

UNIVOCITY OF BEING (*Metaphysics IV*, q. 1)

Opposing views on univocity

Aquinas (ST I, q. 13)¹

- Univocity and analogy are properties of words. Term is univocal if it signifies the same property by means of the same conception.
- Term is analogous if it signifies the same property by means of the same conception, such that the property is realized in different ways in different objects.
 - An additional constraint: one realization is basic, and one conceptualization (standardly the corresponding one) is basic – the core or focal sense. Sometimes called ‘attribution’
- Term is univocal if it signifies the same property by means of the same conception, such that the property is not realized in different ways in different objects.
- So one ‘conception’ is sufficient to signify/represent property realized in different ways.
- A consequence of this: The most basic conception must have some kind of internal structure.
- Given this: *being* is univocal because it is ‘realized’ as *ens commune* in creatures and *ipsum esse subsistens* in God (and *ens commune* is realized in different ways in substance and accident)

Henry of Ghent (in Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 17-19)

- In cases in which a universal concept contain two more basic concepts, such that ‘it is conceived by us as though it were one notion because of the close resemblance of the [diverse] concepts it contains’, that universal concept is analogically common to those different things in which the two basic concepts are realized (p. 17).
- Example: ‘*being* in so far as it is a concept and not simply a part of a concept is . . . conceived as analogically common to God and creatures’ (p. 18)

Scotus’s view on univocity, and his early view on *being*

- Univocity is standarly (though not exclusively) a property of concepts. A concept is univocal if it is a most basic concept and lacks internal structure. (See also *Philosophical Writings*, p. 20: if affirming it and denying it of the same thing is a contradiction; if it can serve as the middle term in a syllogism)
- In this sense, *being*, according to *QMA IV*, q. 1, is not univocal but analogous (see n. 70)

The fundamental problem

- Assume ‘being’ is the subject of metaphysics, and that it can in some sense be predicated of everything (Avicenna’s view ac. to Scotus: see e.g. nn. 31-2).
- If it can be predicated of everything, it’s like a supreme genus (see e.g. nn. 50-1).
- But if it’s univocal, then being like a supreme genus is like being a highest-level determinable.

- And if so, then how is it predicated of the things – the specific differences – that divide that genus into species?
- (I.e. if it's not predicable of them, they are not beings).

The solution

- It's not univocal (n. 70).
- Since the subject of a science must be univocal, the subject of metaphysics is substance, not being (n. 84). (Compare Aquinas's view)

The structure of the question

- nn. 1-16: main objections (13 in all?) – being is univocal
- n. 17: sed contra – being is not univocal
- nn. 18-26: responses to n. 17: 'being' here is used to pick out not the concept *being* but what things of different kinds in the world really have in common, so the sed contra not germane to the question.
 - The assumption: things of different kinds have nothing really in common.
 - We can use 'univocity' and 'equivocity' to talk about what they really have or don't have in common – the metaphysician, not the logician.
- n. 27: first view: it's just a trivial verbal dispute.
- nn. 28-30: rejection of this view
- nn. 31-49: Avicenna's view (ac. to Scotus): it's univocal
 - nn. 32-4: first argument in favor
 - nn. 35-45: second argument in favor, along with an objection and replies
 - nn. 46-9: four more arguments in favor
- nn. 50-69: seven arguments against Avicenna, and multiple replies to them (Nn. 50-3 (1; three replies); nn. 54-6 (2; two replies); nn. 57-61 (3; four replies, the third and fourth of which Scotus likes and can be combined into something like Scotus's mature view); nn. 62-3 (4); nn. 64-5 (5); nn. 66-7 (6); nn. 68-9 (7))
- n. 70: Scotus's view
- nn. 71-85: replies to the initial arguments (i.e. why they don't show being is univocal)
- nn. 86-91: replies to the first three of Avicenna's arguments (nn. 32, 34, 46 – i.e. how the arguments can be answered supposing that *being* is not univocal)

Terminological and related matters

- A confused concept is a general concept (like generality, confusion comes in degrees – e.g. n. 33)
- Logic is the study of the formal relations between concepts; contrast 'real' sciences: mathematics (study of (being as) geometrical shapes), physics (study of (being as) mobile), and metaphysics (study of being as being). (So in n. 70, being, the real feature of things, is analogous, because it belongs primarily to one thing and derivatively to another. But considered from the point of view of logic it is equivocal, because there is no commonality in the meanings of the various occurrences of 'being' across the categories.)

- Predication *in quid*, or *per se primo modo* – the predicate is the definition of the subject, or the genus-part of the definition (e.g. n. 7) – e.g. ‘man is a rational animal’.
- Predication *per se secundo modo* – the predicate signifies a *proprium* of the subject (e.g. ‘man has a capacity to smile’. Here the subject term enters into the definition of the predicate, not *vice versa* (you include ‘man’ in the definition of ‘has a capacity to smile’ since only human beings have a capacity to smile).
- Formal predication (e.g. n. 42) – a predication in which a property (signified by the predicate term) is ascribed to its subject. Predication *per se primo modo* and *per se secundo modo* are examples. So is accidental predication (e.g. ‘Socrates is musical’; ‘a wise man is musical’ – see e.g. n. 42).
- A denominative term (e.g. n. 41) – a concrete accidental term (e.g. ‘musical’).
- Identical predication (e.g. n. 42) – the subject and predicate signify non-identical things that are somehow nevertheless the same. Typical case: two formalities belonging to the same subject – e.g. ‘God’s wisdom is God’s power’, both non-identical with each and with God but the same as each other and God. (As Scotus understands all this, it requires some form of relative identity.) Note that there is a sense in which being is a real feature of a thing, the same as but non-identical with the thing and its various features – exceptions noted below.

Some places where Scotus anticipates his mature view

(Which is that *being* is a univocal concept common to God and all creatures, and is the subject of metaphysics)

nn. 32-5

- n. 32: first object of the intellect is what is most common – most general feature of the particular objects cognized, in virtue of which they can be cognized at all. It is in virtue of being beings that things can be cognized – that’s what gets them into the sphere of cognizability (recall Parmenides)
- n. 35: ‘That is the first object of a cognitive potency under whose aspect all other things are known by that potency’ (e.g. colour as the object of vision; if we were to say that the visible is the object of vision, the claim would be empty or trivial).

n. 46

- See the first argument in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 20

nn. 57-61

- n. 61: Being (i.e. the being of ___) is non-identically the same as absolutely anything that can fill in the blank; it is not realized by everything that can fill in the blank, but there is a sense in which it is common to and can be formally predicated of the subjects that realize it (‘formally common to the thing conceived of absolutely’ – i.e. as a concrete subject).

The hardest part

There are lots, but perhaps the worst bit is nn. 41-2, coupled with n. 60. What he says in both (I think) is that being is included in (some or) all formalities, and so is non-identically the same as each. But it cannot be predicated of them since it's not a feature of them in the way that e.g. being a colour is a feature of white, or in the way that 'white' specifies 'colour' – even though whiteness includes colour and is thus non-identically the same as it.

Scotus's mature view

Why think that being is univocal?

- *Philosophical writings*, p. 20, arg. 1: if I believe that x is a being but have no belief about what kind of being x is – e.g. finite or infinite – then I have a univocal concept of being.
- The idea: two concepts, *finite-being* and *infinite-being* overlap, and the overlap is univocal.
- Opposing views: Henry's view: there's no overlap; Aquinas's view (which Scotus does not address): the one conception of the mind (e.g. *wisdom*) intrinsically includes both finite and infinite 'modes' (or whatever it is that distinguishes God and creatures), such that the conception represents the same perfection – there is the same *res significata* – but signified in different modes (*modi significandi*).

How can being be common to everything given the fundamental problem?

(*Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 3)

[n. 131] 'Being' not something univocal that is said *in quid* of all things that are of themselves intelligible, because [it is not said] of ultimate differences or of the proper properties (*passiones*) of being. . . . [n. 132] I prove the first . . . thus: if differences include being said univocally of them, and they are not wholly the same, then they are different but include something the same [viz. being]. Therefore these ultimate [differences] will properly differ; therefore they will differ by other differences. And if these others include differences quidditatively, it will follow about them as about the first ones, and thus there will be an infinite regress in differences, or there will be a stop at some that do not include being quidditatively, which is what is proposed. . . .

[n. 137] I say that . . . it follows that since nothing can be more common than being, and since being cannot be something common and univocal said *in quid* of all things that are of themselves intelligible . . . it follows that there is nothing that is, in virtue of its commonness *in quid* to everything that is of itself intelligible. But this notwithstanding I say that the first object of the intellect is being, because in it we find two primacies concurrently, namely one of commonness and one of virtuality, for everything that is of itself intelligible either includes the notion of being, or is contained virtually or essentially in something that essentially includes the notion of being. For all genera, species, and individuals, and all the essential parts of genera, and uncreated being, include being quidditatively, and all ultimate differences are included in some

of these essentially, and all the properties of being are included virtually in being and in what is lower than it. . . .

[n. 151] [Shows how the same kind of set-up obtains in the case of sight in relation to its object]

Being as the subject of metaphysics

- See *QMA* VI, q. 4, n. 10 – resolving the debate between Averroes (it's God) and Avicenna (it's being)

¹ Evidence for this reading of Aquinas: voces sunt signa intellectuum, et intellectus sunt rerum similitudines. Et sic patet quod voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus. . . . Sic igitur potest nominari a nobis ex creaturis, non tamen ita quod nomen significans ipsum, exprimat divinam essentiam secundum quod est [i.e. giving a definition] 13.1; id quod bonitatem dicimus in creaturis, praeexistit in Deo, et hoc quidem secundum modum altiorem 13.2; Deum cognoscimus ex perfectionibus procedentibus in creaturas ab ipso; quae quidem perfectiones in Deo sunt secundum eminentiorem modum quam in creaturis. Intellectus autem noster eo modo apprehendit eas, secundum quod sunt in creaturis, et secundum quod apprehendit, ita significat per nomina. In nominibus igitur quae Deo attribuimus, est duo considerare, scilicet, perfectiones ipsas significatas, ut bonitatem, vitam, et huiusmodi; et modum significandi. Quantum igitur ad id quod significant huiusmodi nomina, proprie competunt Deo, et magis proprie quam ipsis creaturis, et per prius dicuntur de eo. Quantum vero ad modum significandi, non proprie dicuntur de Deo, habent enim modum significandi qui creaturis competit. 13.3; Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen. Intellectus autem noster, cum cognoscat Deum ex creaturis, format ad intelligendum Deum conceptiones proportionatas perfectionibus procedentibus a Deo in creaturas. Quae quidem perfectiones in Deo praeexistunt unite et simpliciter, in creaturis vero recipiuntur divise et multipliciter. 13.4