Can God Make a Picasso? William Ockham and Walter Chatton on Divine Power and Real Relations

R O N D O   K E E L E *

I

THAT GOD ULTIMATELY PRODUCED EVERYTHING besides himself, mediaeval philosophers had no doubt. But precisely what this creative act amounts to, whether and in what way it is ongoing, and how divine production relates to, say, human production—all these were important open questions. The title of this article is meant to focus our attention on one of the most interesting of these open questions, as it was discussed by Oxford philosophers Walter Chatton (d. 1343) and William Ockham (d. 1347). For while Chatton and Ockham would certainly have agreed that God is ultimately responsible for the existence of the works of Pablo Picasso (and indeed Picasso himself), they would not have agreed in precise detail about how to answer the question I intend in my title, that is: Does it violate God's omnipotence to say that he cannot make something that Picasso made—for example, the painting *Guernica*—without using Picasso himself as an intermediate cause?

We see that the issue can be argued both ways. For consider: in the actual world, Picasso painted *Guernica*, but *Guernica* is just a created thing—a "creature," in the technical terminology of the their time—and it seems that an omnipotent being would be able to make any creature (*Guernica*) that could be made by another mere creature (Picasso). Moreover, it seems that an omnipotent being could do so directly, that is, without the second creature himself as an intermediary. Surely there is nothing Picasso can do that God cannot. On the other hand, it might seem a part of *Guernica*'s identity conditions that Picasso painted it; hence, it would be a contradiction that *Guernica* would exist without Picasso making it; hence, it would be impossible that *Guernica* exists unless Picasso exists; hence, it is no limitation

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on God that he cannot make *Guernica* without Picasso, since even God cannot do the impossible.

In the context of certain debates between them in the 1320s, Walter Chatton tended to follow the latter line of reasoning, William Ockham the former. And, surprising as it may sound, the context of their dispute over this question was a larger debate regarding the ontological status of relations. Chatton maintained that there are creatures that God cannot produce without another creature as an intermediate cause, and he used this fact as part of a complex and original strategy to argue for the existence of real relations, ontologically distinct from ordinary individual substances, but dependent on them. Ockham held that, on the contrary, God *can* produce any creature without another creature as an intermediate cause, and in this way attempted to block Chatton's realist project. Chatton then defended his ontological commitments by backing up and clarifying his views on omnipotence, and in so doing, explored some interesting metaphysical distinctions that are still worth considering.

So it turns out that the criticisms these men laid against each other's ontological projects gave rise to an interesting controversy about God's power; each thinker seemed to believe that an appeal to divine omnipotence would support his own position and damn his opponent's. In this article I shall (1) explain how these two issues—omnipotence and relations—should have become so interestingly tangled together, (2) try to see which of the two men mentioned above got the better of the exchange, and finally, (3) draw out some important consequences for understanding mediaeval discussions of causality. After a brief section explaining some necessary background, this article will follow the contours of the debate, beginning with Chatton's arguments for real relations, which rely on the notion of divine power. I will then shift to explain Ockham's early attacks on Chatton, also based on the notion of divine power. Following this, I will outline Chatton's response to Ockham, which in effect questions Ockham's interpretation and application of the principle of divine power, and indeed even questions the meaning of the doctrinal pronouncements that gave this principle its pride of place in fourteenth-century philosophy. I conclude the essay by attempting to adjudicate the case, arguing that, in fact, Chatton has the right approach, if not necessarily to the metaphysics of relations, then at least to the subtleties required to apply the principle of divine power in this particular metaphysical dispute. No specialized knowledge of mediaeval philosophy or theology is presumed, and I explain such elements of context as are necessary to make the issues intelligible.

I I

First of all, it is necessary, and not uninteresting in its own right, briefly to contrast the ontological attitudes of these men and to outline their intense intellectual relationship. Moreover, a modern reader who is not a specialist in mediaeval metaphysics will need as background some indication of the peculiar mediaeval conception of relations.

WILLIAM OCKHAM

Ockham was famously a champion of smaller ontologies, and he employed various clever means for arguing against the need to posit a variety of entities that populated the traditional metaphysics of his time, including relations, as entities distinct from their relata. Today his reductive tendencies are often referred to under the name 'Ockham's razor', and set off with the slogan '*pluralitas non ponenda est sine necessitate*' ('a plurality ought not be posited without necessity'). In reality, Ockham employed a number of reductive strategies in arguing for ontological parsimony. One such technique at Ockham's disposal was the principle of divine power, which states that God can do anything that does not involve a contradiction. This principle was common coin in the fourteenth century and was employed by many thinkers. However, Ockham tended to use it reductively, in line with his general ontological tendencies. How effective this principle is when used reductively is an open question. As I hope to show below, the principle of divine omnipotence was sometimes a rather blunt instrument in Ockham's early uses of it, and Chatton's responses to the early Ockham inspired important refinements.

WALTER CHATTON

Chatton was a relentless critic of his slightly older contemporary, William Ockham, opposing the latter's views on every imaginable subject, from the mechanisms of cognition to the nature of moral knowledge. The conflict was fruitful for both men, providing Chatton a chance to use his powerful critical abilities on a body of highly original philosophy, and providing Ockham with a chance to improve and defend his views under a sustained and sophisticated attack.[1] Chatton tended to favor a realist view on many subjects where Ockham was more conservative, in particular on the issue of relations.

 Chatton's primary strategy for establishing the existence of real relations in the world was a methodological principle of ontological commitment, which he expressed this way:

> Whenever an affirmative proposition is apt to be made true for actually existing things, if two things, howsoever they are present according to arrangement and duration, cannot suffice to make the proposition true while another thing is lacking, then one must posit that other thing.[2]

That is, if two things—however they may be arranged and however long they might exist—do not have the requisite causal power to make true a proposition about those things when we know that proposition is in fact true, then we must posit a third thing to account for its truth. Some scholars have dubbed this rule 'the anti-razor', but as Chatton calls this rule '*propositio mea*' ('my principle'), a more accurate name for it might be 'the Chatton Principle', and so I shall call it

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[1] Chatton has perhaps the singular distinction of getting Ockham to change his mind on an important philosophical issue: the nature of universal concepts. The classic paper on the subject is Gedeon Gál, "Gualteri de Chatton et Guillelmi de Ockham Controversia de Natura Conceptus Universalis," *Franciscan Studies* 27 (1967): 191–212. Also very helpful is Marilyn McCord Adams, "Ockham's Nominalism and Unreal Entities," *Philosophical Review* 86 (1977): 144–76.

[2] Chatton, *Lectura* (an unpublished edition of Chatton's incomplete *Lectura*, ed. Girard J. Etzkorn), part I d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, par. 4. All translations of Chatton's works are mine.

here. Like Ockham's razor, the Chatton Principle all by itself is fairly innocuous; it is the use Chatton made of it that is controversial, and which elicited criticism from Ockham.[3]

THEORIES OF RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The mediaeval problem of "respective entities" or just "respectives" (*res respectivae*), which so occupied Chatton and Ockham, has its closest modern cousin in the problem of the ontological status of relations; however, there are several important differences which must be noted.[4]

Modern philosophers have wondered about how to understand the logic and the metaphysics underlying such claims as 'Dick is taller than Jane', '2 is half of 4', and 'Plato is similar to Socrates' (in regard to some particular quality, say; the standard mediaeval example is color). The tried and true subject-predicate analysis will not yield satisfactory results for such sentences, as they would for 'Plato is X'. A modern analysis of this sentence would say that 'Plato is X' = 'Xp', and hence that all we need do to explain a complementary realist metaphysics is to say that Plato, as a substance, has a quality, X-ness (or some such thing). But we cannot easily extend this analysis to 'Plato is taller than Aristotle' = 'Tp' (where 'Tx' stands for 'x is taller than Aristotle'), and give the same kind of realist explanation—that Plato has taller-than-Aristotle-ness (or some such thing). Several problems and questions would arise for this analysis. For example, we might wonder if we were correct in suggesting initially that 'Tx' ought to stand for 'x is taller than Aristotle'. Perhaps what should be attributed to Plato instead is simply taller-than-ness, and we should rather say that 'Aristotle' plays some other role. Or indeed, why not simply attribute tallness to Plato, and deal with the comparative and the Aristotle-qualifier in some other fashion? Moreover, creating an argument place for both the subject and the predicate in a relational sentence permits quantification over both the subject and the predicate place, and so allows uniform analysis of both 'Plato is taller than Aristotle' and 'Someone is taller than everyone', for example.

Thus, one modern logical solution to the analysis of relations, due to Bertrand Russell and others, approaches this by thinking of relations as *n*-place propositional functions, which take names as arguments, such that a relation having *n* relata is represented as an *n*-place function. Upon taking *n* names as arguments, such a function becomes an atomic proposition. Hence, "Plato is taller than Aristotle" is thought to be a matter between Plato and Aristotle, not only an issue for Plato; and so we say that 'Plato is taller than Aristotle' = 'Tpa', where 'Txy' means "x is taller than y." Notice that this type of analysis seems to suggest at least a minimal metaphysical position on the question of what Plato and Aristotle are: they are objects, in some sense ontologically on par with each other, and the relation is a

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[3] For example, Ockham's *Quodlibet* I.5 concerns itself, in large part, with an attempt to refute the Chatton Principle. See William Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions* (a translation of *Quodlibeta septem*), trans. Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 31.

[4] The general account of respective entities that follows focuses on debates in the late-thirteenth to the early-fourteenth centuries, and is based primarily on Mark G. Henninger, *Relations: Mediaeval Theories 1250–1325* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), ch. 1; and Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 1987, chs. 5 and 7.

third "thing" connecting them. But to take this position alone does not answer every connected ontological question; it only raises them for the relation itself. What is a relation like? Is it a real thing "hovering" between Plato and Aristotle, connecting them in tallness and correlative shortness? These questions elicit different answers from different philosophers, of course; what is important for us to note is that the modern debate generally presumes the idea of a relation as a *single intermediary* between objects that are roughly ontological equals.

In the mediaeval debate, a respective entity, by contrast, was not thought of as single intermediary at all. Instead, nominalists and realists alike said that respective entities were supposed to be Aristotelian accidents; that is, they are on par with qualities and other forms of dependent being, as opposed to substances, which are metaphysically independent in some robust sense. Since an accident always inheres in exactly one substance, a respective entity could never "straddle" two relata by inhering in both of them. And yet a respective accident is not like an absolute accident—for example, whiteness—which simply inheres in its subject, a white thing. For, as we noted above, relations are multi-place, having two or more relata. Thus a respective accident corresponding to a two-place relation, say, would have to involve both its relata somehow, even though it only inheres in one of them; for this reason philosophers of this tradition tended to say that respectives are accidents that (1) *inhere* in a subject, as do all accidents, (2) are *based on* the subject in which they inhere or on some other, absolute accident which inheres in that same subject (e.g., a quality like whiteness), and (3) *point to* the other relata in the relation or to their accidents. It is this "pointing" that makes respectives unique metaphysically, and the Latin terms used to refer to them often reflect precisely this feature: e.g., the Aristotelian category of relation was called '*ad aliud*' (literally 'toward another'), and respectives were said to have '*esse ad*' ('being toward').

Let us consider a concrete example. Suppose that Plato and Socrates are both pale. In precisely this respect then, 'Socrates is similar to Plato' is true. Many mediaeval realists thought of "similarity" as a respective entity which makes the two things similar, but they would claim that there are two "similarities" here, not one. Inhering in him but based on his absolute qualitative accident paleness, Socrates has a relative accident of similarity—call it 'S'—which "points toward" the paleness in Plato. But to complete the picture, it must be said that Plato too has a respective accident of similarity, S*, which inheres in him, is based on his paleness, and which points to the paleness of Socrates. Since an accident can inhere in but one subject, and Plato ≠ Socrates, obviously, S ≠ S*. Analogously, a realist might say that a one-meter stick and a two-meter stick will have inhering in them two distinct correlative accidents, "double" and "half," based on their absolute accidental quantities.

Some terminology and a picture may serve to clarify this slightly odd and novel view. Let A and B be two individual substances, with absolute accidents a and b, respectively. If A and B bear relation R to each other, then we say that A has a *respective accident*, R_1 toward B. In that case, A and B are said to be the *extremes* of R_1, with A referred to as the *subject* of R_1, and B the *term*, or *terminus*, of R_1. Since R_1 is based on the absolute accident a in A, we say that a is the *foundation* of R_1. There

is also a respective accident R_2, of which the extremes are also *A* and *B*; however, *B* is the subject for R_2, *A* is its terminus, and *b* is its foundation. The following diagram illustrates this:
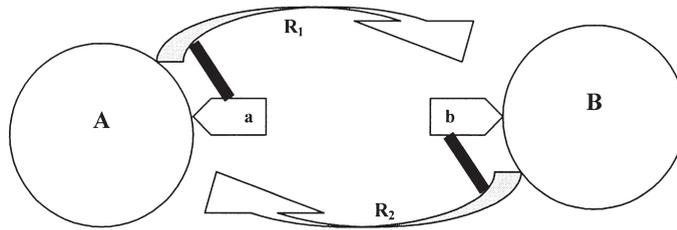
The circles and the pointed boxes attached to them represent *absolute* things—that is, things that are somehow ontologically self-contained, however dependent they may be; both substances, which are independent, and their qualitative accidents, which are dependent, are nevertheless self-contained, and so absolute. The arrows in the diagram, by contrast, represent *respective* or *relational* things—things that are ontologically "toward another;" they point, as it were, with their very being.[5] Notice that the relational entities R_1 and R_2, represented by the arrows, *inhere* in the substances *A* and *B* respectively, but are *founded* in the absolute accidents, *a* and *b*, respectively. The founding I represent with thick black lines.

This diagram nicely represents the general situation for many respective entities, and certainly for a respective such as similarity, which is necessarily founded in some other characteristic the substances share, since two things can be similar only by having a common characteristic.[6] It is important to note, however, that although respectives of similarity are therefore said to be founded in other qualities or quantities, as we see in the diagram, this is not generally necessary; some respectives were not said to be founded in other absolute accidents at all, but rather were said to be founded directly in the substances in which they inhere. Of this type are respectives associated with *causality*, which Chatton referred to as *respectus modo potentiae* (respectives of power). For example, if substance A moves/produces/heats/etc. substance B, then there is a respective of action (*actio*) founded in A, pointing at B, and a respective of reception (*passio*) founded in B, pointing to A.[7] So, for example, if Picasso produces *Guernica*, then this fact is reflected in real

[5] This is not a distinction customarily made by that tradition which descends from Russell and Frege; in the Frege-Russell tradition, concepts are all equally unsaturated, and differ formally only in the number of names needed to fill the propositional function. That is, Px and Sxy differ only in arity. For the mediaeval realist tradition here described, which descends from Aristotle, 'Socrates is pale' is made true by the inherence of one absolute thing in another (i.e., the inherence of a quality in a substance), while 'Socrates is similar to Plato' is made true by a much more complicated state of affairs involving at least two non-absolute things (i.e., respective accidents of similarity) whose being consists only in pointing.

[6] Whether this shared characteristic is a thing shared in some literal sense, like a universal, is an important issue that need not detain us here, since it does not bear on the debate between Chatton and Ockham.

[7] See for example Chatton, *Reportatio super Sententias: Liber I, distincitones* 10–48 [*Reportatio* 10–48], ed. Joseph C. Wey and Girard J. Etzkorn, Studies and Texts 142 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), 234–36, par. 39–55; see also 257–58, par. 41 and 42.

metaphysical qualities in Picasso and in *Guernica*; there is a respective of action in Picasso, pointing to *Guernica*—call this thing 'production'—and also a respective of reception in *Guernica* pointing to Picasso—call this thing 'being produced'. An example of this kind of respective—and one which received much attention by Ockham and Chatton—was the active potency "heating"—sometimes called 'active calefaction'—and the passive potency "being heated,"—sometimes called 'passive calefaction'. This example was often discussed by Chatton and Ockham, and so we will return to it below.

The primary ontological question asked about respective entities in the four-teenth century is this: Are there respective accidents in the world, really distinct from absolute things (i.e., from their own foundations, accidental or substantial)? The question must be answered 'yes' or 'no', with a 'yes' answer distinguishing the realists from the rest.

As indicated above, Walter Chatton believed that there were at least some respective entities in the world, distinct from their foundations. In particular, he seems to have believed strongly in the existence of causal respectives. His favorite argument for the existence of causal respective entities comes from his favorite principle of ontological commitment, the Chatton Principle.

III

The Chatton Principle, as we mentioned earlier, is a methodological principle of plurality; it consists of an insistent requirement that, under certain conditions, not n but $(n + 1)$ distinct things (*res*) must be posited. Chatton was neither the first nor the last philosopher to invoke a principle of plurality, but he is one of a handful who voluntarily chose to assert an explicit methodological imperative for guiding the metaphysical investigation into plurality.[8]

The Chatton Principle occurs in several formulations in the works of its author. The following quotations are representative.

> Where an affirmative proposition is verified for things, if fewer things uniformly present without another thing do not suffice to verify the proposition, one has to posit more.[9]

> Consider an affirmative proposition, which, when it is verified, is verified only for things; if three things do not suffice for the purpose of verifying it, one has to posit a fourth, and so on in turn.[10]

> I say, as before, that where a proposition can be false without the introduction of any new thing, when every absolute [thing] currently existing has already been posited, then if the proposition is true, there is something besides absolute [things]; in other cases this is not needed.[11]

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[8] Kant, among others. See Armand Maurer, "Ockham's Razor and Chatton's Anti-Razor," *Mediaeval Studies* 46 (1984): 463–75.

[9] Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et Lectura super Sententias: Collatio ad Librum Primum et Prologus* [*Collatio et Prologus*], ed. Joseph C. Wey, CSB (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989), 33, lines 464–66.

[10] Chatton, *Rep.* I d. 30, q. 1, a. 4, *Reportatio* 10–48, 237, par. 57.

[11] Chatton, *Rep.* I d. 30, q. 3, *Reportatio* 10–48, 273, par. 72.

Various qualifiers are added in some formulations, dropped in others. However, the basic idea is clearly the same in each case: if a true proposition about n things is such that the n things are not enough to verify a true proposition, then we must posit an $(n+1)$th thing.

The question, of course, is how we can tell when n things are not enough to make a true proposition true. Chatton approaches this question in terms of consistency:

> those things with which, howsoever they are present without another thing, it would be consistent that the proposition would be false are not sufficient for the fact that the proposition is true. For this is how I understand the idea of "not sufficient through things for the purpose of making a proposition true": that with those things so present it is consistent that the proposition would be false.[12]

Chatton's criterion is as follows: n things are not sufficient to make a true proposition p true if it is consistent with the falsehood of p that only those n things exist.

This suggests the following method behind the Chatton's Principle: to figure out what we need to posit an entity, we are to imagine whether, within the absolute power of God, the causal powers attributed to the entities, based on their kind, are sufficient to make a true proposition true. We then imagine God creating those entities, one at a time, and we check to see, after each addition, whether the proposition would at that point have to be true. So long as the insufficiency remains, we add another object. We check that the insufficiency remains via consistency: so long as there remains no manifest contradiction between the existence of the currently-considered types of things and the falsehood of the proposition, insufficiency remains. Given this method, it would seem to follow that, for any set of entities, if the causal powers of those entities were found wanting on the basis of consistency and yet the proposition in question were known to be true, then another kind of entity—with its attendant causal powers—would have to exist.

Can we apply this to Picasso and *Guernica*? Well, the sentence 'Picasso produced *Guernica*' is true. We ask: What must exist (or have existed while Picasso lived and made *Geurnica*) to make this proposition true? In particular, is it enough that Picasso exists and that *Geurnica* exists? No, since God can, starting with nothing, make Picasso, then a painting physically constituted of exactly those atoms which today constitute the paining we call '*Geurnica*', materially and formally identical right down to the last detail, but it would still be false that Picasso painted this painting. More is needed; we must add to reality those entities necessary to make the falsehood of 'Picasso painted *Guernica*' impossible. So suppose that we have instead Picasso, a painting physically constituted of exactly those atoms which today constitute the paining we call '*Geurnica*', materially and formally identical right down to the last detail, and two respectives—one of production in Picasso (pointing to *Guernica*) and one of being produced in *Geurnica* (pointing to Picasso). Then, Chatton thinks, it could not fail to be that Picasso painted *Guernica*, since

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[12] Chatton, *Collatio et Prologus*, 33, lines 470–71.

the causal interaction between Picasso and *Guernica* is nothing more than their having these respective accidents, by hypothesis.[13]

And in fact, we see that Chatton reasons just this way in the case of fire heating wood. Imagine that, starting from nothing, God created some absolute entities, in particular, say, a piece of wood and a fire. Then the sentence 'This fire burns that wood' could never get to be true, even if we imagine God makes the wood burn, since unless the fire and the wood themselves interact metaphysically 'This fire burns that wood' cannot be true. But no amount of absolute things that God could create would "connect" the wood and the fire causally, since absolute things are precisely things that are metaphysically self-contained; they are, by definition, not *ad aliud*. So there must be some non-absolute (i.e., respective) entities that make sentences like 'This fire burns that wood' true, when they are true.[14]

I V

Ockham would have none of this. He objected strenuously to the Chatton Principle as a general rule, of course, but more to the point here, he objected to its use to prove the existence of respective entities. Ockham's own reductive account of how things get to be similar, or to cause one another, need not concern us here. Instead we will look at some of his criticisms of Chatton's realist arguments based on the Principle. Chatton had already invoked the power of God in formulating his Principle, but Ockham tries to do him one better by showing that Chatton's argument for respectives tells against God's omnipotence. Here is Ockham's argument against Chatton:[15]

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[13] This might seem to beg the question, but it does not, at least not simple-mindedly; there is an ontological gap here such that, if there were a corresponding gap in reality, propositions involving causality could never be true. But clearly some such propositions are sometimes true; hence there must be something more in reality. So much is acceptable, but there is still something funny going on. Why must this thing that fills the gap be a *respective*? Are there not other entities that would do the job? The answer, of course, is yes. Chatton's Principle strictly *underdetermines* the possible competing detailed answers to the question, "What fills this ontological gap?" But it does not otherwise systematically the beg the question in *finding* those gaps.

[14] Chatton, *Rep.* I d. 30, q. 1, a. 4, *Reportatio* 10–48, 237, par. 57.

[15] The quotations that follow are from the *Lectura*. In the *Lectura*, Chatton does not name Ockham as the author of these remarks, but Chatton almost never names his opponents. Etzkorn, the editor of Chatton's *Lectura*, speculates that Chatton's source here may be a version of Ockham's *Sentences* commentary, now lost. But we can still give some evidence that the objector here is Ockham. As becomes clear, the objection Chatton reports in his *Lectura* says that, if respective entities existed, then either God could not do something alone that he could do with a secondary cause (impossible, due to the Condemnation of 1277), or an infinity of forms would have to exist (also impossible). Ockham himself gives a more refined version of just these objections in his *Quodlibet* VI.12, 529–32. There Ockham gives three arguments against the existence of relations; the first is against Scotus, but the second and third try to show, respectively, (1) that if respective entities existed, then an infinity of forms would have to exist, and (2) if respective entities existed, then God could not do something alone that he could do with a secondary cause (invoking the Condemnation of 1277). In *Quodlibetal Questions* VI.12, the arguments are discussed in turn, stated separately, and there are some refinements in the argumentation, but the basic strategy Chatton describes, and which concerns this study, is the same as that which Ockham uses in *Quodlibetal Questions* VI.12. Moreover, in *Quodlibetal* Questions VI.12, Ockham undisputably directs these arguments against the Chatton Prinicple, in particular. Hence we can find Ockham making arguments just like those that Chatton discusses, which arguments are aimed at Chatton in particular, in a work that dates to roughly the same period as Chatton's *Lectura*. Ockham has some other criticisms of Chatton's views that are substantially different from these; see *Quodlibetal*

> A ninth mode of objection [to the Chatton Principle] . . . can be argued thus. From the notion of omnipotence it can be objected and proved that if the [Chatton Principle] were true, it would follow that God was not omnipotent, or that an infinity of forms, essentially distinct from each other, would exist in one and the same thing, and also that from an action there could be action to infinity. For this is true: 'The heat in this wood is from that fire'. Either one of two things must therefore be true. (1) God can make every thing that exists uniformly present without a new thing and nevertheless the proposition is false; and then besides these things it is required to posit another thing; and by the same reasoning I argue concerning *that* new thing, and so on to infinity. Alternatively, (2) God cannot make every thing that exists uniformly present without a new thing and nevertheless the proposition is false, in which case he is impotent, because he cannot make it be the case that the same things exist so that none of them would be caused by another.[16]

Ockham's argument in this "ninth objection" is clever, and could not fail to elicit a strong response for reasons connected with the intellectual climate in fourteenth-century philosophy. To summarize Ockham's rejoinder: If the Chatton Principle were true, and a true proposition *p* required *things* to make it true, then either (1) God has the power to make any and every thing while keeping the proposition false, in which case the Chatton Principle would demand that we continue indefinitely to posit new respectives to make the proposition true, and hence an infinity of respective forms would exist in things, or else (2) God lacks that power to make any and every thing while keeping the proposition false, and so God is not omnipotent. Neither outcome is possible, hence the Chatton Principle is incorrect. The impossibility of an actual infinity was a common assumption at this time; I will ignore that side and continue to focus on the other horn of the dilemma, i.e., that God is not omnipotent.[17]

In particular, Ockham developed the omnipotence side of the dilemma against Chatton's realist argument even further by invoking a theological controversy in Paris called the 'Condemnation of 1277' (explained below):

> [Ockham's] objection can be confirmed by the writings of others, because a certain article[18] of Paris says that "God cannot bring into being an effect of a secondary cause [without the secondary cause itself]—Error." But if with all these things remaining

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Questions, VI.8, 512 ff. (in particular, proofs 1 and 3). For further discussion see Rondo Keele, *Formal Ontology in the Fourteenth Century: The Chatton Principle and Ockham's Razor* [*Formal Ontology*], (Indiana University Ph.D. dissertation, 2002), ch. 8.

   [16] Chatton, *Lectura*, I d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, par. 31 and 32. The phrase 'uniformly present'—a literal translation here and subsequently of *uniformiter praesens*—is meant by Chatton to restrict consideration of the things that make present-tense proposition true to (i) things existing in present time, and (ii) *not* insofar as they are moving. The reason for this restriction is to block a strategy Ockham often used against Chatton and his ontological principle, in which Ockham claims that what makes a proposition true or false is not only what things exist (or fail to exist) at the time we are considering the proposition, but possibly also what things will exist in the future, or the location that things will be in at a future time. The issues are complicated, but some of the details can be found in Keele, *Formal Ontology*, chs. 6–8.

   [17] Chatton does eventually respond to the first horn of the dilemma, arguing that the Principle does not require an indefinite positing which would result in an infinity of forms, since the Principle does not require positing more things to explain the truth of a proposition given that enough things are already posited to make that proposition true. See Chatton, *Lectura* I d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, par. 68.

   [18] This is Article 98.

in existence God cannot make the proposition false, then there would be something that could not be done by God without a secondary cause.[19]

I will explain this "article" and the theological controversy of 1277 shortly. But first it is worth seeing as clearly as possible the substantive philosophical issue at stake.

Ockham has sharpened his criticism of Chatton to a fine point here. Remember that Chatton's Principle required us to find ontological gaps by thought experiment on God's absolute power; we could, starting from nothing, develop a list of things, one at a time, to see if the existence of a certain number of them is consistent with the falsity of the target proposition. If it is, then we know we do not have enough things yet. Only when it is a manifest contradiction that, say, *a*, *b*, and *c* all exist and that proposition *p* is false can we say that *a*, *b*, and *c* are sufficient to make *p* true; the reason is that it is the *addition* of some thing that makes the proposition go from being false to being true.

However, we could come at it the other way round, and think of a proposition *p* as going from true to false due to the *extinction* of one of a number of things—say, *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*. We could, say, mentally subtract each item, one at a time, to see if the remaining set is consistent with the truth of *p*. If we remove, say, *d*, from consideration, and *p* can still be true, but then remove *c* and in doing so make *p* false, then we know that *c* is necessary for the truth of *p*, while *d* is not. Hence we would say, if we followed Chatton, that the *non-existence* of *c* explains how *p* goes from being true to being false.

But now Ockham simply points out that God the almighty could conserve any *c* and by divine power still make *p* false! For example, God could make Picasso, *Guernica*, two respectives—one of production and one of being produced—and still make 'Picasso produced *Guernica*' false. And if, in Chatton's defense, you deny that God can conserve *c* in such a way that *p* can be false, have you not really said not simply that God is not omnipotent, but even more specifically, that God requires a secondary cause to bring about certain results, viz., that God requires *c* so he can obliterate it and thereby make *p* false? In short, the full dilemma Ockham describes for Chatton is this: if God is omnipotent, then he can do anything directly that is normally accomplished by a secondary cause, but if this is so, then God himself can directly make the proposition *p* be false, even though *p* is normally made false (in part) by the extinction of object *c*. *Mutatis mutandis* for truth; surely God himself can directly make the proposition *p* be true, even though *p* is normally made true (in part) by object *c*. However, if this is possible, then the Chatton Principle is not an infallible guide to ontology, since a change in truth-value does not always herald a change in things, as consideration of God's omnipotence can always lead directly to the construction of a counter-example. Therefore, either there are exceptions to the Chatton Principle, or else God is not omnipotent.

Ockham's appeal to God's omnipotence has a special bite to it in the context of fourteenth-century philosophy and theology. After a period of optimistic synthesis between Aristotle and Christian theology in the mid-thirteenth century, there was a period of increasing skepticism and conservativism, of which John Duns Scotus

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[19] Chatton, *Lectura*, I d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, par. 33.

(d. 1308) represents a moderate first step, and Ockham several steps further. Chatton tended to follow Scotus in his guarded optimism, and tried to reign in Ockham's more conservative, reductive tendencies and their considerable influence. However, the event which partly underlies both Ockham and Chatton's unease, and which contributed to the end of the thirteenth century honeymoon between philosophy and theology, was the famous Condemnation of 1277.

Deeply troubled by some of the philosophical opinions circulating among the Arts faculty at Paris, and fearful lest they should pick up further adherents in Theology, the powerful bishop of Paris decided to act to safeguard the faith. In 1277 he singled out 219 such opinions for official censure and condemned them as errors, inconsistent with Catholic truth, not to be taught or adhered to. Most important for our purposes is the article on which Ockham relies above, viz., Article 98: "That God cannot act with respect to an effect of a secondary cause without the secondary cause—Error."[20] It was aimed especially against unorthodox neo-Platonic schemes of emanation, imported to the West from neo-Platonic Islamic philosophy, according to which God, unable to bring multiplicity from his perfect simplicity, instead necessarily emanated a simple First Intelligence which, reflecting on its distinction from God, created a Second, and so on down, until the heavens and the earth were finally produced. This scheme—influentially worked out in various directions by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, the early Ibn Rushd, and others—directly contradicts orthodox Christian doctrine, which says that God freely created everything besides himself directly, and *ex nihilo*; the orthodox view would have to be wrong if, as the emanationists had it, there were a *necessary* progression of the world by means of intermediaries. The Condemnation sought to reaffirm orthodoxy against emanationism by appeal to God's power: if the First Intelligence can produce the Second Intelligence, then surely an omnipotent God can also; but then the emanationist is deprived of his first premise.[21] And, indeed the suggestion that God somehow required the First Intelligence as a secondary cause in order to bring about the rest of the world does not, at first, seem to be consistent with divine omnipotence.

It is, in fact, this very article with which we find Ockham and Chatton beating each other over the head in the debate sketched above. Nor was this an isolated instance. Mediaeval debates of this time frequently ran aground on one or another article from the Condemnation. Article 98, on divine omnipotence, was a favorite at Oxford at this time.

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It is to Chatton's credit in the history of philosophy that he did not accept uncritically Ockham's use of Article 98 against him. And what is even more remarkable

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[20] Roland Hissette, *Enquete sur les 219 Articles Condamnes a Paris le 7 Mars 1277* [*Enquete sur les 219 Articles Condamnes*], vol. XXII of *Philosophes Medievaux* (Paris: Louvain Publications Universitaires, 1977), 168.

[21] That theologians and philosophers took Article 98 to be against this emanationism is absolutely clear, and they were right, it seems, since other Articles clarify the connection. For example, Article 33: "That an immediate effect of the First Cause ought to be only one, and ought to be similar to the First Cause itself.—Error." See Hissette, *Enquete sur les 219 Articles Condamnes*, 70.

and radical is that Chatton went so far as to challenge the meaning of the Article itself in answer to this kind of Ockhamist reply.

Recall Ockham's objection. Chatton claimed that, given things *a*, *b*, *c*, and proposition *p*, it is the non-existence of some real entity—*c*, for example—which explains how *p* goes from being true to being false. But then Ockham seemed to show a way that God himself could conserve any *c* in existence in such a way that *p* can still be false, since *a*, *b*, and *c*, made separately by God, will therefore not be related of themselves. This is supposed to be an embarrassment for Chatton's theory because the only way to deny Ockham's counter-example would be to say that God, acting alone, cannot make things such that one of them does not come from the other, which violates the Article 98 of the Condemnation. Interestingly, Chatton's response to this type of counter-example is to deny precisely Ockham's claim: Chatton denies that God can conserve *c* and keep *p* false. In particular, Chatton denies that the intervention necessary to construct the counter-example lies within the power of even an omnipotent God, since it entails a contradiction: in terms of the example of fire and wood, his claim is that it is impossible that two respectives of calefaction would be in wood and a fire and yet 'The heat in this wood is from this fire' would not be true.

He begins his case by recourse to a distinction, which he explains thus:

> The claim that 'These things are made by God alone such that none of them comes from any other created thing' can be understood in two ways. In one sense this sentence could mean that 'These things exist separately [and so none comes from any of the others]'; however, it must be taken in another sense if it means 'These things are made while uniformly present as of now [and yet none comes from any of the others]'.[22]

What Chatton seems to have in mind is that 'God makes *a* and *b* such that neither comes from the other' could be taken either *generally* or *particularly*. In the first case, Ockham's phrase means "God makes *a* and *b* separately" as, for example, in successive acts of creation; starting with nothing, God makes an *a*, then later a *b*. The question of omnipotence would then reduce to the question of whether God could make, say, a respective entity and *then* an absolute entity, which one might argue is impossible, since substance is prior to accident. The point is that such an understanding would tend to focus the issue on whether God can *in general* make entities independently *by type*.

Alternatively, Ockham's phrase could mean "God makes a set of entities {*a*, *b*, . . . } all at once such that they are not connected by causation (such as production)." Here the focus is not on types, but on particular individuals; the question of omnipotence here would reduce to the question of whether God could make, say, *this* piece of wood and *this* fire and *these* respectives of calefaction *all at once* while nevertheless 'The heat in this wood is from this fire' is false.

Taken *particularly*, Ockham's claim that God can make any creature without another under any circumstances is false:

> Having made this distinction, we can say as follows: . . . taking the phrase in the second sense distinguished above, so that, (1) the fire, the wood, and the calefactive accidents

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[22] Chatton, *Lectura* I d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, par. 65.

are uniformly present as of now but, (2) the heat in the wood is not produced from the fire, this *does* include a contradiction.[23]

He makes an analogy with absolute accidents to illustrate why:

> Everyone concedes that it includes a contradiction to say that a whiteness informs a subject and that nevertheless, the subject thus informed is not white . . . In the same way, it seems to include a contradiction that an active calefaction would be in some subject that is apt to heat up another thing through that calefaction, without that subject actually heating up the other thing by means of the active calefaction. And again, the reason is that the power to produce such heat just *is* having that active calefaction, and the agent in question indeed has such a calefaction if the action of heating is in the agent.[24]

This might seem, at first, to beg the question against Ockham, but a little reflection shows that his point is actually sound. Ockham had wanted to say that Chatton's method was not sufficient to show the existence of respectives because it is possible that respectives exist while the target proposition is false, since God alone could bring this circumstance about, and hence the Chatton Principle is not reliable. Chatton's response here is that Ockham is not paying careful attention to what a respective is supposed to be. A respective is just that which fills this ontological gap between absolute things; it is that which (together with some other things) is sufficient for the target proposition to be true, since after all *something* explains this change in the proposition's truth value. But then, in the actual presence of this "gap-filler," it cannot be that the proposition is still false. Ockham has been careless in reasoning about God's power here.

Chatton then turns his rebuttal specifically to Ockham's invocation of the Condemnation, suggesting his own reinterpretation of it in the process:

> One might argue as follows against my response: to say that God cannot make a thing which it is possible to make is to say that God is impotent; but Socrates can make Plato be the son of Socrates [by fathering him]; therefore to say that God without Socrates cannot make Plato be the son of Socrates is just to say that God is impotent. . . . But to say that God cannot make alone what includes a contradiction is not to posit that He is impotent, any more than God would be impotent from the fact that he cannot make Plato be generated by you if there is no *you*.[25]

To finish his reply he indicates the correct interpretation of Article 98:

> The argument of this Doctor [Ockham] can be confirmed since it comes from one of the Parisian articles; however, it can be said that the article does not apply to the present case. In the first place, authors of the Parisian article did not intend to advance the point of view that God could cause any of the actions of a secondary cause without the secondary cause itself, in such a way that the *same effect* would be equally present as it would when it was from the secondary cause alone. For, indeed, the opposite of this view has been held publicly at that same University (viz., Paris), both at the time of the Condemnation of 1277, as well as before and after it, and it continues to be held by many persons to this very day. But this would not be the case if the condemnation of the article went against this very point of view . . .

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[23] Ibid., par. 65.
[24] Ibid., par. 67.
[25] Ibid., par. 69.

> It ought to be said therefore . . . that the gist of the article is, as is clear from subsequent developments, to condemn the philosophical opinion by which it is held that God cannot act with respect to some general effect of a secondary cause without the secondary cause. Hence it is *this* part of the article that is judged to be an error, but nothing more.[26]

Two parts of Chatton's response must be noted. First, he claims that when God brings about an effect with a secondary cause it is not the same effect as when he brings it about alone. This fits with the distinction we observed him making above. As I read him in the above quotations, Chatton's point is just this: it is one thing to say that God can bring about the same *type* of result directly as he could bring about with a secondary cause, and quite another to say that God can bring about *this* very result directly or by a secondary cause, since *this* very result has as a part of its identity conditions that it came from *this* cause (or not). The former claim is true, and is entailed by God's omnipotence; the second claim is false, since it entails the contradiction that God makes X cause Y without X causing Y. Consider the case of fire and wood. God can indeed bring it about that burning wood exists without any kind of fire producing it, but he cannot bring it about that this fire burns this wood without making the fire and the wood interact somehow, which somehow involves a pair of respective accidents, according to the tradition Chatton here defends. Analogously, God cannot bring it about that Socrates generates Plato without Socrates, and this does not tell against his omnipotence any more than the fact that God cannot make you generate Plato if there is no *you*. And again, God cannot, for all his power, make a Picasso painting; only Picasso can.[27]

Second, Chatton seems to be saying here that Article 98 was specifically directed against neo-Platonism, not against realist arguments for relations, and those who quote the condemned Parisian article in that debate do so out of context. The Condemnation of 1277 never intended to say that God can bring about directly any state of affairs whatsoever; rather, the intent was simply to condemn the neo-Platonic emanationist view that God is capable of producing one thing only—the First Intelligence—and that, from there on down, production of the universe proceeded by means of intermediaries.

Putting this all together, we can see Chatton's insight: the application of the principle of omnipotence in the Condemnation has no analogy in the debate over respective entities. As Chatton reinterprets it, the claim of the Condemnation was that there is no general *category* of action in which God needs creatures to get things done, and that God's power exceeds that of any creature. But this does not entail that God can bring about any *particular* action whatsoever without creaturely involvement. Thus, while an omnipotent God can bypass the electorate in directly bringing it about *that Smith is President of the United States*, he cannot bypass the electorate in bringing it about *that Smith is elected President of the United States*.

What is ultimately at stake here is the question of how much space will be allowed in the mediaeval world view for the existence of strong, relatively inde-

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[26] Ibid., par. 70 and 71.

[27] Of course, the notion that the causal origins of a thing figure into its identity conditions has been much discussed by modern philosophers in conjunction with trans-world identity and other questions of reference.

pendent, and intellectually interesting relations among creatures, e.g., causal relations. On the one hand, we might want to avoid emphasizing God's power so much that we end up saying God is the real cause of every effect, since this would deny causal power of any sort to creatures. On the other hand, we might want to avoid positing causal connections in created things which do not depend in some way upon God. People like Chatton tried to steer a course between *occasionalism*, which makes science moot, and *naturalism*, which makes God moot. Chatton's and Ockham's positions in the debate sketched above simply track their attitudes on this larger issue. Chatton, the Scotistic realist, wants to have wide explanatory latitude for natural philosophy and metaphysics, and so attributes to *res respectivae* a certain independence from God: God cannot usurp or override their natural functioning unless he destroys them, and more interestingly and controversially, God cannot really relate two things without creating them. The more conservative Ockham points out that this view makes it sound as though God has limits in dealing with the creation, and favors a rejection of the realist view on the ground of divine omnipotence. Chatton's response to this is telling of how far he is from occasionalism. His view is this: if occasionalism is false, and if a particular individual entity X produces a particular individual entity Y, then if X is to have more than nominal causal responsibility in bringing about Y, we must hold that God has to deal with X in the production of Y. To deny this point is to weaken the idea of causal connection to the point of uselessness.

To summarize my interpretation of Chatton and to make the heart of his dispute with Ockham as sharp as possible, I conclude with a recapitulation the two sides. I then say something about who seems to have gotten the better of the debate.

The relevant part of Ockham's rejection of the theory of real relations, as applied to our example of Picasso and *Guernica*, seems to be as follows:

(1)   The Condemnation of 1277 entails, among other things, that God can make any thing whatsoever without the aid of another thing.

(2)   Hence occasionalism (i.e., the view that God is the only cause) is logically possible for all existing things.

(3)   Since Picasso and *Guernica* are things, both could exist even if God were the cause of them both, and so both could exist if neither caused the other.

(4)   If we say, as Chatton would, that the truth of 'Picasso caused *Guernica*' requires us to posit four things—Picasso, *Guernica*, a relation of cause in Picasso, and a relation of being-caused in *Guernica*—then, by (2), these four things could exist even if none of them caused the other (i.e., they all could have been produced by God directly).

(5)   Hence, in particular, Picasso, *Guernica*, a relation of cause in Picasso, and a relation of being-caused in *Guernica* would then exist, even though Picasso did not in fact cause *Guernica*, since God did. This is absurd.

(6)   Consequently, we ought not to posit such relations of cause and being-caused as things. If we drop this, then the theological dogma in (2) does not apply to these relations. The doctrine of real relations is then abandoned, but the consequences of the Condemnation are thereby respected.

There is something undeniably correct about this. The doctrine of real relations is incompatible with occasionalism and so with the standard interpretation of the Condemnation. But Chatton is keenly aware of the full import of Ockham's reasoning, and this incompatibility, and his response in effect sides with Scotistic realism on relations by responding to Ockham in two ways: (a) Chatton reinterprets the meaning of the Condemnation, that is, in effect he challenges premise (1) above; and (b) he blames the clear contradiction in (5) not on the doctrine of real relations, as Ockham had done, but rather on the abuse of the Condemnation in establishing premise (4). Chatton recognizes the *reductio* that Ockham sets up; he just blames the contradiction on a different source.

In essence, Chatton's response is this: God, in fact, *cannot* make Picasso, *Guernica*, a relation of cause in Picasso, and a relation of being-caused in *Guernica*, since if he did, 'Picasso caused *Guernica*' would be false, although the four things sufficient for its truth exist, and even God cannot bring about such an impossible situation. Occasionalism does conflict with the theory of real relations. But all this shows is that occasionalism is not a (possible) consequence of the Condemnation. Thus, Chatton is quite radical on this count, compared to his fellow Franciscans, and he is willing to go quite far to preserve relatively independent and interesting natural relations, such as causation.

I think we should conclude that Ockham is wrong to invoke the Condemnation against the theory of relations in this way. Unless we hold occasionalism, we should say that God, for all his omnipotence, cannot keep any random proposition true while destroying any creature he likes. Thus, Chatton's Principle seems to be correct about this much: given an initial conception of created objects (such as a self-contained Aristotelian substance), at least some minimum number and kinds of objects must be posited to verify certain propositions about them. If the proposition 'Picasso produces *Guernica*' is true, then there must be a Picasso and a *Guernica*, and—depending on how self-contained we think these two entities are—possibly some other entities which explain their connection as producer/produced. Of course, this result alone does not settle the issue of precisely how many entities of what kind must, in fact, be posited in a given case; in the course of his defense of his general method from Ockham's counter-example, Chatton does not thereby give positive support to the details of his own principle of plurality, or to the details of the Scotistic theory of relations that he upheld. However, it is enough if I have shown here that Ockham's unrestricted appeal to the principle of divine omnipotence early in his debate against Chatton was a step too far in the other direction.[28]