secundum totam suam propriam perfectionem actualem absque eo quod concipiatur rationalitas, si enim ita adaequate concipi non posset, iam in sua perfectione aliquid includeret ipsum determinans, et sic non posset esse eiusdem omnino rationis intrinsece in equo et aliis speciebus.”

the nature of a genus: recall Aquinas's insistence in *De ente et essentia* that a genus or a species signifies the *entire* individual essence as a whole, albeit indistinctly.⁴⁰ It is not a bug but a feature of the Thomist (or, generally, non-Scotist) position that the entire individual is, as it were, one single formality and any universal concept only expresses it inadequately (because it at least fails to grasp its individuality). How is this alternative excluded by Mastri's argument? The answer is that so far it is not, and I dare say Mastri knows that: for he rushes to offer another argument for the crucial minor premise:

Another proof of the same minor premise: God only conceives things adequately and distinctly. But God conceives the sameness and the difference of the man and the brute, for he does not conceive them as differing by their entire essence (or else either the man or the brute would not be an animal) nor as being the same according to their entire essence (for then he would cognize the brute as being no less a rational animal than the man). Therefore, to grasp both the sameness and the difference of the man and the brute, God clearly must conceive those grades as *ex natura rei* and adequately distinct; and if he did not so conceive them, he would certainly perceive neither the difference between the man and the brute nor their sameness, which is absurd.⁴¹

We are here witnessing Mastri's reasoning gradually delving into what seem to me to be his deepest reasons for the necessity of the formal distinction – viz. those derived from the need to vindicate the reality of both sameness and difference (or similarity and dissimilarity) between two species of the same genus (or two inferior genera of the same superior genus). An immediate retort to the given argument could be that the very same argument could be applied to the transcendental concept of being: God certainly must perceive both the difference (in the respective modes of finiteness and infinity) and similarity (in the common *ratio entis*) between Himself and the creatures – and yet Mastri does not posit the *ratio entis* as *ex natura rei* distinct from its contracting principles. God, ac-

40 Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2 (ed. Leonina XLIII), 373a: “[...] [S]icut [...] genus, prout praedicabatur de specie, implicabat in sua significatione, quamvis indistincte, totum quod determinate est in specie, ita etiam et [...] species, secundum quod praedicatur de individuo, oportet quod significet totum id quod est essentialiter in individuo, licet indistincte.” *Ibid.*, c. 3 (ed. Leonina XLIII), 374a: “[...] ratio generis vel speciei conveniat essentiae, secundum quod significatur per modum totius, ut nomine hominis vel animalis, prout implicite et indistincte continet totum hoc, quod in individuo est.”

41 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, n. 218, 297a: “[P]robatur etiam eadem minor, quia Deus non cognoscit res, nisi adaequate, et distincte, sed Deus cognoscit convenientiam, et differentiam inter hominem, et brutum, non enim concipit illa in tota essentia differe, quia vel homo, vel brutum non esset animal, neque in tota essentia convenire, quia tunc cognosceret brutum non minus esse animal rationale, quam sit homo: ut ergo cognoscatur a Deo convenientia, et differentia hominis, et bruti, plane concipere debet gradus illos, ut ex natura rei, et adaequate distinctos, quod si eos non concipit, certe discrimen inter hominem, et brutum, nec convenientiam inter illa attingit, quod est absurdum.”

cording to Mastri, is both similar and dissimilar to creatures *according to one and the very same formality*. So why does a coincidence of sameness and difference in creatures require the formal distinction (between the grade in which two species are similar to each other and the grade in which they differ) while in God it does not? We have just reduced the case to what seems to be Mastri's ultimate argument for the formal distinction – viz. to the Argument from Contradiction, either explicitly or implicitly present at many places of his reasoning.

To facilitate understanding, I will first sketch the general outline of the argument and then proceed to show how Mastri implements it in his texts. The gist of the argument consists in an inference that can be expressed in the following way:

$$\begin{array}{l} (x \text{ is } F) \ \& \ (y \text{ is not } F), \\ \hline \text{therefore,} \quad \text{there is a distinction between } x \text{ and } y; \end{array}$$

or perhaps more precisely,

$$\begin{array}{l} (x \text{ is } F \text{ qua } R) \ \& \ (x \text{ is not } F \text{ qua } S), \\ \hline \text{therefore,} \quad \text{there is a distinction between the aspects } R \text{ and } S. \end{array}$$

But *what* kind of distinction? Well, that depends on the kind of contradiction. Mastri distinguishes three possible cases:⁴²

42 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 11, art. 1, nn. 215–16, 296b: “Advertendum est [...] non posse hanc [formalem] distinctionem inferri ex quacumque contradictione absolute sumpta, quia contradictio infert distinctionem praecise cum ipsa commensuratam, non maiorem, neque minorem; si est contradictio facta per intellectum et secundum esse diversum esse rationis, infert solam distinctionem rationis, ut constat in propositione identica de Petro posito a parte subjecti, ac etiam praedicati; si est contradictio secundum esse reale, ac entitativum, ut esse, et non esse absolute sumpta, aut saltem secundum praedicata ad tale esse spectantia, ut esse productum, vel non productum, causatum, vel non causatum, infert realem, ac entitativam distinctionem inter extrema, de quibus verificatur; si denique est contradictio secundum esse formale, aut praedicata ad tale esse spectantia, infert tantum formalem distinctionem, non vero realem [...]. [D]istinctio virtualis non ponit actu aliquid diversum in extremis ante operationem intellectus, ergo fundare non potest veritatem actualem utriusque partis actualis contradictionis, sed poterit tantum fundare, quando accedente opere intellectus advenit distinctio actualis inter extrema actu multiplicata per intellectum.” Cf. also *Met.*, disp. 6, q. 12, n. 242, 306b: “[Q]ualis est contradictio, talem etiam distinctionem ex ipsa inferimus; si est contradictio rationis, solam infert quoque rationis distinctionem, si est contradictio realis, et actu a parte rei verificata, infert pariter distinctionem ex natura rei actualem, et non tantum virtualem inter extrema de quibus verificatur.”

- The contradiction is *entitative*, (i.e., concerning matters of existence, production, etc.) – then the distinction implied is a *real distinction*;
- The contradiction is *formal and actual* (i.e., concerning formal predicates) – then the implied distinction is a *formal distinction*;
- The distinction is *mind-dependent* (i.e., only arises in dependence on an act of the intellect) – then the implied distinction is a distinction of (either reasoned or reasoning) reason.

So why, then, must the contradiction between sameness and difference (i.e., not-sameness) be resolved by means of the formal distinction on the specific or generic level, whereas on the transcendental level the mere virtual distinction is sufficient? Elsewhere, Mastri provides an answer: because

God and creature are both the same and different in one and the same respect, but not in the same way: for their difference is actual whereas their sameness is virtual and dispositional – and this is not a contradiction.⁴³

In other words: a man is both *actually* similar and *actually* dissimilar to a horse; therefore, there must be an *actual* distinction in reality between the aspect of the man's essence according to which he is similar to a horse and the aspect of the man's essence according to which he is dissimilar to it. On the other hand, only God's dissimilarity to a creature exists *actually a parte rei*, whereas his similarity is *not* actual but merely "virtual" or "dispositional" (*aptitudinalis*) – that is, there is a disposition or aptitude *a parte rei* to be *conceived as* similar in terms of the inadequate concept of being, but prior to the abstraction of this concept there is no actual similarity.⁴⁴

⁴³ Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 2, q. 3, art. 1. n. 87, 49b: "Deus, et creatura secundum idem a parte rei conveniunt et differunt, sed non eodem modo, nam differunt actualiter, conveniunt virtualiter, et aptitudinaliter, quod non contradicit [...]"

⁴⁴ This, however, is not to say that the similarity is *not real* or *a parte rei*! According to Mastri, the "virtual" or "inchoative" similarity between God and creatures is out there *a parte rei* and *ante opus intellectus*, as irrespective of any work of any intellect both God and a creature are capable of causing a concept common to both (note again the causal language!). There is a dialectic: qua in the thing, the similarity is real but merely virtual or fundamental, qua actualized it is no longer real but merely "of reason." Cf. Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 2, q. 3, art. 1, nn. 86–87, 49b: "Circumscripto omni intellectu Deus, et creatura habent aliquam convenientiam, quia plus conveniunt, quam ens, et nihil; ergo illa convenientia est realis, et consequenter fundamentum istius convenientiae debet esse reale, nempe realis unitas alicuius naturae communis, quae conceptui entis correspondeat. [...] Deus et Creatura ob infinitam eorum distantiam sunt primo diversa in realitate, adhuc tamen conveniunt in conceptu entis, et verum est unitatem huius conceptus habere fundamentum reale, nempe realem convenientiam Dei, et creaturae in ratione essendi; sed hic maxime advertendum [...] similitudinem hanc realem [...] ante abstractionem conceptus entis non esse actualem, et positivam [...], sed adest tantum convenientia fundamentalis, et aptitudinalis [...] et talis convenientia fundamentalis est,

As already Scotus claimed, God and creatures are *primo diversa in realitate* (despite not being so *in conceptu*) – although it is questionable whether he meant the same thing, or derived from that assertion the same implications, as Mastri.⁴⁵ And for that reason, the contradiction of God’s being at the same time and *in the same respect* (that is, according to *one and the same formality*) both like and unlike the creatures is a mere “contradiction of reason” – it only arises due to the way we *conceive* God, it is not an *actual* contradiction in reality.

It might seem that Mastri’s notion of a mere “virtual and dispositional sameness/similarity” is an *ad hoc* construction, designed only to reconcile God’s simplicity with the univocity of being. But it is not so. It is Mastri’s explicit and systematic conviction that univocal concepts *can be abstracted* even from irreducibly diverse realities that have *nothing* in common:

There are two possible grounds that may allow a thing to be grasped in a confused and indistinct way according to some common feature. [i] Either that it has some reality *ex natura rei* in common with another thing. On that account, whenever that reality is adequately and distinctly conceived, at once anything that contains it and is therefore subordinate to it will be said to be conceived in a confused and indistinct way. This is how things are said to be conceived confusedly and indistinctly when they are grasped according to their common categorial features. [...] [ii] Another way a thing may be said to be conceived confusedly and indistinctly is when it is conceived inadequately owing to a certain affinity or as if an inchoative similarity which it has to another thing. This is how things are said to be conceived when they are grasped according to transcendental features: for such concepts are grounded not in one common nature existing in reality on the part of both God and creatures but in a certain virtual and inchoative similarity between them.⁴⁶

quod quodlibet istorum natum est causare conceptum communem ambobus, quoad rationem essendi apud intellectum inadaequate concipientem [...].”

⁴⁵ Duns Scotus, *Ord.* I, dist. 8, p. 1, q. 3, n. 82 (ed. Vat. IV), 190. In Scotus, ‘reality’ here means the same as ‘formality’; and as it is made clear later (*ibid.*, nn. 138–42, ed. Vat. IV, 222–24), the “irreducible diversity *in realitate*” refers not simply to a diversity according to what is really there, but to the *realitates* of God and creatures *qua including their respective intrinsic modes (of finiteness and infiniteness)*. It is doubtful that Scotus wants to imply that the distinction between a reality and its intrinsic mode is not actual *a parte rei*. He actually seems to assert the opposite; cf. note 36 above.

⁴⁶ Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 2, q. 3, art. 1. n. 82, 48a: “[R]es [...] aliqua potest intelligi confuse, et indistincte in signo quodam communi ex duplici capite: vel quia realitatem quandam ex natura rei communem cum alia habet, unde cum illa adaequate, et distincte concipitur, statim inferiora illam includentia dicuntur concipi confuse, et indistincte; et in hoc sensu res concipi dicuntur confuse, et indistincte, quando attinguntur secundum gradus communes praedica-mentales [...]. Alio modo dici potest res aliqua concipi confuse, et indistincte, quia inadaequate concipitur ob aliquam convenientiam, et veluti inchoatam similitudinem, quam habet cum alia re, et in hoc sensu concipi dicuntur, quando attinguntur per gradus transcendentales, quia

And the case of God and creatures is not the only instance of this – another one, explicitly noted by Mastri and quite ubiquitous, is agreement between irreducibly simple finite formalities. Irreducibly simple ultimate generic and specific differentiae are similar in their function of differentiating; individual differentiae agree in differentiating individually – and yet they do not and *cannot* have – on pain of infinite regress – any *a parte rei* distinct formality in common.⁴⁷ Mastri’s theory of a mere “virtual,” “inchoative,” or “dispositional” similarity can explain this puzzle in the Scotist theory of common concepts – but not without a price.

The price is, of course, the ever-recurring problem that once the requirements on a necessary ground for the abstraction of common concepts are lowered in certain cases, their vindication in the other cases becomes problematic. The argument that there *must* be instances of a merely “inchoative” or “virtual” similarity is convincing enough – especially considering the case of the ultimate differentiae. But how do we know that it is not the case that *all* instances of similarity are merely “virtual” or “inchoative”? There is perhaps a certain persuasiveness to the argument that the similarity of creatures to one another must be of a substantially stronger sort than that between God and creatures (but could not even *that* be explained merely by God’s infinity?). But ultimate differentiae are *not* infinitely distant from one another, so what justifies the claim that, say, an angel and a lump of quartz are substantially more similar than, e.g., the irreducibly diverse ultimate differentiae *rational* and *sensitive*?

Unfortunately, Mastri never develops his suggestion that the notion of “virtual similarity” might be applicable to ultimate differentiae or its implications for the general discussion regarding the justification of the formal distinction. He focuses on the case of God and creatures and the difference between “transcendental” and “categorical” similarity – but even on this perspective there always is the same worry lurking: if the formal distinction is not needed on the transcendental level, why do we need it on the categorical level?

One of Mastri’s opponents who voices precisely this concern is his Irish nemesis John Punch, who maintains the universal necessity of the formal distinction as a ground of abstraction, even with respect to the concept of being:

I know that the Thomists try to solve this and similar arguments that the Scotists employ to demonstrate the formal distinction between metaphysical grades by means of their “virtual” or “fundamental” distinction – and this is perhaps how Mastri will respond,

isti non fundantur in una natura communi reperta a parte rei in Deo et creatura, sed super quamdam virtuaalem, et inchoatam similitudinem, quae reperitur inter ipsa [...].”

47 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 2, q. 3, art. 1. n. 88, 49b–50a: “Sed sane non video, cur etiam ultimae differentiae dici nequeant similes saltem fundamentaliter in ratione faciendi differre, cum omnes eodem modo differe faciant scilicet ultimo, et ideo probabile censemus etiam ab ipsis inadaequate conceptis abstrahi posse, si non conceptum entis, quia ipsum non includunt, saltem conceptum ultimae differentiae, et haecceitatis [...].”

too. But if such a response were valid here, it will be valid everywhere and we won't be able to demonstrate the formal distinction anywhere.⁴⁸

Mastri defends himself, trying to vindicate the disparity between the categorial and the transcendental level – and this indeed is his ultimate response:

You will object that this solution [viz. that even *primo diversa* can agree in a concept] completely demolishes Scotus's principal grounds for admitting common natures *a parte rei*: [...]. For [Scotus's argument] is founded precisely in the contradiction that a man *a parte rei* both agrees with a donkey and a horse (in being an animal) and differs from them (in being rational). This is why these must be formalities distinct *ex natura rei*, because simultaneous sameness and difference of two things in altogether one and the same respect cannot occur.⁴⁹

I respond by rejecting the validity of the inference. For Scotus is speaking of a real, actual, and positive similarity in his argument, which is the one that occurs between individuals of the same species and between a man and a horse in their being sentient. Such, however, is not the similarity occurring between God and creature in the *ratio* of being, because it is merely virtual and fundamental, as has been said.⁵⁰

You will say: why is the similarity between God and creature in being not actual and positive while the one between a horse and a man in being sentient is? [...] This is obviously an *ad hoc* response.

I respond that the response is not *ad hoc* but well founded. For species and individuals are not irreducibly diverse but “somewhat the same,” i.e., agreeing in some reality, and therefore they ground a positive similarity to one another. God and creature, on the other hand, are irreducibly diverse in reality, as everyone concedes, and therefore cannot ground a real, actual, and positive similarity, but merely a virtual and fundamental one, thanks to which both can cause the common concept of being in an inadequately conceiving intellect. Besides, there is no doubt that God and creature are incommensurably more distant than two species, or two individuals of the same species; and so there is no

48 Joannes Poncius, *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer*, Met., disp. 2, q. 2, add., 885a–b: “Scio Thomistas conari solvere haec et similia argumenta, quae adducunt Scotistae ad probandam distinctionem formalem graduum Metaphysicorum, mediante sua distinctione virtuali aut fundamentali, aut rationis ratiocinatae; et sic etiam fortassis respondebit Mastrius. At si hic valeat illa responsio ubique valebit, et sic nullibi poterimus probare distinctionem formalem.”

49 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 2, q. 4, art. 1. n. 88, 49b: “Sed dices per hanc solutionem penitus enervari principale fundamentum, quo Scotus admittit naturas communes a parte rei [...] nam praecipue fundatur in hac contradictione, quod homo a parte rei convenit cum asino, et equo, ut animal est, differt ab ipsis, ut rationalis est, ergo istae sunt diversae formalitates ex natura rei, quia secundum eandem penitus rationem convenientia, et dissimilitudo inter aliqua duo contingere non potest.”

50 *Ibid.*: “Respondeo negando consequentiam, quia in ea ratione Doctor loquitur de similitudine reali, actuali et positiva, qualis est illa quae versatur inter individua eiusdem speciei, et inter hominem, et equum in ratione sentiendi, talis autem non est similitudo, quae inter Deum, et creaturam invenitur in ratione entis, quia [...] est virtualis tantum, et fundamentalis.”

wonder that there can be a positive actual similarity in the latter case while in the former case there cannot [...].⁵¹

It indeed seems that Mastri's ultimate justification of the formal distinction is that created things are much more similar to each other than they are to God, and therefore there must be common natures separated from the differentiating differentiae *ex natura rei*. But this is a very vague argument, incomparably less clear than Scotus's argument from the possibility of abstraction: for no one beside the Scotists has a problem in explaining how God is so much more different from creatures than the creatures from one another, *even though* they are *all* "irreducibly diverse," according to the Scotist standards, because there are no formal distinctions and therefore no *ex natura rei* common natures. Punch, to be sure, is not convinced either:

This response, however, strikes me as merely formal, without any probability of its actual content. Therefore, I say that if God and creature were so irreducibly diverse that they had no actual similarity to each other but a virtual one,⁵² so that the formality in which they agreed would not be *a parte rei* distinct from that in which they differ, the very same should be said of created species and individuals in comparison to one another. And to assert otherwise would be to beg the question, because no argument could be given that would demonstrate that similarity and distinction in them. And, conversely, if a positive similarity and an agreement in reality can be demonstrated, e.g., between a man and a brute, it will be possible to demonstrate the same kind of similarity between God and a creature in the *ratio* of being.⁵³

51 *Ibid.*: "Dices, quare similitudo inter Deum, et creaturam in ratione essendi non est actualis, et positiva, bene tamen inter equum, et hominem in ratione sentiendi [...]; plane hoc prorsus videtur voluntarie dictum. Respondeo non esse voluntarie dictum, sed satis rationabiliter, quia nimirum species, et individua non sunt primo diversa, sed aliquid idem entia, id est in aliquo realiter convenientia, et ideo fundant similitudinem positivam ad invicem; at Deus, et creatura sunt inter se primo diversa in realitate, ut apud omnes est in concessio, et ideo fundare nequeunt realem actualem, et positivam similitudinem, sed tantum virtualem, et fundamentalem, ratione cuius ambo causare possunt conceptum communem entis apud intellectum inadaequate concipientem; Tum quia nulli dubium est magis distare sine ulla proportione Deum, et creaturam ab invicem, quam duas species, vel duo individua sub eadem specie, et ideo mirum non est, si haec aliquam actualem positivam similitudinem fundare possunt, non illa [...]."

52 Punch rejects that – according to him, God and creatures agree in the formally distinct *ratio entis*.

53 Poncius, *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer*, Met., disp. 2, q. 2, add., 888a: "Sed haec responsio mihi videtur esse mere formalis, sine ulla probabilitate in re ipsa. Unde dico si Deus et creatura sint ita primo diversa ut non habeant similitudinem actualem, sed virtualem et propterea formalitas in qua conveniunt non distinguatur a parte rei ab illa qua disconveniunt, idem omnino dicendum de speciebus, et individuis creatis inter se comparatis, et gratis asseri oppositum, cum nulla possit dari ratio ob quam similitudo, aut distinctio in ea probari

The plight of the Mastrian position is salient also in another Scotist's work, that of Crescentius Krisper (1679/1680–1749),⁵⁴ a late Scotist who only rarely departs from Mastri (he even provides a list of these exceptional departures in his *Philosophia scholae Scotisticae*⁵⁵). In the matter of distinctions, Krisper wholeheartedly subscribes to Mastrianism and defends the doctrine of merely virtual distinctions on the transcendental level. Nevertheless, when pressed by arguments like those discussed above – such as the following:

You will object: There is no reason to multiply the formalities, for everything can be explained by means of a single real *ratio* and a plurality of merely objectively distinct *rationes*, inadequately conceived by the intellect in a thing; consequently, everything can be achieved by means of [merely] intentional logical abstractions.⁵⁶

– Krisper gives the following reply:

Against that: I reject the premise, [...] because a created essence requires not only a composition of accidents and modes, but also an intrinsic and essential one, since it cannot possibly equal the simplicity of God [...].⁵⁷

What has happened here? Obviously, Krisper simply reduced the Argument from Contradiction to yet *another* of Mastri's arguments for the formal distinction, viz. the argument from necessity of metaphysical composition. This is one of two arguments put forward by Mastri that I have not discussed so far; suffice it to say that it ultimately rests upon the premise that the metaphysical composition of a genus and a differentia contradicts God; but only an *a parte rei* composition contradicts God, therefore, metaphysical composition must be *a parte*

possit. Et e contra si possit probari similitudo positiva, et convenientia aliqua in realitate inter hominem, v.g. et brutum, posse idem probari inter Deum, et creaturam in ratione entis.”

⁵⁴ For an overview of Krisper's metaphysics cf. Andersen, *Metaphysik im Barockscotismus*, 930–32; for a summary of his (thoroughly Mastrian) take on distinctions in relation to intuitive cognition, see Andersen, “Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition,” 239–40.

⁵⁵ Cf. Crescentius Krisper, *Philosophia scholae scotisticae*, “Indiculus alter materiarum, de quibus in his operibus Scholae Scotisticae etiam ex Scoto impugnatus fuit Mastrius, alias quidem celeberrimus et prae ceteris sincerior Scotista” at the back of the volume. As for Mastri's theses rejected by Krisper, they are eight in number in logic, six in natural philosophy and only one in metaphysics. The “Indiculus” also lists seventeen of Mastri's theological theses rejected in Krisper's previously published *Theologia scholae Scotisticae*.

⁵⁶ Krisper, *Philosophia scholae scotisticae*, Log., disp. 3, sect. 3, q. 8, 278a: “Dices: frustra multiplicantur formalitates cum omnia possunt salvari per unam rationem realem, et per plures rationes solum obiective diversas, quas intellectus in eadem re inadaequate concipit: ergo omnia possunt fieri per abstractiones intentionales logicas.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: “Contra nego antecedens, [...] quia essentia creata exigit non solum compositionem accidentium et modorum, sed etiam intrinsecam et essentialem, cum non possit adaequare simplicitatem Dei [...].”

rei.⁵⁸ Mastri's subsequent discussion of this argument focuses on rejecting responses that maintain that metaphysical composition would be incompatible with God's simplicity even if it were conceived in terms of a mere virtual or *rationis ratiocinatae* distinction; but it is hard to avoid the impression that the cart is somehow put before the horse.

The argument treats the thesis that metaphysical composition contradicts God's simplicity as an *a priori*, undeniable truth – but there is hardly any justification for that. If it turned out that the so-called “metaphysical composition” (i. e., that condition of things which makes the abstraction of generic and differential concepts possible) in creatures does not, as such, involve any sort of imperfection, we would in fact have no reason to deny such composition to God. In other words: we should *first* establish, on independent grounds, the nature of the metaphysical composition *in creatis*, and *then* see whether it does or does not involve an imperfection, and, by implication, whether it is compatible with God. There is no way to know *first* that metaphysical composition is incompatible with God, *without* having already ascertained its intrinsic nature. This argument, therefore, seems condemned to epistemic circularity: its premise cannot be known independently of its conclusion.

We are left with one last major argument put forward by Mastri, *viz.* the one from order of priority and posteriority between a genus and a differentia. Where there is order *ex natura rei*, there must be a distinction *ex natura rei*: but metaphysical grades are *ex natura rei* ordered (a genus is prior to its differentiae, since it is indifferent towards them, whereas each of the differentiae presupposes the genus), ergo etc.⁵⁹ The problem with this argument seems to be the same as with the preceding one: *viz.* that it is ultimately circular. For how can we know that a genus is *ex natura rei* prior to its differentiae, unless we have *already established* that they are distinct formalities? For if they were not distinct, then the ordering of the grades would be merely a logical one, only arising on the level of objective being. Mastri's reaction to this response is underwhelming: he accuses the opponent of begging the question:

Against this: this solution obviously begs the question if you consider it well. For it asserts without any proof that which is in dispute: *viz.* that the entity of Peter is altogether

58 Mastrius / Bellutus, *Logica*, disp. 5, q. 3, art. 2, n. 127, 182b: “Compositio metaphysica ex gradu generico, et differentiali [sic] talis est, quod Deo repugnat, et eius summae simplicitati, ut passim fatentur omnes, ergo est aliquo modo realis, et non rationis tantum, quia haec non tollit simplicitatem a parte rei.”

59 Mastrius, *Met.*, disp. 8, q. 6, art. 2, n. 188, 61b: “[I]nter quae est ordo ex natura rei inter ea est distinctio ex natura rei, sed inter gradus Metaphysicos superiorem, et inferiorem est ordo ex natura rei, ergo etiam consimilis distinctio.”

simple in reality without any distinction between the grades and any *ex natura rei* plurality.⁶⁰

But this is a most unusual reaction to a solution of an argument: instead of providing a restoration of his argument, Mastri attempts to shift the burden of proof to his opponent. But the one who responds to an argument has no epistemic obligation to *prove* anything! When an argument is discussed, the question is whether it succeeds in imposing an epistemic duty on the respondent to accept its conclusion or not; and one way the respondent may evade this duty is to reject any as yet unjustified premise. In this case, the respondent did precisely that: he rejected the minor premise of Mastri's argument, viz. that a genus and its differentiae are *ex natura rei* ordered. This rejection alone – without the need of any proof – divests the argument of its epistemic force (viz. of its power to impose epistemic duties), unless and until the rejected premise is supported by a new argument. But instead of providing one, Mastri tries to convince the reader that it is his opponent's turn to deliver proofs. This is a logical fallacy known as *argumentum ad ignorantiam*: an attempt to present as a proof of one's own position the mere absence of a proof to the contrary. Mastri's accusation of circular reasoning thrown upon his opponent thus rather strengthens the suspicion that it is Mastri's own reasoning which is circular, and that it is Mastri who is out of his arguments.

Mastri must be aware of this, and this is probably the reason why he offers a formally correct *restauratio argumenti* after all: he argues that the ordering of a genus and a differentia cannot be merely “of reason” because

[...] these grades are such that the prior ones can always be without the posterior ones but not the other way around, and they can be so by their very nature and without any fiction of the intellect: for a substance can be without animality, animality without humanity, and humanity, in turn, without Petreity – but not the other way around. Therefore, there really is between them essential subordination and priority [...].⁶¹

The problem with this argument is that it again either proves too much or nothing: since it could be, *mutatis mutandis*, applied to the transcendental level as well. What hinders us from saying that *being* can be, of its very nature and without any fiction of the intellect, without the modes of finiteness and infiniteness –

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: “Contra, quia in hac solutione, si bene perpendatur, committitur manifesta petitio principii, quia in ea sine ulla probatione assertur, quod controvertitur, entitatem scilicet Petri esse omnino simplicem a parte rei sine graduum distinctione et multiplicitate ex natura rei.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: “[...] qui gradus ita se habent, ut priores semper esse possint sine posterioribus, non e contra, et hoc quidem ex natura sua, et absque ulla intellectus fictione, nam potest esse substantia sine animalitate, et haec sine humanitate, et rursus haec sine Petreitate, non e contra, ergo re vera inter eos est essentialis subordinatio, et prioritas secundum subsistendi consequentiam.”

and therefore is *ex natura rei* prior to these modes and, by implication, *ex natura rei* distinct from them? Any response compromising the force of this argument on the transcendental level could immediately be transferred to the categorical level, because the same general argument applies to both.

Conclusion

With respect to the two questions formulated in Section 2, it seems to me that Mastri failed in both respects, and thus fell prey, metaphorically, to both Scylla and Charybdis at once. For one thing, he failed in neutralizing Scotus's Final Blow Argument, that is, failed to show how objective precision might be possible, *vis-à-vis* Scotus's argument, without the formal distinction. Besides, he also failed in providing convincing arguments for the necessity of the formal distinction that would be applicable exclusively at the categorical level. It seems to me, therefore, that Mastri failed to show how it is possible to both (i) admit the virtual distinction as a possible basis for objective precision, and (ii) keep the formal distinction as justified at least somewhere. *Qui melius scit Mastrium exponere, exponat!*

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