

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 33 | Issue 4

Article 1

10-1-2016

Duns Scotus on Divine Immensity

Richard Cross

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Cross, Richard (2016) "Duns Scotus on Divine Immensity," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 4 , Article 1.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil201610567

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol33/iss4/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

DUNS SCOTUS ON DIVINE IMMENSITY

Richard Cross

In a recent article, Hud Hudson analyses divine omnipresence in terms of a spatial property, *ubiquitous extension*, neither reducible to nor derivative from any other divine attribute. Hudson's view is an alternative to the predominant view in recent philosophical theology, in which omnipresence is reduced to omnipotence. I show that Duns Scotus adopts a view that conforms very closely to Hudson's account, and show how he argues against the derivative view, which he finds in Aquinas. Hudson claims that ubiquitous extension helps dissolve the mystery of causal interactions between God and creatures. Scotus argues against this claim. He also argues against the view taken by Hudson that extension entails materiality. While fundamentally agreeing with Hudson's basic position, then, Scotus nevertheless provides challenges both for Hudson and his opponents.

In a recent article on the subject, Hud Hudson analyses divine omnipresence in terms of a property that he labels "extension." Extension requires for its analysis the notions of being entirely located and being wholly located, which Hudson defines as follows:

" x is entirely located at r " =_{df} x is located at r and there is no region of space-time disjoint from r at which x is located.

" x is wholly located at r " =_{df} x is located at r , and there is no proper part of x not located at r .¹

Given these definitions, Hudson provides the following definition of "extension":

" x extends" =_{df} x is an object that is wholly and entirely located at a non-point-sized region, r , and for each proper subregion of r , r^* , x is wholly located at r^* .²

And given this definition, Hudson offers an analysis of omnipresence: omnipresence is just "ubiquitous extension."³ This is a way of occupying space, and the claim that omnipresence is ubiquitous extension is supposed to take God's spatiality seriously. Hudson's view is unusual among

¹Hudson, "Omnipresence," 206.

²Hudson, "Omnipresence," 206.

³Hudson, "Omnipresence," 209.



modern philosophers of religion, who are generally inclined to deny that God has this kind of relation to space—preferring to make God’s omnipresence derivative from, or even reducible to, some other divine attribute—most notably, omnipotence.⁴ (I take it that reductionism on this question is one way of understanding a derivative view. But derivative views need not be reductionist, as we shall see.⁵) Hudson himself formulates his view as an express attempt to find an alternative to the currently dominant reductionist view, one that, he claims, offers some hope for an *explanation* of the possibility of God’s knowledge of and action in the material world.⁶ But Ross D. Inman has shown that, far from being novel, very close ancestors to Hudson’s non-derivative view can be found in Augustine and Anselm.⁷ And both Robert Pasnau and Edward Grant suggest—though without much discussion or evidence—that it represents the standard view in the Middle Ages and beyond.⁸

In what follows, I propose to test the hypothesis that non-derivative views of omnipresence were standard in the Middle Ages by looking at what Duns Scotus has to say on the matter. As far as I can see, two varieties of the derivative view (reductionist and non-reductionist) that Hudson wants to oppose were proposed by Aquinas. Scotus provides a defense of the non-derivative view against Aquinas’s derivative views—something that we do not find in either Augustine or Anselm (since, I take it, the views were unknown to them). Scotus’s account turns out to be in principle instructive both for modern adherents of the derivative view and for modern adherents of the non-derivative view. On the one side, he provides reasons for thinking that the derivative view is false. But one of the reasons that Hudson has for adopting his non-derivative view is that it helps demystify questions about divine action: how the divine and the created realm might be the *relata* in any kind of causal activity. (Answer: by being in *spatial* contact.) So, on the other side, Scotus provides reasons for thinking that a view such as Hudson’s is in fact *no* help in this demystification, and thus that it needs to be motivated in some other way. (I suggest in passing one advantage of Scotus’s view, though it is not an advantage that he avails himself of.) Hudson concludes from his view that God must be material. Scotus provides a way of resisting this conclusion, albeit one rooted in details of his own medieval metaphysics.

⁴See for an extensive list of recent adherents to reductionist versions of the derivative view, see Inman, “Omnipresence.” Alexander Pruss defends a view similar to Hudson’s, in his “Omnipresence,” 63–67.

⁵The contrast terms for “derivative” and “reductionist” are “non-derivative” and “non-reductionist.” Suppose some divine attributes are basic divine attributes. Non-derivative views of divine omnipresence make omnipresence in principle a basic attribute. Non-reductionist views make omnipresence non-reducible to other divine attributes without necessarily requiring that omnipresence is a basic attribute.

⁶Hudson, “Omnipresence,” 205.

⁷See Inman, “Omnipresence,” section 3.

⁸See Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 337; Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 335.

I begin by showing how Scotus's views on the varieties of occupation relations relate to Hudson's. In §2 I show how Scotus applies these views to the relation between spiritual substances and the physical universe.⁹ I then show how Scotus responds to Aquinas's derivative view (§3). These two sections, cumulatively, show that Scotus accepts a non-derivative view of God's presence to the physical universe, and give his reasons for so doing. In §4 try to relate what Scotus says to the question of divine perfection. In my conclusion, I will consider what Scotus would say in reaction to Hudson's thesis that all entending objects are—in virtue of their entending—corporeal and material. On the way through, I draw from Scotus's discussion of angelic presence in order to cast light on what he says about divine presence.

1. Scotus on Place

In his physics, Scotus largely follows Aristotle, and thus he fundamentally thinks of the spatial location of extended objects, as Aristotle did, in terms of a relation between the object and the surface of its immediately surrounding environment:

Every body (other than the first body) is primarily in a place, that is, exactly in an immobile container: for this is what is understood by the definition of the Philosopher, *Physics* IV, "On place," namely, that "place is the first, immobile edge of a containing body."¹⁰

This view is often thought of as a two-dimensional view of location, as opposed to Hudson's three-dimensional view of space (or four-dimensional spacetime)—"two-dimensional" in the sense that a body's place is the inner surface of its surrounding container, contiguous with the body and spatially indivisible with respect to depth (as Scotus puts it, "the exact container of something is quantitatively indivisible").¹¹ So I shall talk about Scotus's view on the ways in which extended substances relate to space as one in which they strictly speaking occupy not *space* but *place*.

As Scotus understands his position on place-occupancy, it immediately entails that a place-occupier's surface is equal to the surface of its place: "on account of [their having] the same quantity, a body necessarily requires a body equal to it."¹² This claim embodies Hudson's insight that a substance's being entirely located requires there being no region of space-time disjoint from the place occupied by the substance, but translated into

⁹I talk of "spiritual" substances rather than (say) immaterial ones so as not to beg any questions, since Hudson, as we shall see, believes that extension entails materiality. Scotus would disagree; I return to the issue in my conclusion below.

¹⁰Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 219 (Vatican ed., 7:254), quoting Aristotle, *Physica* IV, c. 4 (212a20–21). For discussion of Scotus's views of place, see my *Physics of Duns Scotus*, 193–213. See too Lewis, "Space and Time," 70–78.

¹¹Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 220 (Vatican ed., 7:255). For the 'two-dimensional' terminology, see, e.g., Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion*, 187.

¹²Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 233 (Vatican ed., 7:160).

Scotus's two-dimensional account of the place of a body. But extended bodies have an internal ordering, such that no proper part exactly coincides with any other proper part: "It is not intelligible that there is some extended quantum if we cannot designate in the whole an order of this part to that, according to some intervening quantity."¹³ And, in line with this, Scotus's Aristotelian definition of quantity identifies extension as the ordering of part outside part: "Part outside part is required for the position which is a difference of quantity, as 'outside' relates *per se* to the parts of the body."¹⁴

We need to be careful with terminology, and I pause a moment to make these matters clearer. *Extension*, for Scotus, is exclusively an *intrinsic* property—the *internal* ordering of parts. Scotus would take atomless gunk—things that are parts all the way down—to be *ipso facto* extended. Scotus's *place* is a relation between an object and an extended region. Place is thus a relational property; to the extent that we think of extension as a relation between bodies and regions, we would make the extension of *extension*, so to speak, wider than Scotus would, including both Scotus's (monadic) extension and Scotus's (relative) place. As we shall see, what is at issue for Scotus, in his discussion of the relation between spiritual substances and place, is a case or set of cases in which these two properties—monadic extension and relational extension—fall apart: a case or set of cases in which something lacking monadic extension might nevertheless exist in a place, or have relational extension, so to speak. In what follows, I use (unmodified) "extension" in Scotus's monadic sense; if I want to talk about relational extension, I talk about the extension of the *region* or *place* which an object occupies.

On Scotus's understanding, then, extended bodies cannot entend:

For this reason [viz. that the body and the place have the same two-dimensional quantity], the body is commensuratively in a place, such that a part of the contained surface coincides with a part of the containing surface, and the whole to the whole.¹⁵

Here, an extended whole has proper parts that fail to be located where the whole is. Extended bodies, then, *pertend* (*mutatis mutandis*):

"*x* pertends" =_{df} *x* is an object that is entirely located at a non-point-sized region, *r*, and for each proper subregion of *r*, *r*^{*}, *x* has a proper part entirely located at *r*^{*}.

Having spelled out these various relations (*being in an actual place*, *being in an equal place*, and *being commensuratively in a place*) in the case of extended (i.e., *pertending*) substances, Scotus very helpfully goes on to consider angelic location (i.e., the location of an *entending* substance)

¹³Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 10, p. 1, q. 1, n. 61 (Vatican ed., 12:72).

¹⁴Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 10, p. 1, q. 1, n. 73 (Vatican ed., 12:76); see Aristotle's discussion of quantity at *Categoriae*, c. 6 (4b20–23, 5a15–24).

¹⁵Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 233 (Vatican ed., 7:260).

under the same headings.¹⁶ I discuss this in my next section, along with what Scotus has to say about divine location. For now, I want to pause to tighten up my assumption that Scotus's two-dimensionalist view of place can be readily translated into Hudson's three-dimensionalist view of space. It might be thought that I am not entitled to hold this: after all, while Hudson's three-dimensional pertension clearly entails Scotus's two-dimensional commensuration, the opposite entailment does not hold. So an unsympathetic critic might hesitate to follow me. I will therefore attempt to argue the case briefly here. (I need this only to the extent that Hudson's "entension" is spelled out in a three-dimensional way. It may be that what Scotus says on the question of spiritual substance entails for these purposes accepting some kind of three-dimensional space, *running through* spiritual substances, not just surrounding them; I am not sure. But I want to cover all the bases, so to speak.) So what I need is a way of showing that Scotus accepts in some sense that bodies occupy three-dimensional regions, not just the two-dimensional surfaces of regions.

On the negative side, Scotus follows Aristotle in sharply distinguishing place-occupancy from part-whole relations:

An extended body is actually in a place, because it is in something that actually exactly contains it: for it could not be in a place other than if it makes the edge (which is the immediate container) actual because it makes the sides of the containing body to be distant [from each other]. But it is different in the case of a part in a whole, which does not make a potentially containing surface actually a surface; and for this reason a part is not in a whole in the way that what is located is in a place (*Physics* IV).¹⁷

On one reading, this might seem to make it a matter of principle that it is not possible that those proper parts of bodies that do not include the surface of the body occupy places, and hence cannot occupy regions of space. (Scotus says "potentially containing" because anything that is a real internal part of a body would occupy a place, were all other parts of the body cut away. And he claims that contained bodies are causally responsible for making room for themselves, as it were—causing the containing body to wrap itself around the contained body, and thus making the "edge" of that body "actual"—think of air or water surrounding a solid body.)

But on the positive side, it seems to be a matter of metaphysical necessity that it is not possible that those proper parts of a body that do not include the surface of the body are themselves contiguous to any container, and thus not possible that they occupy places in Scotus's Aristotelian sense, other than to the extent that they are proper parts of a body

¹⁶Scotus adds "being determinately in this place, or in another" (Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 216 [Vatican, 7:253]), which, as it turns out, is intended simply to rule out being "everywhere" (see Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 246 [Vatican ed., 7:265]).

¹⁷Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 232 (Vatican ed., 7:260); see Aristotle, *Physica* IV, c. 5 (212b3–6).

that is so contiguous and thus occupies a place. So we should not put too much stress on this counter-evidence to the view that Scotist bodies occupy regions, not just places. Furthermore, we should take Scotus's view of place-occupancy to maintain (unsurprisingly) that a body standardly occupies a given volume without interpenetrating any other body. But Scotus holds that total bodily interpenetration is at least logically possible: God can bring it about that two extended bodies occupy the same place—there are obvious theological examples. And in that case, Scotus claims, the two bodies would coincide with each other part by part, *right the way through* (and not just at the surfaces). As Scotus puts it, the one body is “with another body,”¹⁸ and he contrasts this view of spatial coincidence with one according to which the one body is squeezed into the empty spaces in another body—a view I label “*Squeeze*”:

These [viz., theologians holding *Squeeze*], if they want to say that [a body] cannot be in the same place (*simul*) as another unless it should enter into the gaps (*subintrando poros*) [of the other body], should even more have to say in consequence that it could not be with another body other than because the other gives way to it, as air gives way to an arrow.¹⁹

The point of the passage is that theologians holding *Squeeze* would have to say as well that the only way in general for two bodies to be united is for them to be contiguous, such that one “gives way” to the other. Nothing much surprising about the conclusion, I suppose. But in any case, Scotus wants to reject *Squeeze*, and hold that two bodies can be in the same place by fully interpenetrating each other. We might think of space-occupancy in something like the same way: for a body to occupy a region of space is for that region of space to interpenetrate the body.²⁰ The formal features (not the physical ones) of both sorts of interpenetration are the same, coinciding part by part right the way through—contrast *Squeeze*, which clearly, and by design, does not satisfy this requirement. In short, if Scotus's theory can accommodate the structural features of bodily interpenetration, it should be able to accommodate the structural features of region-occupancy. And that is all I need.

2. Scotus on the Place of Spiritual Substances

God

The key later medieval text on divine presence—used by both Aquinas and Scotus—can be found in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*:

It should be kept in mind that God, who exists immutably in himself, is in every nature or essence by presence, by power, and by essence, without his

¹⁸Scotus, *Reportatio* IV, d. 49, q. 15 (printed as *Ordinatio* IV, d. 49, q. 16, n. 4 [Wadding ed., 10:612]).

¹⁹Scotus, *Reportatio* IV, d. 49, q. 15 (printed as *Ordinatio* IV, d. 49, q. 16, n. 4 [Wadding ed., 10:612]).

²⁰For this way of talking, see Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion*, 77.

being limited (*sine sui definitione*), and in every place without circumscription, and in every time without mutability. And furthermore he is in holy spirits and souls in a more excellent way, namely, indwelling by grace. And he is in the man Christ in the most excellent way, "in whom the fullness of divinity dwelled in a bodily way" (as the Apostle says [Colossians 2.9]). For in him God dwelled not by the grace of adoption, but by the grace of union.²¹

This gives us three modes of general divine presence: by presence, power, and essence. There was not a great deal of controversy about the first two of these. As Scotus understands it, for God to be in all things "by presence" is for all things to be "open and transparent to his knowledge"; and for God to be in things by power is for God to be the "efficient and conserving" cause of them.²² The third case is more complex. Scotus claims that God is present "by essence" by *interpenetrating* everything:

If [God] is considered under the notion of his infinity and limitlessness, as he intimately interpenetrates (*intime illabatur*) each thing, in this way he is in all things through essence.²³

What weight should we give to this kind of language? Does it specifically signal entension, as opposed to (e.g.) causal presence? On the one hand, talk of interpenetration (*illapsus*) is commonplace, certainly occurring in Aquinas's discussion of God's indwelling in the human mind.²⁴ But, on the other, Aquinas does not employ it in his general account of divine or angelic presence: it is restricted to God's causal influence simply on cognitive agents. Scotus uses it in strongly spatial ways, without this restriction. For example, when discussing the circumincession or mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity, he notes that this indwelling is rather like the *non-causal* component of God's *illapsus* in creatures: the result, as Scotus notes, of his immensity.²⁵ It is "even more perfectly like" the interpenetration of two bodies—suggesting again a rather spatial account of divine presence (even of God's presence to himself).²⁶

Scotus's treatment of some of the formal properties of divine location make it clear that he has something very similar to Hudson's proposal in mind. In particular, he argues that non-extended substances are such that they are wholly located at any subregion of the region occupied by the substance. Scotus makes the point in response to an objection: "A whole is something outside of which there is nothing. . . . But God is whole in some place; therefore he is not outside that place."²⁷ The idea in the objection is that if God entirely occupies a region of space, God cannot occupy

²¹Lombard, *Sententiae* I, d. 37, c. 1, n. 2 (1:263–264).

²²Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 35 (2:445).

²³Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 35 (2:446–447).

²⁴Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* II, c. 98, n. 18.

²⁵Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 19, q. 2, n. 64 (Vatican ed., 5:297).

²⁶Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 19, q. 2, n. 65 (Vatican ed., 5:297).

²⁷Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 3 (2:438).

any further region of which that region is a subregion. Scotus's reply in effect claims that an entending substance can be wholly located at a place without that entailing that the place is not itself a subregion of a larger place that the substance entirely occupies. Scotus makes his point by examining just what it might be that "outside" is supposed to be excluding, in ways that mirror very closely Hudson's definitions of being "entirely located" and being "wholly located":

When it is said that a whole is something outside of which there is nothing, I say that if "outside" is referred to the whole, then the proposition is true, under this sense: "A whole is that outside of which there is nothing of the whole." But if "outside" is referred to some place in which the whole exists, then the proposition is false, under this sense: "A whole is somewhere in some place outside of which place there is nothing," because the whole itself [viz. God] is outside of this place essentially and really. In the same way, it could be said of [my] soul which is a whole in my finger. For none of it in the finger is outside of itself; but the whole is certainly outside the finger, such that "outside" can here be related to the whole or to the finger. And in the first way it is true, and in the second way false.²⁸

The reply is that the objection's central claim ("a whole is something outside of which there is nothing") is true, in the case of God's place-occupancy, if it is understood to mean that nothing of the whole is outside the whole (compare "there is no region of spacetime disjoint from r at which x is located," to quote Hudson's definition of " x is entirely located at r "). But it is false if understood to mean that there could be nothing of a whole outside some place that the whole occupies (compare "for each proper subregion of r , r^* , x is wholly located at r^* ," to quote from Hudson's definition of " x entends"). A being such as God is fully in any given place without that entailing that he is not fully in some other place too. Scotus's example is a created spiritual substance, a soul, which, as the form of an animate body, is fully in each of the body's limbs. But it is also outside each limb, and yet not outside itself.²⁹ The aim is to show that God's entending a region, r , does not involve God's entirely occupying any subregion, r^* , of r ; and that God's wholly occupying r^* is compatible in principle with God's wholly and entirely occupying r .

Angels

Parallel to his treatment of the divine case, Scotus's discussion of the ways in which angels can entirely occupy particular non-point-sized regions suggests that they too entend the regions they occupy.³⁰ We can see this if we consider the three relations that characterize the location of physical bodies and their application (or not) to the angelic case. An angel cannot be in an actual place in Scotus's Aristotelian sense, since "it does not make

²⁸Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 31 (2:445).

²⁹Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 31 (2:445).

³⁰For Scotus on angelic presence, see Suarez-Nani, "Angels, Space and Place," 99–111.

the sides of the container distant [from each other]."³¹ Neither can it be commensuratively in a place, "since it does not have parts corresponding to the parts of a place."³² An angel thus has no proper parts that fail to be located exactly where the whole angel is located. But an angel is "equal" to its place, in the sense that it is entirely located at a particular region.³³

Scotus devotes considerable space to discussing what kinds of constraints there might be on the sizes of place that an angel can occupy. His basic idea is that since an angel, as a non-extended substance, has no internal spatial structure—no extension in Scotus's sense—it can occupy a place of any shape:

Whatever can be in one equal place, can also be in another, if there is no configuration, by which one is distinguished from another, repugnant to it. But in an angel there is no configuration of a place, in which it exists, repugnant to it. Therefore, if it can be in one equal place, it can be in another. Consequently, if it can be in a small rectangle, and [if] no rectangle, howsoever narrow, is repugnant to it (which we have to say, given that it is not repugnant to it to be in any shape of place), it seems that it is not repugnant to it to be in any place howsoever long, because that rectangle is equal to the small rectangle in which [the angel] can exist.³⁴

There is "no configuration" of place incompatible with the existence of an angel at that place. So there are no restrictions on the kinds of shape that an angel can occupy. The examples are (I think) differently shaped hexahedra: provided that the overall volume remains the same, the angel is indifferent to occupying this or that hexahedral structure.³⁵

Scotus believes too that angels can occupy places of different volumes, within certain finite limits. The assumption is that there is a natural size for the region an angel occupies, and that increasing or decreasing the volume of this region both require power. An angel's expanding itself into an infinite region would require infinite power—the more an angel stretches itself out, so to speak, the more power it expends. So an angel, with merely finite power, could never occupy the whole of an infinitely extended universe (God, as we shall see, is a contrasting case here). Scotus reasons too that an angel's making itself indefinitely smaller, so to speak, would also require infinite power. So there is a limit beyond which an angel cannot expand or contract, and the limit is determined by the extent of the angel's power over itself.³⁶

³¹Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 237 (Vatican ed., 7:261).

³²Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 245 (Vatican ed., 7:265).

³³See Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 238 (Vatican ed., 7:261–262).

³⁴Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 239 (Vatican ed., 7:262).

³⁵Despite talking about rectangles in the passage, Scotus's official line is that an angel could not in fact occupy a two-dimensional place, since (as Scotus believes) such a place would have to be infinite in at least one dimension: see Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, nn. 239–240 (Vatican ed., 7:262–263).

³⁶Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 241 (Vatican ed., 7:263). I do not know what Scotus would or should say about the "extension" of angels in the case that there is no phys-

Note that the entire discussion is wholly geometrical and physical, involving no reference to any other angelic attribute. Augustine and John of Damascus are relevant authorities; but so too are Aristotle and Euclid.³⁷

This leaves as an open question whether or not an angel could occupy a point (since beginning to occupy a point—a zero-extension position—is hardly a case of *contraction*, and thus does not fall prey to the finite-power argument); and Scotus is agnostic.³⁸ He summarizes:

It seems that it should be conceded that [an angel] has a determined place, but indeterminately. In this way there is both some place than which it cannot have a larger, and some than which it cannot have a smaller (speaking of a place that is a continuum), though it can perhaps be in a point.³⁹

“It can perhaps be in a point”: what more does Scotus say about this most scholastic of questions? What is notable about the Scotist positions I have examined thus far is that they fundamentally deal with angelic location as a matter of geometry, to be decided along geometrical lines. When discussing the possibility that an angel might occupy a point, the only objection that Scotus considers at any length has to do with a geometrical question that arises from Aristotle’s *Physics*: could a point, a zero-extension space-occupier, *move* (supposing, as Scotus and his opponent did, all angelic motion to be possibly continuous)? The negative claim was made by William of Ware, an Oxford Franciscan of the 1290s, and supposedly Scotus’s teacher in the Franciscan convent there:

An angel . . . [cannot be] in an indivisible place, because then it could not move itself, since it would mark out infinitely many points in the space across which it moved itself.⁴⁰

Aristotle himself rejected the possibility of the motion of an indivisible on the grounds that anything that moves must first traverse an extension equal to or less than itself before traversing an extension greater than itself.⁴¹ Scotus offers an entirely physical response to Aristotle, and uses this response to defend the possibility of the motion of an angel occupying a non-extended region: Aristotle’s claim, Scotus avers, is true only in the case of the motion of an extended body; it is simply false, and question-

ical universe. He sometimes speaks about “privative” dimension: the extension that a body would occupy were the body to have a place (see my discussion in *Physics of Duns Scotus*, 207–208). So perhaps he could give a counterfactual account: an angel occupies a (privative) extension equivalent in dimension to the actual dimension of the place that an angel would occupy were there a real place for the angel to occupy.

³⁷At *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 238 (Vatican ed., 7:262) Scotus appeals to Euclid, *Elementa* I, prop. 35 (1:85).

³⁸Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, nn. 242–243 (Vatican ed., 7:264).

³⁹Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 243 (Vatican, 7:264); the whole discussion is nn. 243–244 (Vatican ed., 7:264–265).

⁴⁰William of Ware, *In sententias* II, d. 2, p. 2, q. 1 (quoted in Apparatus F in the edition of Scotus, *Lectura* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2 [Vatican ed., 18:167]).

⁴¹Aristotle, *Physica* VI, c. 10 (241a6–14), discussed by Scotus at *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, q. 5, n. 303 (Vatican ed., 7:285–286).

begging, in the case of the motion of a non-extended one. So an angel occupying a point could still move.⁴²

In sum, then, both angels and God *de facto* occupy finite regions co-extensive with physical bodies: in God's case, the entire finite physical universe (on which, see the next section).⁴³ Presumably, Scotus would hold that, in Scotus's spherical geocentric universe, God occupies every place in that spherical region—rather as Scotus's angels generally seem to occupy hexahedral regions, albeit (as it seems) rather smaller in volume than God. Were the universe infinite in extent, of course, God would wholly occupy every region in a shapeless infinite volume. And an angel could not do this, since (unlike God) it does not have the infinite power required to stretch itself out indefinitely—as we have seen.

3. Scotus's Criticism of Aquinas's Position

This leaves it an open question whether or not spiritual substances occupy places *derivatively* (i.e., in virtue of some other property) or *fundamentally* (i.e., non-derivatively). Scotus, as I shall show in this section, maintains that they occupy places fundamentally. He defends this view in the context of a rejection of Aquinas's derivative account. But, as Scotus notices, Aquinas, while consistent in claiming that spiritual substances occupy places derivatively, can be read as offering different accounts of this derivative place-occupation in the case of God, on the one hand, and created spiritual substances, on the other. In brief, Aquinas appears to maintain that, in the divine case, place-occupancy is not reducible to any other property, albeit that it is grounded on some other property. But in other cases, Aquinas seems to adopt a straightforwardly reductionist account. In either case, the relevant non-derivative property is *activity*—activity at a place. In what follows, I do not attempt a systematic account of Aquinas's views, but lay them out only in sufficient detail, and in such a way, as to allow us to make sense of Scotus's response to them.⁴⁴

Aquinas on God's Presence

Just like Scotus, Aquinas makes Peter Lombard's analysis of the modes of divine presence the focal point of his discussion.⁴⁵ But in the clearest

⁴²Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, q. 5, nn. 424–425 (Vatican ed., 7:342–344).

⁴³Note a curious though correct consequence of Scotus's Aristotelian notion of place: since the universe lacks a container it is not in a place in Scotus's sense. On the lack of a place for the universe, see my *Physics of Duns Scotus*, 205. God, of course, as a ubiquitous entending substance, is wholly located at every place in the universe.

⁴⁴For a complete account of Aquinas's views, including careful analysis of the differences between the various accounts Aquinas offers, see Fuerst, *Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Omnipresence of God*, 169–200. See also Goris, "Divine Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 37–58. I find myself in substantial agreement with the thrust of both of these accounts, though neither appeals to what seems to me to be the crucial passage in favor of Aquinas's anti-reductionism, quoted at n. 47 below.

⁴⁵See Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* I, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2 c; *Summa theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 3 c.

account of God's presence, found in the early *Sentence* commentary, Lombard's analysis does no substantive work. Aquinas argues here that the three modes of divine presence highlighted by Peter Lombard amount to the same thing. To be in things by *presence* is for the divine essence to be "applied" to a thing by operation; the divine essence is in things by *power* because operation and power are not distinct; and because power and essence are identical, if God is in things by power he is in things by essence.⁴⁶ But in this early work, Aquinas maintains that God's presence is *grounded* on operation, but that this presence is a relation that is in some sense distinct from the operation:

When it is said that God is everywhere, what is implied is a certain relation of God to a creature, through which God is said to be in things, based (*fundata*) on operation (*operationem*).⁴⁷

The idea, roughly, is that operation and relation represent distinct Aristotelian categories, and thus the one—the relation—cannot be reduced to the other—the activity. And the relation between them is asymmetric: presence is based or grounded on activity. So on Aquinas's view, presence is derivative on activity, but not reducible to it: presence non-reductively supervenes on activity. Given divine simplicity, I suppose we should say that the categories are distinct here in the sense that the relations in the creatures are distinct: *being caused* and *being in the presence of* are distinct relations.

Why suppose that operation or activity requires presence? Aquinas persistently accepts an Aristotelian principle about the impossibility of action at a distance: "It is necessary for every agent to be conjoined to that on which it immediately acts."⁴⁸ It is in this sense that he later (in the *Summa theologiae*) comes to understand presence by essence: unlike presence by power—which can be exhibited by causes that act merely through secondary or instrumental causes—presence by essence requires the *immediate* presence of cause to effect.⁴⁹

We might wonder how this Aristotelian contact condition might be characterized in the case of a spiritual substance. The condition is, after all, supposed to explain how causal interactions between the spiritual and the material are possible. Aquinas does not have much to say. At one point, he claims that the relevant kind of contact is "metaphorical contact," which he simply describes as contact "through action."⁵⁰ And elsewhere he explains the relevant kind of contact as amounting to a substance's "virtually

⁴⁶Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* I, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2 c.

⁴⁷Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* I, d. 37, q. 2, a. 3 c.

⁴⁸Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1 c, referring to Aristotle, *Physica* VII, c. 2 (243a3–6). For a discussion of Aquinas's rejection of the possibility of action at a distance, see Decaen, "The Impossibility of Action at a Distance."

⁴⁹See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 3 c.

⁵⁰Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* I, d. 37, q. 3, a. 1 c.

contain[ing] the thing with which it comes into contact."⁵¹ But "virtually containing" something is here most likely to mean having that thing as the object of a power (*virtus*). In short, virtual contact is contact by action or activity. But be this as it may, the significant claim is that whether or not the contact condition turns out to be vacuous, Aquinas persistently infers presence from activity on the grounds that action at a distance is impossible.

Aquinas on Angelic Presence

Aquinas's view on the nature of angelic presence is (as far as I can make out) somewhat different from this. Angelic presence is derivative on angelic activity, but not distinct from it:

An angel cannot be definitively located or determined to some place other than by its action and operation—and this is the third opinion, which posits that an angel is in a place in so far as its operation is applied to some place. . . . And for this reason, following this opinion (which seems more reasonable), I say that an angel, and any incorporeal substance, is in a body or a place only through an operation that causes some effect in it [viz. the body or place].⁵²

What makes it true that the angel is at a place is simply its operation at that place, "through" which (viz. the operation) it is "in . . . a place." Contrast the divine case: in this latter case, what makes it true that God is at a place is something additional—the *relation* between God and the place, "through which [viz. the relation] God is said to be in" a place. The truth-makers of the relevant location-locutions consist, respectively, in the angel + the operation, and God + the place-relation.

I would not, incidentally, go to the stake for this interpretation. It is quite possible to read Aquinas as trying to claim that angels have the relation *being in a place* in virtue of their operation at that place, and thus that his account of angelic presence is aligned with his account of divine presence. It is hard to tell from the few rather scattered remarks that he makes. Scotus, as we shall see, is quick to spot the ambiguity and to attempt to capitalize on it.

So on my preferred reading of Aquinas's view, an angel's presence at a place is reduced to its immediate activity at that place. Likewise, the question about the shape and size of angels is reduced to one about the shape and size of the physical bodies over which they can exercise causal power:

It is not necessary that there is determined to [an angel] a place that is indivisible in layout (*secundum situm*); but rather divisible or indivisible, or larger or smaller, to the extent that he voluntarily applies his power to a larger or smaller body.⁵³

⁵¹Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 52, a. 1 c.

⁵²Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* I, d. 37, q. 3, a. 1 c; see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 52, a. 1 c.

⁵³Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 52, a. 2 c. I say "he" to capture no more than the thought that angelic agency is in a crucial sense personal.

Restrictions on an angel's external power (over material objects), not on its internal power (to fit itself into differently-sized regions), determine the shape and size of the place that it occupies. Aquinas deals similarly with another question, that of the simultaneous existence of more than one angel in one place. For Aquinas, this would require more than one angel simultaneously counting as the total secondary cause of just one effect—a possibility that is ruled out on the grounds of causal overdetermination: "it is impossible that there are two complete causes immediately of the same thing."⁵⁴ (Aquinas here assumes that angelic presence requires being the total cause of some material effect. I am not sure why.)

Scotus against Aquinas

Scotus rejects all of these claims. Against Aquinas's view of divine presence, Scotus argues that divine presence cannot be derivative on causal presence. Scotus delights in detecting systematic inconsistencies in the views of his opponents, and his basic strategy here is to criticize the lack of theoretical generality in Aquinas's account of divine and angelic presence:

In the question "Whether God is everywhere" he [viz. Aquinas] proves the positive in this way, that according to Aristotle in *Physics* VII "the mover is contiguous with the moved," and God is the first efficient cause and for this reason able to move every movable object, and from this concludes that God is in all and present to all. I ask what he intends to prove from this. Either [he intends to prove] that God is present, that is, moving [things], and then the question is begged (*est petitio principii*), because the premise is the same as the conclusion, and the answer is irrelevant to the question, because there he aims to conclude the immensity of God as God is present to everything. Or he intends to prove that presence which pertains to God in so far as he is immense, and then, according to him [viz. Aquinas], that presence which pertains to divine immensity (which belongs to God as God) is inferred (*sequitur*) from his operation somewhere, such that God will be present as immense earlier (by nature) than [he is present] as operating. And this is concluded from the fact that he is present through operation, just as the prior is proved from the posterior. Therefore, likewise in the case at hand, the angel will be present to some place through [its] essence naturally prior (by nature) to its being present to it through its operation.⁵⁵

The context here is a discussion of angelic presence, and Scotus assumes that Aquinas accepts a reductionist account of such presence. The passage then tries two strategies to reject such an account. Both take it that Aquinas's account of the presence of spiritual substances should have some kind of theoretical unity. The first grants that Aquinas accepts a reductionist account not only of angelic presence but also of divine presence. Scotus then reports an argument from Aquinas that goes something like this: God is the

⁵⁴Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 52, a. 3 c.

⁵⁵Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 204 (Vatican ed., 7:246–248). Scotus here refers to Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, c. 68, n. 2. The argument here is about motion (*changing things*); but the overall discussion is about causal relations more generally.

cause of everything; any cause is essentially present to (is in contact with) its effects; so God is essentially present to everything. The worry is this: what does “being essentially present to a thing” mean? If it means *being the immediate cause of that thing*, then the argument begs the question; and, likewise, the conclusion is not the one that Aquinas seems to be aiming for, because it seems that he wants to show something more than this causal presence (“the answer is irrelevant to the question”).

This strategy is probably not successful against every reductionist account of divine presence. It would be possible to suppose, for example, that *being essentially present to a thing* and *being the immediate cause of that thing* are coextensive without its being the case that “being essentially present to a thing” and “being the immediate cause of that thing” mean the same thing. And in this case, we might think, the rejected inference would go through, *pace* Scotus’s objection. In modern terms, Scotus mistakenly identifies reductionist and eliminativist accounts of divine presence. On his reading of reductionist accounts of divine presence, they entail eliminating the relevant category from ontology. But that is not right: indeed, the point of reductionist accounts is in some sense to preserve the relevant category. So the confusion of reductionist accounts and eliminativist accounts means that the argument does not count against modern reductionist accounts of divine presence.

I do not think that this matters much as a criticism of Aquinas since (as Scotus at least suspects) the reductionist account of divine presence is not one that Aquinas accepts in any case. So the second strategy assumes that Aquinas accepts a non-reductionist account of divine presence. Aquinas’s reasoning, as presented by Scotus, is that activity requires essential presence and contact. This is a general claim that Aquinas uses to support the view that God is essentially present to the universe. But if the claim is general, then it should apply in the angelic case too. If activity requires essential presence and contact, then angelic activity requires essential presence and contact too, against Aquinas’s claim that angelic presence reduces to angelic activity. Scotus in this passage talks about essential presence being “naturally prior” to causal presence, which is technical Scotus-speak for asserting that essential presence is necessary for causal presence.

This, of course, is all *ad hominem*. Scotus’s substantive criticism of the derivative account challenges not only modern reductionist accounts but also the motivation for Hudson’s non-derivative account, and it seems to me is worthy of careful consideration independent of its historical context. Scotus argues from a case in which—it seems—the contact condition is not only inapplicable but incompatible with a bit of Christian doctrine. Scotus considers the case of creation *ex nihilo*. God’s creating a place must be causally and ontologically *antecedent* to his occupying that place. So essential presence must depend on causal presence, not vice versa:

God, when he creates something *de novo*, is made to be present to that thing through essence, having been non-present to that thing through essence. And this is done not by any change in God; so [it is done] therefore through

a change on the part of the creature. Therefore it is necessary to presuppose the change of the creature from non-existence to existence, through divine activity, logically prior to God's being present to it through essence. So God produces something through his power prior to being present to it through essence.⁵⁶

The idea is that God is changeless, and thus any relations between God and creatures are real merely in the creature—they are in effect just extrinsic denominations of God.⁵⁷ And they must be *consequent* on the existence of the creatures, and thus consequent on the divine activity that brings such creatures about. And essential presence is one such relation. So *creation* cannot require the contact condition—indeed, it seems to be incompatible with it, to the extent that the contact condition makes causal presence depend on essential presence. Scotus uses this kind of consideration against the applicability, in this context, of Aristotle's contact principle *tout court*. The priority of causal presence in one case of divine action shows that contact—essential presence—is not presupposed to divine action.⁵⁸ So this argument puts pressure on Hudson's view, at least to the extent that this view attempts to demystify causal relations between God and creatures. But it undermines Aquinas's view: if activity cannot guarantee presence by essence, it cannot constitute an analysis of the necessary supervenience base for presence.

Scotus's remaining arguments also attempt to find ways of rejecting the Aristotelian contact condition. In sharp contrast to Hudson, who thinks that ubiquitous extension might provide a way of demystifying questions about God's causal interaction with the material world (and who would thus doubtless be sympathetic to Aristotle's contact condition), Scotus holds that the contact requirement holds only for interactions between natural objects, and thus that it is irrelevant to the question of divine activity:

When it is said that it is necessary for an agent to be joined to its effect on the grounds that mover and moved must be together (*simul*), this is irrelevant to what is proposed by the person holding this view [viz. that we can infer omnipresence from omnipotence], because the Philosopher speaks of a natural agent and a natural patient.⁵⁹

The Philosopher, of course, is Aristotle. According to Scotus, the contact argument is relevant (if at all) only in the case of agents that cause in virtue of their "active qualities," which have to *do* something, at a place, in order to bring about an effect. God is not like this.⁶⁰ Indeed, for a disembodied

⁵⁶Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 21 (1:443).

⁵⁷On this, see Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 30, qq. 1–2, nn. 49–51 (Vatican ed., 6:192). Scotus does not mean that there are no true relational predications of God; merely that what makes these predications true are the non-relational substances and/or accidents along with the relational accidents that are, and are in, creatures.

⁵⁸See Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 20 (2:442–443).

⁵⁹Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 16 (1:440).

⁶⁰Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 16 (2:440–441).

agent such as God to cause something is simply for him to will it; and nothing about willing an effect entails existing where the effect does.⁶¹

In effect, Scotus argues that action at a distance is possible, and on the basis of this that ubiquity with respect to essence is conceivably a *contingent* feature of God's, even given the existence of space. Scotus discusses the rejection of the contact condition in two different contexts, angelic and divine. He argues that angels do not have to be present where they act. They can communicate with each other over a distance, for example, without causing anything in the medium between them.⁶² Given that more powerful agents can act over a greater distance than less powerful ones, maximal power might lead one to conclude not that the contact criterion is applicable, but to the contrary—that greater distance from an effect is possible in the case of a maximally powerful agent.⁶³ The difference between the angelic and divine cases is simply that the finite power of angels restricts the distance over which they can act.⁶⁴

Likewise, Scotus imagines a scenario in which God acts at a distance in his causal activity:

Supposing that God were not present to an effect through his essence, but that he was in one determined place—for example, in heaven, sitting on a throne, as old women imagine—he could through his will still cause the effect that he now causes, without further presence.⁶⁵

Here causal presence is strongly contrasted with essential presence: God can occupy some of the space in which he is causally present without occupying all of it. Admittedly, as Scotus makes clear in a parallel discussion, this argument is understood by him to have an impossible antecedent.⁶⁶ But he does not believe that the impossibility is the result of any evident contradiction. (It is the result of a contradiction, in fact, but not one that is evident to unaided human reason: I return to this in the next section.) Here, causal presence is prior to, and a necessary condition for, essential presence. But it is not a sufficient condition, and essential presence turns out to be independent of causal presence.⁶⁷

This might seem rather implausible, but Scotus attempts to motivate it by isolating counterinstances to the contact principle even in the physical

⁶¹Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 19 (2:442).

⁶²Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 9, qq. 1–2, n. 56 (Vatican ed., 7:160).

⁶³Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 17 (2:441).

⁶⁴Scotus, *Lectura* II, d. 9, qq. 1–2, n. 62 (Vatican ed., 19:34–35).

⁶⁵Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 19 (1:442).

⁶⁶Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 37, q. un., n. 7 (Vatican ed., 6:301).

⁶⁷At one point Scotus seems to say something conflicting: “For God, being in a creature and conserving that creature in being are the same”: Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 33 (2:446). I take it that all that Scotus means to highlight is the fact that neither of these are real relations in God, since no relations to creatures inhere in the divine essence (on this, see n. 57 above). Of course, the grounds for the two relational predications (“God is in a creature”; “God conserves a creature”) are different, since one is causal, and the other not.

world: the action of the sun in generation, for example;⁶⁸ or the problem of how causal activity in generation can extend beneath the surfaces that are in contact.⁶⁹ Clearly, here, Scotus's antiquated physics has misled him. But he, of course, was not to know that.

I suppose that Aristotle's contact criterion is what any reductionist about omnipresence—anyone who believes that it is reducible to omnipotence—needs to abandon. So reductionists should not be troubled by the thought of action at a distance: after all, they accept action from *nowhere*. And it is possible to feel some sympathy for Scotus's overall worry about contact in this dialectical context. If the notion of causal interaction between spiritual and material substances is mysterious, this mystery does not seem much mitigated by positing *virtual contact*, which seems as obscure as the notion that it is invoked to explain. To preserve Aristotle's authority, Scotus glosses the contact requirement counterfactually: a distant agent is present "as if it were present through its essence"; it is "not that its power is present, but that it can cause an effect by its power just as if it were there, even though neither it nor its power is there."⁷⁰ This is, of course, mysterious; but no more so than Aquinas's virtual contact.

What Scotus says about divine presence is theoretically consistent with what he says about angelic presence. And he believes himself to have a very good authoritative reason to suppose that non-causal presence, in the angelic case, cannot be reduced to causal presence. Among the propositions condemned in 1277 by Stephen Tempier, the Bishop of Paris, is this:

That separated substances are somewhere by operation, and that they cannot move from one extreme to another, or into the medium, other than because they can will to operate either in the extreme or in the medium—this is an error, if it be understood that a substance is not in a place, or moves from place to place, without operation.⁷¹

Key here is the rejection of the view that a causally inactive angel would be nowhere: a position that Scotus takes Aquinas's reductionist position to entail: "it would follow [on Aquinas's view] that an angel is sometimes (indeed, frequently), nowhere"—namely, when the angel has no causal effect in the material world.⁷² And, as Scotus notes, "Against this [viz. the opinion of Aquinas] is that it was condemned as one of the articles condemned and excommunicated by the Bishop of Paris."⁷³

Scotus likewise rejects Aquinas's views on the impossibility of more than one angel in a place. He is agnostic on the substantive question, but rejects

⁶⁸Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 9, qq. 1–2, n. 58 (Vatican ed., 7:161).

⁶⁹Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 9, qq. 1–2, n. 59 (Vatican, 7 ed., 161–162). For these cases, see the discussion in Kovach, "Action at a Distance."

⁷⁰Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 9, qq. 1–2, n. 62 (Vatican ed., 7:163).

⁷¹Article 204 (in *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, 1:554). On this, see my "The Condemnations of 1277."

⁷²Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 207 (Vatican ed., 7:249).

⁷³Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 200 (Vatican ed., 7:244).

Aquinas's argument, as we might expect, on the grounds that "it presupposes something false, namely that an angel is in a place only by operation."⁷⁴

4. Omnipresence, Divine Perfection, and Human Reason

As I have just suggested, Scotus holds that it is in fact a necessary truth that God's presence to the universe consist in (in effect) ubiquitous extension. But as we have seen, Scotus believes that there is no implication accessible to natural reason between perfection and essential omnipresence. Essential omnipresence is a perfection, but why it is so remains mysterious. To see this, consider the thought that power to act at a distance would be an opposing and incompatible perfection: there is, according to Scotus, no way to choose between them as great-making properties independent of revelation. Oddly enough, Scotus believes that omnipotence is similarly a perfection, but that it too cannot be shown to be such by natural reason. He believes that God can be shown to be the universal cause. But he believes that omnipotence requires more than this: it requires being able to cause everything *directly*. And Scotus is not sure that direct causation is not an imperfection, involving God more, rather than less, in the physical universe.⁷⁵ (Recall Aristotle's thought that the first mover would be demeaned were it to have any cognitive or causal connection with the cosmos.) So omnipresence is doubly inaccessible to natural reason.

So why does Scotus accept God's essential omnipresence? Principally, it seems, on the basis of Patristic authority.⁷⁶ That said, at one point he offers what he calls a "persuasive" argument in favor of his view, an argument that he formulates on the basis of some hints in Peter Lombard:

God is either everywhere, nowhere, or somewhere but not elsewhere. Not in the third way, because then he would be limited like other things that are determined, circumscriptively or definitively to a certain given place. Neither can it be said that he is nowhere, because this seems to be proper to what is nothing (*proprium nihilo*). . . . Therefore it is necessary to say that God is everywhere through his essence.⁷⁷

"Persuasive" arguments are, very roughly, those that appeal to plausible intuitions rather than to necessary *a priori* truths. Scotus borrows the three options (everywhere, nowhere, somewhere but not everywhere) from Lombard. But Lombard does not spell out the conclusion that Scotus later draws, simply noting that (as he thinks) no one would "dare to say" that God was nowhere, or somewhere but not everywhere.⁷⁸ The danger of Scotus's argument here is that it could prove too much—God has to be somewhere, and for God to be somewhere he has to create a physical

⁷⁴Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 2, p. 2, qq. 1–2, n. 280 (Vatican ed., 7:276–277).

⁷⁵On this, see my *Duns Scotus on God*, 94–96.

⁷⁶See Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 28 (2:444).

⁷⁷Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, nn. 25–27 (2:444).

⁷⁸Lombard, *Sententiae* I, d. 37, c. 4, n. 3 (1:269).

universe. Presumably the property of being nowhere is a property of everything real in the case that there is no physical universe. Being nowhere is the mark of *nothing* (so to speak) only in the case that there is a physical universe. (This too seems a bit too strong; we might think that both God and angels could be nowhere in the sense of not occupying any physical place, even given that there are physical places that they could in principle occupy. But this, of course, requires accepting that divine presence could be not merely non-derivative but also contingent—something that Scotus does not countenance other than for the sake of a thought experiment.)

Setting this Scotist conclusion aside, it seems to me that there may be a very significant theoretical advantage to accepting an account of God's presence by essence that is both non-derivative and makes it a contingent divine property. In the context of a discussion of Hudson's view, James Gordon has recently argued that entension allows for a robustly realist account of divine *absence*—think for example of the very vivid account of God's departure from the Temple recounted in Ezekiel 10.⁷⁹ Since part of Hudson's express aim is to allow for an account presence that demystifies the notion of God's causal interactions with a physical universe, I am not sure how welcome he would find Gordon's view. But it seems to fit rather neatly with what Scotus has to say. (Of course, Scotus supposes such absence scenarios to be counterpossible. But we need not.) I assume that, on a view such as this, God's infinite power means that he could occupy as small a place as he wished, and—like an angel—could occupy a point, or even exist in no place at all. Again, I do not think natural reason would enable us to adjudicate as to the status of (possible) spatial absence as a great-making property.

The question of the accessibility to natural reason of God's ubiquitous presence by power is rather more complex. If we understand "presence by power" to signify simply God's being the creator and conserver of the actual universe, then the presence by power is accessible to natural reason (according to Scotus), since God's being the creator and conserver of the universe is so accessible.⁸⁰ And this is Scotus's official account of presence by power, as we saw at the beginning of section 2 above. But if we were to understand "presence by power" in the way that the later Aquinas does—i.e., as *immediate* causal presence—we would have to say that this cannot be shown by natural reason, just as omnipotence cannot be. Scotus does not consider this interpretation of "presence by power." But he does consider a third one. We could understand the notion *modally*, such that God is present by power to the whole set of objects that are *or can be* the end term of his power. And in this sense, we can know by natural reason that God is omnipresent in this way: "If God is considered according to the notion of an efficient or conserving cause, he is said to be in things by power,

⁷⁹See Gordon, "Rethinking Divine Spatiality." I am grateful to Prof. Gordon for sharing his work with me.

⁸⁰See my *Duns Scotus on God*, 29–39.

because possible beings are the end term of his power."⁸¹ Scotus goes on to argue that presence "by power" in this sense must be distinct from presence "by essence." After all, God can be present by essence only to things that actually exist. But God is present by power in this modal sense throughout the infinity of non-existent space, and if we did not distinguish this kind of presence from essential presence, we would have to hold that God is essentially present throughout the infinity of non-existent space:

Before the creation of the universe, it was no more the case that God was here, where the universe now is, than it is that he is outside the imagined universe, where nothing is. Therefore it was not the case that he, existing there and present through his essence, created the universe. But given that he was not present anywhere through his essence, he could act there, and be present through his power. And in this way he can even now, through his power, create an angel outside the imagined universe, where there is nothing, and where he is not present through his essence. Therefore he is present through power and operation prior to presence through essence.⁸²

Here again Scotus attempts to show that the priority of causal presence over essential presence is required by the doctrine of creation: in this case, the doctrine requires the priority of modal presence by power over presence by essence.

Talk of God's being "outside of the imagined universe, where there is nothing" seems at first glance odd: we might reasonably think of the "imagined universe" as nothing, contrasting with the real universe, and Scotus himself sometimes talks of imaginary space in this way.⁸³ Edward Grant has highlighted a passage from a slightly earlier thinker, Pseudo-Siger of Brabant, that perhaps casts some light on this:

To Pseudo-Siger of Brabant, the term "beyond" (*extra*) could signify either a true place or one that is imaginary (*secundum imaginationem*). For we can perceive something by our imagination only if it is in a place. Presumably, then, if we wish to imagine a body beyond the world, we must first imagine a place for it, even though no such place exists there.⁸⁴

The idea is that God is present by power throughout the actual universe, and in all possible space, whether or not we imagine that space to include a body. Whatever possible (finite) body we can imagine, God exists "by power" beyond that body. A reductionist view of divine presence by essence, then, had better not understand presence by essence to be reducible to this modal kind of presence by power, on pain of making God far too present: absurdly, making God present where there is nothing to be present

⁸¹Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 35 (2:446).

⁸²Scotus, *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 20 (2:442).

⁸³See, e.g., Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 37, q. un., n. 9 (Vatican ed., 6:302): "We should not imagine an infinite vacuum before the creation of the world, as though God were present there by essence before he produced the world"; see too, e.g., Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 1, q. 3, n. 174 (Vatican ed., 7:88).

⁸⁴Edward Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 119, referring to Pseudo-Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*, 179.

to. Scotus's God is (or can be) essentially present only where there is something other than himself.⁸⁵

5. Concluding Comments

Hudson takes it to be an implication of his position that God is corporeal and material. According to Hudson, this will follow if we accept his extension view (according to which "God . . . inherits the shape, size, dimensionality, topology, and boundaries of whatever is the most inclusive region"),⁸⁶ and an analysis of "material object" in terms of "simple occupancy."⁸⁷ This is, I take it, part of Hudson's demystifying strategy. Scotus would agree with the inheritance claim, provided that this relation is not understood to introduce any internal ordering of parts, any intrinsic extension. But he would not quite agree with Hudson's conclusion, for the rather technical reason that he would not accept the simple occupancy analysis of "material object." Scotus believes that a necessary condition for being *material* is the possession of (prime) matter—the potentiality for substantial change.⁸⁸ Neither God, nor angels, nor human souls, have such potentiality.⁸⁹ And Scotus believes that a necessary condition for being *bodily* is being the kind of thing that is or *can be* extended (in his sense). For example, he considers the hypothetical case of a non-extended (viz. point-like) quality (whiteness). An objector maintains that there could be no such thing on the grounds that

whiteness without quantity would be a spiritual quality, because indivisible, and it would be a bodily quality, because in the third species of quality, and thus would be spiritual and non-spiritual.⁹⁰

The "third species of quality" comprises those qualities that Aristotle labels "affective" qualities⁹¹—those that are "productive of an affection of the senses":⁹² things that we would label "secondary qualities." The idea is that such qualities are real, physical, features of physical objects. The conclusion, of course, is supposed to be contradictory.

⁸⁵Aquinas, of course, does not think of presence by power in this modal way: it is simply God's causing actual spatial things. So Aquinas is not, as far as I can see, vulnerable to an objection along these lines (to the effect that Aquinas's God will need to be present by power through infinite non-existent space). The argument in favor of essential presence that Aquinas offers begins from God's *actual* causal activity (not his possible causal activity), and argues on the basis of this that God needs to be present by essence since causal activity requires and presupposes contact.

⁸⁶Hudson, "Omnipresence," 210–211.

⁸⁷Hudson, "Omnipresence," 210.

⁸⁸On prime matter and materiality, see, e.g., Scotus, *Lectura*, I, d. 3, p. 1, qq. 1–2, n. 38 (Vatican ed., 16:339);

⁸⁹For God's lack of prime matter, see Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, p. 1, q. 1, nn. 7–8 (Vatican ed., 4:154–155).

⁹⁰Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 12, p. 1, q. 2, n. 118 (Vatican ed., 12:333).

⁹¹See Aristotle, *Categoriae*, c. 8 (9a29–9b32).

⁹²Aristotle, *Categoriae*, c. 8 (9b7–8).

Scotus's reply seems to concede the possibility of non-extended corporeal items (at least in cases that the same item with extension would be homoeomerous—a white patch, in this case); the burden of his response is to deny the contradiction:

[Whiteness without quantity] would be simply speaking a bodily or corporeal quality, because simply speaking it is determined to perfect a body. But it is qualifiedly incorporeal, since it is not actually a corporeal being—just as a corporeal substance, even though it were without quantity, would be corporal, since it is naturally apt to exist under quantity (whereas an angel is not thus apt); and it would also be actually indivisible, but divisible in remote potency or aptitude.⁹³

The point is that being corporeal *simpliciter*—being potentially divisible—and being qualifiedly incorporeal—being actually indivisible—are not contradictories: any quality can begin to be extended (begin to inhere in something extended), and thus become divisible. But such a quality—and, indeed, a corporeal substance, according to this passage—*need* not be extended.

So Scotus would only allow that God, angels, and souls were bodies in the case that they could be extended. But he would deny that God could be extended, for the simple reason that extension is an accident and God is not receptive of accidents.⁹⁴ What about angels or souls? In the passage just quoted, Scotus says that an angel “is not apt” to exist under quantity. And he says a number of other suggestive things too. First of all, there could not be a colored angel:

Just as a stone cannot be wise, because it has no receptive capacity with respect to wisdom, so an angel cannot be white, since it is in no way receptive of this form (whether the form is posited to be divisible or indivisible). Indeed there are two reasons why an angel cannot be white: one is the extension in the form and the lack of extension in the angel; and the other reason is because this form is this form, and an angel is an angel. And the second reason, not the first, is the essential reason for the impossibility.⁹⁵

So angels, just in virtue of the kinds of thing they are, could not be subjects of corporeal qualities. One might well imagine that, *a fortiori*, they could not be subjects of corporeal quantities such as extension. (The passage, though, asserts only that they are not the subjects of such quantities, not that they could not be.)

Secondly, Scotus sometimes repeats the scholastic commonplace that quantity supervenes on matter, and quality on substantial form: “Quantity follows the composite in virtue of matter, and quality in virtue of form, because form is simply more perfect than matter, *Metaphysics* VII, c. 2.”⁹⁶

⁹³Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 12, p. 1, q. 2, n. 124 (Vatican ed., 12:335).

⁹⁴See, e.g., Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, p. 1, q. 1, n. 15 (Vatican ed., 4:159).

⁹⁵Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 12, p. 1, q. 2, n. 125 (Vatican ed., 12:335–336).

⁹⁶Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 12, p. 1, q. 2, n. 131 (Vatican, 12:337), referring to Aristotle, *Metaphysica* VII, c. 3 (1029a5–6).

Quality, presumably, is more perfect than quantity, and this is what grounds the inference.

And, thirdly, Scotus elsewhere suggests a reason why this might be so. The key feature of immaterial substances is their capacity for intellectual cognition, and Scotus suggests, using grounds that originate in the *Liber de causis*, that nothing material could have such a capacity:

We could not prove [that only something unextended could have immaterial cognition] other than from the condition of the object related to the act— unless perhaps from reflection, since we experience that we reflect on the act of cognition, and nothing with quantity is able to reflect on itself.⁹⁷

The idea is that no extended item is fully accessible to itself: part is accessible to part, but there is always an inaccessible part, as it were: the part doing the accessing. Only a non-extended item is fully transparent to itself. Of course, the argument relies on there not being cognitively inert immaterial substances.

So Scotus's spiritual substances are spatial, but not material or corporeal in Scotus's technical medieval senses. In this way, then, Scotus would defend a spatial God while avoiding Hudson's materializing conclusion.⁹⁸

University of Notre Dame

References

- Aquinas, Thomas. n.d. *Opera omnia*. Edited by R. Busa. <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>.
- Aristotle. 1831. *Opera omnia*. Edited by I. Bekker, 5 vols. (G. Reimer).
- Cross, Richard. 1998. *The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision* (Clarendon Press).
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198269748.001.0001>
- Cross, Richard. 2005. *Duns Scotus on God*, Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Routledge).
- Cross, Richard. 2008. "The Condemnations of 1277 and Henry of Ghent on Angelic Location." In *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Enquiry*, edited by Martin Lenz and Isabel Iribarren (Ashgate), 73–88.
- Decean, Christopher A. 2007. "The Impossibility of Action at a Distance." In *Wisdom's Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan*, edited by Peter Kwasniewski (Catholic University of America Press), 173–200.
- Denifle, H., and E. Chatelain, eds. 1889–1897. *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, 4 vols. (Delalain).

⁹⁷Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 43, q. 2, n. 72 (Vatican ed., 14:22).

⁹⁸Thanks to Dominik Perler and Chris Shields (and the other members of the Topoi Research Group "Immaterial Causes/Omnipresence" who participated in a colloquium on an ancestor of this paper at the Humboldt University in Berlin in August 2013); also to Hud Hudson and an anonymous reader for *Faith and Philosophy*, and in particular to Mark Murphy for comments that greatly improved this essay.

- Duns Scotus, John. 1639. *Opera omnia*. Edited by L. Wadding, 12 vols. (Lyon).
- Duns Scotus, John. 1950–2013. *Opera omnia*. Edited by C. Balić et al., 21 vols. (Vatican Polyglot Press).
- Duns Scotus, John. 2004–2008. *Reportatio 1–A*. Edited by Allan B. Wolter and Oleg V. Bychkov, 2 vols. (Franciscan Institute).
- Euclid. 1883–1884. *Elementa*. Edited by J. L. Heiberg, 2 vols., Bibliotheca Teubneriana (Teubner).
- Fuerst, Adrian, 1951. *An Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Omnipresence of God in Selected Writings between 1220–1270*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology, Second Series, 62 (Catholic University of America Press).
- Gordon, James. In progress. “Rethinking Divine Spatiality: Divine Omnipresence in Philosophical and Theological Perspective.”
- Goris, Harm. 2009. “Divine Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas.” In *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk Schoot (Peeters), 37–58.
- Grant, Edward. 1981. *Much Ado about Nothing: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press).
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511895326>
- Hudson, Hud. 2009. “Omnipresence.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford University Press), 199–216. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199289202.003.0010>
- Inman, Ross D. Forthcoming. “Omnipresence and the Location of the Immaterial.” *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*. <https://rossdinman.wordpress.com/dissertation/about/online-papers/>.
- Kovach, Francis J. 1978. “Action at a Distance in Duns Scotus and Modern Science.” In *Regnum Hominis et Regnum Dei*, edited by Camille Bérubé, *Studia Scholastico-Scotistica*, 6 (Societas Internationalis Scotistica), 477–490.
- Lewis, Neil, 2003. “Space and Time.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, edited by Thomas Williams (Cambridge University Press), 69–99.
- Lombard, Peter. 1971–1981. *Sententiae*, 2 vols., *Spicilegium Bonaventurianum*, 4 (Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae).
- Pasnau, Robert. 2011. *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1689* (Oxford University Press).
- Pruss, Alexander. 2013. “Omnipresence, Multilocation, the Real Presence and Time Travel.” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 1: 60–73. <http://journalofanalytictheology.com/jat/index.php/jat/article/view/jat.2013-1.%20001117151718a/25>
- Pseudo-Siger of Brabant. 1941. *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*. Edited by Philippe Delhaye, *Philosophes Belges*, 15 (Editions de l’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie).
- Sorabji, Richard. 1988. *Matter, Space and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (Duckworth).
- Suarez-Nani, Tiziana. 2008. “Angels, Space and Place: The Location of Separate Substances according to Duns Scotus.” In *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Enquiry*, edited by Martin Lenz and Isabel Iribarren (Ashgate), 89–111.