This is the first in a series of 3 essays dealing with philosophical problems related to modality. The main focus of this essay is John Duns Scotus's doctrine of "the contingency of the present".

This article is not intended for scholarly publication. It is the fruits of a study, undertaken in order to gain competence for a larger article on necessary existence.

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John Duns Scotus on the modality of freedom

Introductory remarks

Modal terms like "impossible", "possible", "contingent" and "necessary" are predicated in a variety of different ways. This is not primarily due to conflicting ways of defining the relevant *concepts*, but to there being such a variety of *kinds of items* of which modal terms are predicated, and because there are several *kinds of modality* to which modal terms correspond. *Kinds of items* which have been at some time or other been claimed to be e.g. necessary include states of affairs, properties, inferences, causal connections, truth, the past, the future, metaphysical principles, logical principles, and sometimes even of laws of nature, too, only to mention some. *Kinds of modality* which have at some time or other been proposed to exist include necessity *de dicto* and *de re*, absolute or relative, as well as factual, logical, veridical, and more. So the picture here is quite intricate.

Some important problems in the history of philosophy have been claimed to rest on a confusion of *kinds* of modality, and to dissolve once that confusion is cleared up. For example "the Master Argument" which Epictetus attributes to Diodorus claims that there is a contradiction between any two and the third of the following three propositions: "Every true proposition about the past is necessary. The impossible does not logically follow from the possible. What neither is presently true nor will be so is possible." If Epictetus's argument is true, it has very profound consequences for our conception of freedom. But many philosophers have argued that the argument is fallacious on the grounds that it confuses the *kinds of modality* involved in saying that true propositions about the past are necessary and that some counterfactual propositions are possible.[1] Saying this is meant to illustrate that philosophical work on necessity and correlated modal notions has to pay minute attention to a large battery of conceptual distinctions, and that philosophizing on modal notions can be

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[1] For an historical review of- and a modern contribution to the debate on the Master Argument, see (Vuillemin 1996).

expected to consist, to some important extent at least, in sorting out, working out and providing modal notions which are proper to the subject matter at hand.

Even if modal terms disperse into such an intricate conglomerate of concepts, they are not said homonymously. This is to say that each modal term has a univocal sense which it retains even as it is referred across the various kinds of modality; i.e. there is something common about anything which is, e.g., necessary, and which qualifies it as such.

The basic modal terms are "possible" and "necessary" and they are defined in terms of one another. A standard way of defining them is as follows: [2]

1. That is necessary whose negation is impossible.
2. That is possible whose negation is not necessary.

On the basis of these definitions we can construe a subgroup of the possible called "contingent":

3. That is contingent which is possible and not necessary.

Though this definition of the contingent includes all non-necessary possibles, it is quite a commonplace, I think, that philosophers restrict the use of the term "contingent" for non-necessary possibles which are *also actual*.

These definitions do not determine anything about any *kind of modality*, just the necessary and sufficient conditions for anything to be necessary, possible or contingent respectively. It is perhaps worrisome that the first two of these definitions are circular. The fact that they are has been used to motivate a supposition that modal talk is really unintelligible despite appearances to the contrary, and that modal terms should be abandoned, or at least expelled from metaphysics. This is undoubtedly a serious concern which needs to be addressed in a philosophical theory of modality. It seems well possible that modal concepts are *primitive* in the sense that they cannot be deduced from more prior terms, and so that understanding them will require that they be *intuitively grasped* (though such a grasp will ensue from experiential preconditioning, to be sure), but exploring the viability of this path of the epistemology of modality falls well beyond the limits of this paper. For now, all I propose is that we lay down (1-3) as dialectical starting points for the following investigation.

Absolute and relative necessity in Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 980-1037)

Avicenna developed definitions of what it is for an entity to exist contingently and what it is for an entity to *exist* necessarily; i.e. he developed definitions of necessary and contingent *existence*. This is not to say that Avicenna *invented* this distinction, for

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[2] Exactly equivalent definitions are found in: (Audi 1995) *s.v.* "modal logic" and (Garson 2003).

some way of expressing the difference between necessary and contingent existence has been employed by philosophers at least since the time of Plato. But Avicenna's definitions are lucid and simple and will serve us in the ensuing discussion, so we will now take a closer look at them. Avicenna says there are two kinds of existents:

4. In one of them, when the thing itself is considered, its existence is not necessary; this is called "possible of existence". In the second, when the thing itself is considered, its existence is necessary; this is called "necessary of existence" (from *'Uyun al-masa'il*, in: (Bosley 1997, p. 14)).

A pertinent point here is that this distinction applies to things according as they are *considered in themselves*, which is like saying "considered *essentially*" or "*intrinsically*". Avicenna is asserting that some things, what their essence or their intrinsic properties are concerned, are possible of existence, while others are necessary of existence. In line with the terminology we have laid down, will shall call these two kinds of existence "contingent existence" and "necessary existence" respectively.

Avicenna's position presupposes the view that things have a proper nature or essence, and that their nature or essence is somehow accessible to our cognition. Such a position is often referred to as "essentialism" and is controversial. Avicenna's definitions of contingent and necessary existence does not make any claims about *how* these modes of existence may be recognized by us or *what* it is that causes or brings it about that some things have a necessary while others have a contingent mode of existence, they just state that for some natures *it is the case* that they exist contingently, while for some other natures *it is the case* that they exist necessarily. But Avicenna does have a rationale for why this is so.

5. Know that every existent has a cause for its existence or has no cause. If it has a cause, it is something possible [of existence]… (from *al-Risala al-'arshiyya* in *Rasa'il Ibn Sina*, in: (Bosley 1997, p. 14)).

That a thing either has a cause or no cause for its existence is a truism under the principle of the excluded middle. But the statement that if an existent has a cause, it is something possible [of existence], i.e. something contingent, requires argument. I do not know whether Avicenna did give an argument for this proposition, but I think it may be fairly easily done. If an entity p exists due to a cause q, then p is dependent on q for its existence and hence p is not, *considered in itself*, necessary of existence (this argument can be expanded and formalized in a demonstration, but I think it sufficiently evident as it here stands).

Even if an existent p is caused and thus contingent, Avicenna believes that its existence *is* necessary in certain way, albeit not in virtue of the thing itself itself. Speaking of something which is possible of existence, Avicenna says:

6. And if it does exist, it becomes necessary of existence by another thing; consequently it is something that is always possible of existence by itself

and necessary of existence by another thing. (from *'Uyun al-masa'il*, in: (Bosley 1997, p14), cf. *ibid*. I.2.3).

A caused and contingent thing, then, remains contingent – "*is always possible of existence by itself*" – even if its existence is necessitated by an external cause. The kind of necessity in question, that of being necessitated with regard to existence by another thing, is often referred to by philosophers as "relative necessity" or "hypothetical necessity" (the latter expression is especially typical for the Leibnizian tradition, I think), and for ease of expression we shall take over the term "relative necessity". So according to Avicenna it is not merely *possible* that something contingent be relatively necessary. Any contingent thing which exists *is* necessary relative to its cause; it is thus *intrinsically contingent* and *relatively necessary* at the same time.

So Avicenna has a rationale for determining whether something is contingent: If a thing is caused, then it is contingent.[3] Since things are either caused or uncaused, and since caused things are contingent, necessary things, if anything such exists, must be uncaused. Avicenna does have an argument to the effect that there exists something necessary (*ibid* I.2.2.) – the argument is basically that which is known in philosophy as "the Cosmological Argument"[4] – but we will not be studying that argument here. The point which we shall hold on to here is that the criteria for whether a thing is intrinsically contingent or not, is whether it is caused or not.

Preliminary Summary
The philosophical platform that we have just envisaged provides us with some useful material for a discussion that we will soon engage in. I will briefly sum up some main points that we shall keep in mind as we proceed:

A. Any existent thing is either caused to exist or not.
B. That which is caused to exist is contingent; that which is uncaused in its existence is necessary (the thing considered in itself).
C. That which is caused and thus contingent, is nevertheless necessary relative to its cause.

John Duns Scotus on the contingency of the present (1265-1308)

In Scotus's times it was commonly accepted among philosophers that the existence of contingent existents could only be properly explained by reference to an ultimate

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[3] Note that this rationale may sometimes be difficult to apply, for in some cases it might be very hard to determine whether a thing is caused or not. There are plenty of clear instances though: Any thing which has a beginning in time, under the assumption that nothing comes to be from nothing, must be caused to be.

[4] A rough structure of this argument runs as follows: Since there are, manifestly, contingent things, and since there cannot be an infinite regress of ever more prior and contingent causes (this premise is quite controversial), there must be an ultimate cause of contingent existence, and that cause must be a necessary existent.

cause which exists necessarily. This ultimate, first cause, would be referred to as "the first cause", "the first principle" or "God", pretty much interchangeably. Philosophy at that time was largely concerned with philosophical theology. A theological-philosophical problem which greatly occupied Scotus was something like the following: If God is the first principle of everything and, to be sure, is a necessary being, *and* if God necessarily causes what he actually does, then it appears that everything will be necessary. It appears there will be no contingency in the world, as all events will just follow in a necessary sequence of causes ensuing from Gods necessary, causal activity; there will be only one possible world.

One can see why Scotus would be troubled by this view of things: it can be thought to have devastating consequences for our view of human freedom, and from a religious point of view, it may be thought to annihilate the freedom and belittle the dignity of God as well.

The idea that God, in addition to simply *existing* necessarily, also *exerts his causal activity necessarily* (necessarily in the sense that it is impossible that he *would* have done anything otherwise than what he does), can be considered as part of Scotus's philosophical heritage, even if such a thesis was condemned by Bishop Etienne Tempier in 1277. A theological-philosophical position of this kind is commonly attributed to Aristotle and the Neoplatonic tradition (from what I gather one contests over what Augustine finally held about this), and was carried into medieval philosophy through Averroes and Avicenna. Quite notably, Plotinus' tractate VI.8 of the Enneads is a sublime work on this topic. In this tractate Plotinus argues that even if the activity and will of the One (Plotinus' favored designation of the first principle) is necessary, it is not so in the sense of being forced, constrained or in any way restricted or necessitated by anything external to the One itself. The necessity pertaining to the activity of the One is just what the One itself is, and consequently, Plotinus concludes, the necessity of the One's activity is just its own perfect and unhindered autonomy; nothing could be more free.[5]

When Scotus enters the philosophical scene, something like the view just ascribed to Plotinus was the received view within philosophy, referred to as the "view of the Philosophers". This was a view which Scotus would radically oppose. After having conducted a demonstration to the effect that there does necessarily exists one first cause of all existence, he proceeds to argue that *the first cause necessarily causes contingently* (!):

> 7. Something is contingently caused, therefore the first cause causes contingently, therefore it causes by willing (*Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, pt. 1, qu. 1-2. (Bosley 1997, p. 64)).

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[5] A nice exposition of the basic and contrary intuitions of freedom that underlies this vs. a "choice between opposites" theory of freedom (like that of Scotus), is given in (Armstrong 1982).

The argument as it stands here is of course elliptic, but Scotus immediately turns to justify it. We will now attempt to evaluate this justification. Let us start by critically investigating the contention that if anything be contingently caused, then the first cause causes contingently. Here is Scotus's argument for it:

8. Proof of the first consequence: Any secondary cause causes insofar as it is moved by the first; therefore, if the first necessarily produces motion, any other cause is necessarily in motion and causes necessarily whatever it causes. Therefore, if some secondary cause produces motion contingently, also the first will produce motion contingently, because the secondary cause causes only in virtue of the first cause to the extent that it is moved by it (*ibid.*).

This argument is quite problematic. First of all a little trifle: It is not evident that 'motion' is the proper kind of causal activity to be talking about when one talks about the causal activity exerted by the first principle. But I call this a trifle because it seems well possible that Scotus employs "motion" as a generic designation of any kind of causal transfer, regardless of whether or not it implies spatial change.

The contention that "any secondary cause causes *insofar* as it is moved by the first" seems inevitable. For something is a secondary cause precisely in virtue of being moved by the first, and whatever it causes *insofar as it is a secondary cause*, it causes *insofar as it is moved by the first*. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that some substance which is a secondary mover in some respect and in one causal chain, can be a first mover in another respect and in some other causal chain. But even if one accepts that "any secondary cause causes *insofar* as it is moved by the first", why should one accept that "if some secondary cause produces motion contingently, also the first will produce motion contingently"? The reason given by Scotus, "because the secondary cause causes only in virtue of the first cause to the extent that it is moved by it", does not prove the point.

Consider what Scotus means by the expression "causes contingently":

9. I do not mean by the word "contingent" [in this context] whatever is non-necessary or non-everlasting, but rather that whose opposite can come to be when it comes to be (*Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, pt. 1, qu. 1-2 (p. 64)).

This means that a cause causes contingently if and only if at the moment it causes something it has the power to cause the opposite of what it causes *at the moment of causing*. One would want to know whether "opposite" in this context refers to *contradictory opposites* only, so that the power of causing opposites consists in the power to cause or not-to cause a certain effect at the moment of causing, or whether it also refers to *contrary opposites*, so that the power of causing opposites also consists in the power to bring about any of two contrary effects at the moment of causing. A standard interpretation of "opposite" would allow for both of alternatives. But note that if contrary opposites are included, God will not only have the power e.g. to do or not to do any benevolent act, but he will also have the power to do either a

benevolent or an evil act in any instance of causing![6] *Lectura* I 39, 45 pretty clearly implies that it is this latter, wide sense of "opposite" which is intended.

With this understanding of what it means for a cause to cause contingently, we can now highlight what I believe to be a fundamental problem with Scotus argument: **How is it that whether or not a secondary cause causes contingently is in any way whatsoever dependent on whether or not its mover causes contingently?** I do not see how Scotus could answer this question, given the premise that any "secondary cause causes only in virtue of the first cause to the extent that it is moved by it" (from 8). For let a first cause cause necessarily; any secondary cause it brings about will cause *insofar* as it is moved by the first and to the extent that it is moved by the first (by 8). Alternatively, let a first cause cause contingently; any secondary cause it brings about will cause *insofar* as it is moved by the first and to the extent that it is moved by the first (by 8). In any case, whether the first cause causes contingently or necessarily, any secondary cause will cause *insofar* as it is moved by the first and to the extent that it is moved by the first, and hence, not contingently in the way required by (9).

It might well be that the subject of the secondary cause exists contingently, i.e. that the *thing* which is a secondary cause is a contingent existent (cf. the section on Avicenna above), it might also well be that the causal activity of a secondary cause is an accidental and hence contingent *property* of that subject, so that there be *no intrinsic necessity* in the subject for engaging in just that causing. But insofar as a secondary cause causes "in virtue of the first cause and to the extent that it is moved by it", its causal activity will be *relatively necessary*, necessary relative to the first cause, and not contingent in the way in required by (9). So I do not think that the argument of *Ordinatio I* succeeds in showing that the possibility of contingent causation in secondary causes is in any way dependent on whether or not the first cause causes contingently.

Note that even if Scotus's *justification* for his argument seems to fail, the *conclusion* he wants to establish might still be true. Recall the raw backbone of the argument of (5): "Something is contingently caused, therefore the first cause causes contingently". This might be true. Indeed, it is an analytical truth that if something is contingently caused, then there is a cause that causes contingently. Also that *if* the first principle of everything causes contingently, *then* whatever it causes is contingently caused. Well and good. But what Scotus has not shown, is that "if some secondary cause causes contingently, also the first will cause contingently" (from 7). For indeed, if secondary causes only cause *insofar* as they are moved by first causes and to the extent that they are moved by first causes, it appears impossible that secondary causes can cause contingently (in the required sense) at all!

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[6] In a Platonic framework this would be just share nonsense, because the ability to do bad is held to come about through a lack of power to do good; there is no positive capacity to do bad. Omnipotence on a Platonic view consist solely in the power to do what is best.

Does Scotus have a way out?

When one believes oneself to have detected such an obvious fallacy in the reasoning of a philosopher known as *le docteur subtil*, one can be pretty sure that one has overlooked something. And indeed, Scotus does have material outside the *Ordinatio I* which appears to make his position immune towards the simple minded kind of objection that I have outlined above. To try to unearth a Scotian solution here, we shall begin by looking into Scotus's notion of *essentially ordered causes*, and then investigate how he conceives of the will as *acting contingently yet dependently* within an essential, causal order.

Essentially ordered causes

In *Tractatus de primo principio* I, Scotus defines what he means by "essential order". The term is equivocal and Scotus treats a veritable array of its senses, but there is one (of two primary) divisions of the term which is particularly relevant for us now, and that is the division of *essential order of dependence*:

> 10. I understand prior here in the same sense as did Aristotle when in the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*, on the authority of Plato, he shows that the prior according to nature and essence can exist without the posterior, but the reverse is not true. And this I understand as follows. Even though the prior should produce the posterior necessarily and consequently could not exist without it, it would not be because the prior requires the posterior for its own existence, but it is rather the other way about. [7]

This notion of "essential order" makes up something of an ever recurring theme in philosophy and is perhaps most often referred to as an order of *ontological dependence*. From Aristotle we are familiar with the notion being expressed as "that which is prior or posterior according to form/substance/nature" (*Met.* V 11. 1019a1-4; IX 8. 1050a1-5). Things (essences) are related as prior or posterior to one another in an essential order according as they are able or not to exist without one another; the more independent of existence, the more prior, the more dependent of existence, the more posterior. An illustrative analogy may be found in the relation between you and your mirror image, where there is an order of dependence such that you can exist without the mirror image but not conversely. Hence, relative to one another, you are prior and the mirror image is posterior. (The analogy is incomplete because this relation implies time, something a relation of essential dependence does not).

A corollary of having items (essences) ordered as prior and posterior in an order of ontological dependence is that one can induce the notion of something like a "reality slice". By reality slice I mean a segment of reality which can but need not include a point of time, and which cannot include more than one point of time. A reality slice will display items as they are ordered according to ontological dependence *abstracted from time*. In a reality slice "prior" and "posterior" will refer purely to the "vertical"

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[7] Translation taken from (Scotus); this source does not refer the translator. I have chacked the citation against the French translation by Imach, (Imbach 1983) and Walter (1966) in: (Normore 2003, p. 133).

essential order of ontological dependence, not the order of time. Further , in Scotian terminology each level *level* in (what I call) a reality slice is an "*instant of nature*". Scotus formulated a technical criterion for an essential ordering of instants of nature in his *Propositio Famosa*,[8] implying that A is essentially prior to B if and only if A is an element required in an explanation of the existence of B.

With the notion of a "reality slice" as background, we can now enjoy Scotus's thought experiment of an angel existing only for a single moment of time t.[9] The reality slice containing t can, for simplicities sake, be divided into two instants of nature, one prior to the other. In the prior instant is contained the angel's will with the power both to hate and to love God; i.e. the ontological item contained in this instant of nature is the angel's *power* to realize opposite acts of will. The posterior instant contains the angel's actualization of the power to love God. These are prior and posterior because a power to actualize is presupposed for its actualization, even if there is no succession of time between the two.

According to Scotus, this angel is free because its causing its will to actualize its capacity to love God is contingent at t; contingent in the way required by (9). I will not in this paper discuss whether or not one should accept that a will is free simply because it causes contingently (what if the angel just randomly and ignorantly chose to hate God, would that be free too?). The point now is just that Scotus has a model for what it involves for a will to cause contingently.

At this point one must keep very clearly in mind that there is a sense in which a state consequent upon a contingent act of the will is necessary, and another sense it which it is not. For say that the angel's realization of its capacity to love God at t realizes state A. There is now a certain sense in which A is necessary at t. For since it is true that A at t, it is impossible that ~A **is** true at t. But this is necessity *de dicto*. It commits us to nothing more than the realization that what is true cannot be false. But there is a much more important sense in which A at t is not necessary. Namely that relative to the angels *power* to realize both A **or** its opposite at t, the angel has at t the power for doing other than what it is doing at t. This means that the angel **could** be doing something other than what it is doing at t. On a larger scale, this has the significant philosophical consequence that at the present moment, things **could** be other than what in fact they are.

There is something quite paradoxical about this. On the one side the present is *determinate and actual* and cannot **be** other than what it is. Yet simultaneously, since there are, according to Scotus, contingent causes, not only **could** the present have been different from what it is, but these contingent causes **have** at present the power to cause other than what they do cause at present. This means that for all x, when x is a contingent power, even if x is A at t, it is nonetheless possible *relative to x's power for*

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[8] The *Propositio Famosa*: "The order among concepts is the order there would be among the significata of the concepts if these could exist separated from each other." My source in: (Normore 2003, p. 133).

[9] My source for this thought experiment is (Normore 2003).

opposites that x is ~A at *t*.[10] But how is ~A of x now possible when x is now A and it is impossible **now** that the present **is** anything other than what it is; is it not an impossibility that something has a power for something which cannot be realized? My guess is that Scotus would want to dissolve this paradox with recourse to a distinction between the indeterminate possibilities of *a power* for opposites, and the determinate possibilities of what is actual.

Even if paradoxical (and quite probably open to non-trivial objections), Scotus's doctrine on this point is often considered a genuine discovery of his, and is referred to as a doctrine of *the contingency of the present* or of *synchronic contingency*.[11]

Acting dependently yet contingently
I said earlier that we would investigate the notion of an essential order of causes *in order to* explain how it is that Scotus thinks that contingency in secondary causes are dependent on contingency in first order causes. In the previous section we considered a very simple essential order consisting of an angel's power of will and the actualization of that power. According to Scotus, any power of will such as the angel's can only cause contingently because the first cause of everything, God, causes contingently. But the difficulty here lies in understanding precisely why it is that the contingency of God's act contributes to the contingency of the acts of created wills.

In chapter 3 of *Tractatus de primo principo* Scotus argues that the causation of any secondary cause in an essential order *depends* on the activity of the first cause. The use of the word "depends" here is significant, and is the word which is used in Imbach's translation: "… la seconde, en tant qu'elle cause, *depend* de la première" (Imbach 1983, 4, 28, p. 61), and in (Scotus, p. 10), "… in essentially ordered causes, the second depends upon the first precisely in the act of causing". This differs from Normore's presentation of the same passage, who writes: " [Scotus] has argued in chapter 3 that every cause except the first causes only insofar as its causing is itself *caused* by the activity of the first cause" (Normore 2003, p. 136); similarly also in (6) above: "Any secondary cause causes insofar as it is moved by the first".

But there is a significant difference between saying that the causal activity of secondary causes is *dependent on the first*, and saying that they are *caused by the first*; at least the two sets of terminology will evoke different connotations, and I believe "dependence" is better suited for the kind of causal relation which is found in an essential order. [NB! What does the Latin say? Since we are talking of causation in an

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[10] This distinction between the determinacy and necessity of the present facilitates a solution to the classical problem of how Gods omniscient foreknowledge can be compatible with future contingents.

[11] In the introduction of (Scotus 1994), its commentators go so far as to assert that the theory of the contingency of the present developed in *Lectura* 39 (*ibid.* p. 25) presents, for the first time in the history of philosophy, a theory of *real contingency*. Real contingency, according to these writers, demand not only that p can possibly change to ~p, but that p is contingent if ~p is possible *simultaneously* with p. The latter conception these authors call "synchronic contingency", to be distinguished from "diachronic contingency".

essential order, the translation "depends" might be justified even if the Latin word says "causes"]. An essential order contains a series of beings (essences) ordered according to ontological dependence. It is each of these essences that depend on the prior items (essences) in the series, not their contingent properties. Suppose then than some secondary and dependent item in an essential order has the essential property of having the *power* to cause contingently, precisely the essential property a *will* is said to have according to Scotus. Suppose further that this item realizes its power in a contingent act of causation, just like Scotus supposes. Now, I do not think it sound to say that this causal is caused by the first cause in its essential order in the sense that it is this first cause, viz God, which actualizes the will's potentiality to act.[12] It is rather, I want to suggest, the existence of an essence with a *power* to cause contingently which is so dependent, so that *what God causes is the will's power to act contingently*. This seems to be implied by something Scotus himself says: "… if the caused will necessarily wills anything, it is not determined by its cause to will such in the way that the weight is determined to descend. All it receives from the cause is a principle by which it determines itself to this volition." (*Quodl.* q. 16, n. 15; my source in: (Normore 2003, p. 142)).

We will later search for Scotian, technical tools to describe this causal relation. At this point I want to suggest what might be an illustrative analogy: Say we live in a possible world in which my daughter has (mysteriously) received from me the following power for opposite action: the power of touching the ceiling by willingly raising either her left or her right hand. But say further that in this possible world, the only possible way she can exercise this capacity, is if I carry her on my shoulders. Imagine now that she sits on my shoulders and lifts her right hand to touch the ceiling. What I want to illustrate with this scenario is a situation in which a certain power, the power for opposites, is given, but where the exercise of that causal power presupposes the continued support and the continued "upholding" of some necessary conditions for that power's exercise, *and* where this support and upholding stems *from the same causal source* which gave the power for opposites. The analogy is incomplete, since in the relation between God and the human will, God's sustaining the will's power for opposites will be just the same as causal activity which supports the actualization of the will too, these will not be two different causal acts. My aim was just to provide an image of how the causal source for a power of opposites will work as a *simultaneous* and *concomitant* cause in the exercise of that power. This flows from the fact in an essential order, the causes are not "cut off" from their effects (as in temporal causal chains), but "all essentially ordered causes are simultaneously required to cause the effect, for otherwise some causality essential to the effect would be wanting" (Scotus, § 3. 11).

So if I am right in thinking that what the primary cause of the will causes is the will's *power* to cause – something which entails that the primary cause of the will is *also* and *necessarily* a *simultaneous* and *concomitant cause* of the will's *exercise* of this power, *insofar* as it upholds this power in existence – then the question of why it is that contingent causation in secondary causes is dependent on the first cause causing

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[12] The same thing is emphatically emphasized in (Möhle 2003, p.324) and (Normore 2003).

contingently, should be tackled with a different set of conditions than those which we have been employing until now. The question now becomes, not how the contingency of the first *impetus* in a causal chain can do anything to safeguard the contingency of secondary causes (which it manifestly does not), but why it is that *if a dependent essence has the power to cause contingently, then that same power must be present in the first cause of its essential order*.

Searching for solutions

If the items of a Scotian essential order were ordered like a Platonic essential order, then this question would have an analytical solution. For in a Platonic essential order, any *essential* (!) property of a dependent item must of necessity be found more eminently in the prior items of its series, the posterior "participating" in the prior. So on that model, if a will essentially possessed the power of opposites and that will was dependent on God, then God would necessarily possess the power of opposites to an even higher degree (assuming now that to have the potential for opposites actually is to have a power and that it is compatible with perfection). But Scotus's notion of an essential order is not like the Platonic, for at least Scotus's notion is wider.

I said previously that the first chapter of *Tractatus de primo principio* distinguishes various *kinds* of essential orders. The divisions here are quite intricate, but among the essential orders of *dependence* we are, on a final count, left with six kinds, two non-causal and four causal.[13] It would seem that the kind of dependence we are searching for cannot be non-causal for we have explicit Scotian claims to the effect that the first cause in an essential order of will is responsible *somehow* for the causation of second order causes. We will need to look for a relation which is *direct* and which has to do with the *exercise of power*.

The four kinds of essential orders which are causal correspond to the four Aristotelian causes, material, efficient, formal and final. Since I take the prior argumentation to have excluded that the causal relation between God and the human willpower can be one of efficient cause, given that the contingency of the act of the human will is to preserved, and since this exclusion corresponds to a consensus view of the commentators I have consulted,[14] we are now left with the option of construing this dependence through material, formal or final causation, or some ordering *among* these.

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[13] A systematic exposition of Scotus's theory of causation providing *examples* of these kinds of essential orders is provided by Peter King (King 2003, p. 38-42).

[14] See (Möhle 2003), (Normore 2003, p. 141) and (Mechthild Dreyer 2003, 56-59). Normore remarks in a footnote that there are commentators who have held that that the human will, even if contingent absolutely, is nevertheless necessary relative to God's will, notably Douglas Langston, *God's Willing Knowledge*: *The influence of Scotus's analysis of Omniscience*, 1986.

It is quite tempting to hypothesize that the will's actualization of an act of the will is an initiation of *efficient causation*, and that this initiation is essentially dependent on God as its *final cause*. This model fits neatly into a theory of teleological freedom, where the will is considered as autonomous and free when it knowingly achieves its own best. The problem is just that this is not Scotus's model. Scotus claims that the will is free to sin and hate God, and we cannot posit God as the final cause of God-hating.[15] It seems we cannot frame the relation of the human will's relation to God in terms of a relation of matter to form either, for Scotus's will is itself the initiator of the impulse leading to the actualization of it's acts, something which would be excluded by the passivity of matter. Purely final causation is not effective in the way required and neither is purely material causation. Then lastly, that the relation between God's will and the human will should be construed as a relation of form to form seems unintelligible outside of a Platonic-kind "metaphysics of participation". [Might the last point be false? If Scotus allows for "form-to-form" causality, then that opens up for some extremely interesting perspectives.]

If the above analysis is correct, none of the kinds of essential orders listed in *Tractatus de primo principio* can account for the causal relation between a primary and a secondary cause in an essential order of contingent willpower. And if that is correct, I am sorry to say that I do not know how the problem facing us can be solved within Scotus's philosophical framework at all.

Let us recognize that the problem we are encountering, the problem of why, if a secondary essence has the power to act contingently, then its primary essential cause must be inferred to have the same power, is a classical one. William of Ockham e.g., argued rigorously against it (*Ordinatio* I, dist. 43, qu.1 (Bosley 1997, p. 83-86)). Even when assuming that the first essential cause does not actually cause *the acts* of secondary causes, but merely upholds these causes in existence, Ockham argued that the inference from the contingency of secondary causation to the contingency of primary causation is just plainly invalid. He argued e.g., that even if the first cause causes necessarily, it could have caused the heavens to necessarily and intrinsically possess a will with the power to act contingently; the point being that there is no contradiction involved in this dual supposition. There is no contradiction involved in supposing that God *necessarily* causes and preserves a will which intrinsically possesses a power to act contingently.

In more recent times, Calvin Normore has been thrust against a very similar problematic. Normore strongly opposes the idea that God causes the acts of the human will. Rather, he suggests:

> God causes the will's causing of its act. *Exactly what this means is far from clear*. I suggest that at least this much is true: God causes it to be the case that what the will does is a causing of its act (Normore 2003, p. 139).

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[15] For a deeper explanation of why Scotus's will is not caused to act by a final cause and how Scotus's stance on this point represents a break with Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics and action-theory, see (Möhle 2003, p. 325-6).

Not only does Normore here admit that the relevant causal relationship is unclear, on the same page he also describes the relation of essential causation involved here as embedded in a "dark doctrine", presumably meaning to indicate that it is more than just obscure. Since Normore does not discuss or reject alternative interpretative solutions, it seems fair to assume that his assessment reflects the current state of scholarship and that until this day, one simply does not know exactly how Scotus conceived of the causality in an essential order of willpower.

For my own part, I submit that based on a reading of *Ordinatio* I, dist. 2; *Lectura* I 39 and *De primo principio,* I have not found one single piece of textual evidence which would *explain* why the contingency of the human will is dependent on God's will being contingent. In addition, we have seen that there are some systematic considerations which seem to count *against* Scotus's system having the resources for explaining such a dependency relation at all, since his theory of causation is bound up to the Aristotelian doctrine of the four causes. On this background it is my (temporary and revisable) conclusion that Scotus has not succeeded in demonstrating that if the human will is contingent, then God's will is contingent, too.

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