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More than Just an Individual: Scotus's Concept of Person
from the Christological Context of *Lectura* III 1

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MORE THAN JUST AN INDIVIDUAL¹

SCOTUS'S CONCEPT OF PERSON FROM THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF *LECTURA III* 1

1. INTRODUCTION

If we could have met Jesus on one of his tours from Galilee to Jerusalem, many of us would have gotten the impression that he is a human person. For he could be experienced as one particular human being, having a body like all human beings and expressing feelings and thoughts in words and actions. Following him, however, we could also have sensed a mysterious dimension hidden and revealed in this man. His disciples became convinced that God was present in him, that in this man God presented himself in an unprecedented personal way. The most impressive expression of this belief is found in the gospel of John: Jesus is “the Word made flesh.” After three centuries of intense reflection faithful to the New Testament testimony and attempts to answer various critical questions pressing for its better interpretation, the early church officially declared Jesus to be a divine person having not only the divine nature but also human nature.² In this way church theology seems to have reached a conclusion opposite to the apperception with which we started. Yet, terms can be deceptive, since “having human nature” still implies, for the church fathers, that Jesus has a body and a soul.

In order to understand the humanity of Christ, ancient philosophy offered a solution which was accepted by some Greek church fathers, namely, that by incarnation God the

¹ This article is a joint production of *The Research Group John Duns Scotus*. Together with this article we publish a complete English translation of *Lectura III* 1 on our website (www.dunsscotus.com): John Duns Scotus, *The possibility of the incarnation. Lectura distinction III* question 1, Latin Text and English Translation, 2008.

² See e.g. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, (London: A.&C. Black, 1985), 280-342.

Word has joined himself with the “idea” (*eidos*) of human nature as materialized in a human body. Here, human nature is seen as one existing essence in which all human beings participate. In virtue of this participation every human being is human, while they are individual by the fact that this ideal human nature is realized in separate bodies. If, then, in Christ, God has united himself with this human nature incorporated in one body, incarnation can be seen as an event that deeply affected the human nature in which all human beings share. In the Middle Ages this view was revived in the opinion of Thomas Aquinas (†1274). However, most of his contemporaries, who, unlike him, had no direct knowledge of Chalcedon (451) but developed their Christological reflections through Augustine, Boethius and Damascene,³ searched for a view that could do more justice to the individuality of Jesus’ human nature.⁴ The fact that Jesus, in his earthly life, could be pointed at as “this man” was not just an “accidental” embodiment of a general human nature. Both his body and his soul must somehow be essential to his humanity.

At this frontier of further reflection John Duns Scotus (†1308) offers two innovations. First, he proposes a new concept of individuality, a concept that does not define it as a material or accidental feature, but as essential individuality (*haecceitas*). Second, he sets out to show that an *individual* nature is not by itself a *person*, but can become the nature of *another* (kind of) person. So there must be a difference

³ Cf. Scotus invoking John of Damascus in *Ordinatio* III 1, 1 in the translation of Norbert Hartmann, O.F.M., *Person und Sittlichkeit. Grundlegung einer Ethik verantwortlicher Selbstbejahung*, ed. G. Höver, (Kvelaer: Verlag Butzon und Bercker, 1992), *Veröffentlichungen der Johannes Duns Scotus Akademie für Franziskanische Geistesgeschichte und Spiritualität* 4, 15: “Man muss genau zusehen, wie sich dasjenige, auf Grund dessen eine Geistnatur Person genannt wird, zu demjenigen verhält, wodurch eine solche Natur singular und individuell ist; und es liegt zutage, dass sie nicht formal und letztlich durch ein und dasselbe eine individuelle Natur und durch diese geschöpfliche Personalität zur Person konstituiert ist; nach Johannes Damascenus nämlich hat das (ewige) WORT eine individuelle Natur, nicht jedoch eine Person angenommen.”

⁴ For an overview of Christological positions in the second half of the thirteenth century, see Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of Incarnation. Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27-120.

not only between person (*persona*) and nature (*natura*), but also between person (*persona*) and individual nature taken in Scotus's new sense (*haec natura*).

In this article we will turn to Scotus's first presentation, in *Lectura* III 1, of this second endeavor, distinguishing a person from its individual nature.⁵ Scotus agrees with most medieval theologians that a person has several essential characteristics, like having a body and having a soul or mind; being individual is one of them.⁶ Yet, according to him, as we shall see, the distinctive essential characteristic of a person is not individuality, but a specific kind of independence (*independentia*).

Scotus's careful exposition elucidates the conviction that God has joined himself, not with human nature in general (which as such does not exist), but with one individual man who nevertheless is not a human person. This incarnation has not affected the nature of all human beings, but has effected one human being unlike all others. There is one man who belongs to God's identity now. In this way, Scotus is in line with Chalcedon which never claimed that Jesus, who was fully God, was also *fully* human; it claimed that Jesus was really and genuinely human, as he was really and genuinely divine. Jesus has all that is *essential* to being human, including being an individual; but he is not a human person. Scotus's explanation reads, as we will see, that lacking human personhood does not mean that an essentially human feature is missing, but only that the complete individual hu-

⁵ See also further below, § 5, third paragraph. For the first endeavor, the development of a proper concept of individuality, see e.g. Antonie Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 406-13). For a positioning of this concept in Medieval thought, see Nico den Bok, "Richard de Saint-Victor et la quête de l'individualité essentielle: La sagesse de la *daniélité*," in: Brigitte-Mirjam Bedos-Rezak and Dominique Iogna-Prat, *L'Individu au Moyen Age. Individuation et individualization avant la modernité*, (Paris: Aubier, 2005), 123-44 and 327-32.

⁶ For Scotus's relation to contemporaries and predecessors, see N. den Bok, "Eén ding is noodzakelijk. Duns Scotus en het volheidsbeginsel," in Henri Veldhuis and Andreas Beck (eds.), *Geloof geeft te denken. Opstellen over de theologie van Johannes Duns Scotus*, (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 225-81, 254ff.

man nature exists dependently. It has a separate identity but not a separate existence.

Lectura III 1 has only recently become available, not just in a critical edition, but in any edition: the latest volume published in the *Editio Vaticana*.⁷ So we will be able to present a rather fresh analysis, which will in fact offer some reassessments of earlier Scotus scholarship on this subject. Since *Lectura* III 1 consists of a concatenation of arguments and sub-arguments, we will have to confine ourselves – for this article – to Scotus’s concept of personhood. With this in mind, we first offer an overview of the exposition in *Lectura* III 1 (section 2). Next, we focus on Scotus’s formulation of his own answer to the main question of this distinction (section 3), in order to bring forth the essential feature of his concept of person: independence (section 4). Subsequently, we turn to another term related to personhood, incommunicability, traditionally used to pinpoint the individuality proper to personhood (section 5). After detecting a tension between incommunicability and independence we offer a tentative extrapolation of our analysis into a wider Scotian view on personhood, human and divine (section 6).

2. THE STRUCTURE OF *LECTURA* III 1

In order to find our way in *Lectura* III 1 we start by glancing at the structure of the entire distinction (§1-91). After that we “zoom in” on its central part (§35-47), the narrower context in which Scotus develops his own position (§44-47). The subdivision of *Lectura* III 1 offered by the *Commissio Scotistica* in the Vatican Edition is generally correct, but can be made more clear and simple, for Duns appears to follow the traditional threefold *quaestio*-structure even more than the *Commissio* suggests:

⁷ B. Ioannis Duns Scoti, O.F.M., *Lectura in librum tertium sententiarum, a distinctione prima ad decimam septimam*, in *Opera Omnia* XX (Roma: Civitas Vaticana, 2003). When the main text of this article refers to a paragraph (§), it is always a paragraph of *Lectura* III 1 from this edition.

Quaestio; quod non, sed contra (§1-15) // *Responsio* (§16-47) // *Ad rationes* (§48-91)

In this structure, Scotus, as in other distinctions, inserts a rather long monographic passage (§ 17-43) in which he works his way to his personal answer, his *opinio propria*. Strictly speaking, that answer is given only in §44-47.⁸ Because of this insertion the usual third part of the *quaestio*, dealing with the arguments against the answer defended by the author, has to be extended; it has to deal with some extra arguments, brought forward in the insertion, against Scotus's answer. In overview:

Is it possible for the human nature to be in personal union with the Word?

§1 It seems not (= negative answer):

usual arguments for a negative answer (1-4)

special arguments for a negative answer

(5-9, in 5 three sub-arguments)

§15 Against these arguments

(= positive answer, Scotus's lead):

John 1:14: "The Word has become flesh"

Answering the question

§17 How should "personal union" be understood?

some opinions

Scotus's "non-magisterial" answer: it is a unity like that of substance and accident

§23 How can the human nature be united with the Word in a personal unity?

§23 considered from the Word

two reasons why it could not, and their refutation
a misguided defense of how it could

§28 considered from human nature

("is more difficult")

⁸ We will see (below, n.11) that there still is a reason to consider §§35-43 as belonging to Scotus's *opinio propria*: Scotus does not seem to refer to adherents of the two ways advanced and rejected by him, so maybe these ways to define personhood are construed by himself to make up his own mind about the main question.

§29 Three ways in which personal unity cannot be understood

§35 Three ways in which personal unity could be understood:

§36 *first way*: person defined by a positive entity on top of individuality

§37 *second way*: person defined by the denial of dependence

§38 Objections to these two ways:

to the *first way* (3 arguments);

to the *second way* (3 arguments)

§44 *third way* = middle way (= Scotus's answer): person defined by the denial of actual and dispositional dependence

Refuting the arguments against Scotus's answer:

§48 the arguments for a negative answer to the main question:

the usual arguments (1-4)

the special arguments (5-9, with the sub-arg. in 5 and an extended arg. 7)

§69 arguments for an elaboration of the *first way* (see §36, 38-40)⁹:

the fact that in Christ human nature gets a relation with the Word presupposes that that nature gets a positive entity as the foundation for that relation. – In this *dubium* Scotus discusses various points of view, a.o. by distinguishing three kinds of relations

§83 the arguments of the *second way*

(see §37, 41-43) if they contradict the third way: personhood is defined by the denial of actual independence (only). – In this revaluation of the three arguments already mentioned Scotus distinguishes a.o. two kinds of incommunicability

⁹ The *dubium* is presented, by Scotus, as an excursus after the last sub-argument given in his discussion of the ninth initial argument. However, in extending this argument he, in fact, offers an elaboration of the second way.

In the middle section of his monographic insertion (§35-47) Scotus develops his own position. He does that by describing, evaluating and rejecting two positions which share the conviction that personhood cannot be defined in terms of individuality. Individuality is an essential property of a person, but not its defining distinctive property, not that which makes a person a person.¹⁰ When this starting-point is accepted, however, one can proceed along various lines. Scotus presents two positions, two ways to define personhood beyond individuality.¹¹ These ways are presented in a rather Augustinian way¹², for Scotus says (§44) that the one overestimates human personhood, whereas the other underestimates it:

- (1) The *first way* to define human personhood assumes that its distinctive feature is a positive entity on top of individuality. In the incarnation this entity is removed and replaced by the divine person of the Son. So in Christ there is no ultimate positive entity which completes the individual human nature in human persons. For Scotus, human personhood is overestimated in this way for only in God personhood is defined by a positive entity on top of individuality.¹³
- (2) The *second way* defines human personhood by assuming that its distinctive feature is only a denial of dependence. In incarnation no positive entity is re-

¹⁰ For this concept of the *proprium* of something – for instance of a person – (Scotus: *propria personalitas*, e.g. in §88), see N. den Bok, *Communicating the Most High. Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard of St. Victor* (†1173), *Bibliotheca Victorina* VII (Paris/Turnhout: Brepols), 147.

¹¹ It is difficult to locate these positions historically. For the two *viae* mentioned by Scotus the *Vaticana* does not offer references to contemporaries, as it usually does. It is not unlikely that Scotus construed these positions in order to point out his own (cf. above, n. 8). Duns does not refer to them by *quidem dicunt* etc., but by *hoc potest poni duobus modis* (*Lectura* III 1, 36; cf. *Ordinatio* III 1,31: *duae videntur viae possibiles*).

¹² For this way of positioning the “catholic” view between two opposite “deviations,” see N. den Bok, “In vrijheid voorzien: Een systematisch-theologische analyse van Augustinus’ teksten over voorkennis en wilsvrijheid,” in *Bijdragen. Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 56 (1995): 40-60.

¹³ We could add in a Scotian vein that, if the individual human nature had an independence like that of God, incarnation would be impossible, for then it could not possibly depend on another person.

moved, but only a denial of dependence is lacking. In Christ, human nature, which is individual by itself, does not exist independently, as in human persons, but dependently. For Duns, human personhood is underestimated in this way since it still leaves room for a kind of dependence which must also be excluded for human personhood, namely, the *disposition* to exist dependently.

As can be expected, Scotus's own answer consists in a concise middle way.¹⁴ He does not agree with the first way that personhood is defined by a positive entity on top of individuality.¹⁵ Only in God, Duns says (§ 46), is there a positive entity in virtue of which his nature cannot be communicated to a person of another nature. God has an ontological aspect which creatures do not have: in him personhood and nature are necessarily connected. Scotus does agree with the second way that in creatures personhood is only defined by something negative, something *not* being there. Personhood is defined by a denial of dependence. However, he does not agree with this way on the extent of this denial. According to Duns, for human personhood more than just actual dependence has to be denied. If not, the individual human nature existing independently in human persons can still have a *disposition* to exist dependently. This would diminish the autonomy proper to human personhood, "it would ascribe too little to human personhood." In human persons, Scotus claims, the

¹⁴ This answer is given by Scotus in the usual way, so it can be taken as his position. He adds that this position is most difficult to find (§28). Within this position there is a part which he offers with some caution, *sine assertione* (§21): that the Word and human nature are united like substance and accident. In *Ordinatio* III 1 Scotus seems to have become more careful: in §44 the *non asserendo* refers to his own answer.

¹⁵ In itself this suggestion is understandable. If one climbs the "tree of Porphyry" from the general to the individual while considering individuality as an essential ontological feature, one might think that personhood, if it cannot coincide with individuality, must still be another, final specification. This suggestion is even reinforced in a Christological context, for in Christ the individual human nature is a person in virtue of a divine person (the Word), which suggests once more that for personhood something positive is added.

individual human nature, not having dependent existence, does not have a disposition for dependent existence either. Yet, this independent existence, free of any inclination to exist dependently, still is a non-necessary existence. It is a contingent independence, an actual state of affairs which *can* be different, but *is as it is* because of a decision of the divine will. So in creatures personhood is defined by an independence that depends on the actual, contingent arrangement of things by God. Human persons do not have the autonomy proper to God. In divine personhood, which is also defined by the denial of actual and dispositional¹⁶ dependence, this independence is non-contingent. So Scotus opts for

- (3) a *middle way* defining human personhood by a denial not only of actual dependence, but also of dispositional dependence.¹⁷ In incarnation no positive entity is removed or missing, but only this twofold denial is missing. This means that in human persons the individual human nature has independent existence without having the disposition to exist dependently. The definition of human personhood also applies to divine personhood if we add that in God the twofold independence defining personhood is not a contingent, but a necessary feature.

3. HOW AN INDIVIDUAL MAN IS NOT A HUMAN PERSON

Let us take a closer look at Scotus's argumentation for his middle position; but let us make a preliminary remark first. Independence, the key word for personhood as understood by Scotus, is not meant in a psychological, but in an ontological sense. Ontological independence is presupposed

¹⁶ This is how Allan Wolter translates *aptitudinalis*, see e.g. in D. McElrath (ed.), *Franciscan Christology. Selected Texts, Translations and Introductory Essays* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1980), 176. We follow him because of the modern meaning of "dispositional," see below, n. 27.

¹⁷ Scotus's most famous characterization of a person, as *ultima solitudo*, is defined by exactly this double independence, see e.g. *Ordinatio* III 1, 74.

by any psychological independence or dependence. Psychologically, a human being is independent if he or she can take self-motivated initiating actions, by not *leaning* on others for his or her thinking and acting. However, in order to be able to do this he or she needs to be a human person first, that is, a being which can have personal actions in the first place, a being with a particular identity that is not a part or form or shape of another being, but “self-standing.” The ontological independence of human nature in human persons can be compared to a twig planted in the soil to grow roots and branches. This twig is set “on its own,” as it were. But it could also have been grafted on another tree, and then it “exists dependently.”¹⁸ Within this image, psychological dependence can be compared with the twig growing slim and leaning on a neighboring branch, and independence with the twig growing straight.

The main question of *Lectura* III 1 is: How is incarnation possible? If it is not possible that an individual human nature is not a human person, then only a human person can embody an individual human nature, and then incarnation is impossible. Scotus develops his answer to this question mainly by modifying the second way offered as a solution to this problem. In this way, the condition of the soul after death, when it is separated from the body, is used as an example to elucidate the situation of the individual human nature existing in human persons (see §46). So this way allows for the confirmation that in human persons the individual human nature has an inclination for dependence (like the separated soul has for her body). Hence, this way in fact acknowledges the negation of *actual* dependence only.

Scotus claims a stronger kind of psychological independence than the second way allows. A human person not only has no actual dependence, but it does not even have the disposition (*aptitudo*) to depend. Here, “disposition” must be taken in the sense of inclination, a potential in human nature that

¹⁸ The apostle Paul uses this image for the gentiles who are “like wild olives grafted on the noble olive” (which is the Israel that is faithful to its calling, see Rom 11:24). In this case, however, it does *not* refer to ontological dependence, but a kind of historical and spiritual dependence.

is fulfilled when it exists dependently.¹⁹ Scotus adds that, wherever this disposition is not there – in human persons – human nature still has “obediential potentiality.”²⁰ This potentiality merely is the possibility to be assumed, without any potential or inclination corresponding to it. It means that every creature, simply in virtue of being a creature, can be taken in a unity with God’s personal being and hence become that by which God personally expresses himself.²¹

According to Scotus, therefore, an individual human nature can be taken into a personal unity with God in virtue of its createdness, without having an inclination for the specific dependence it actually has when it is in a personal union with God.²² From this we derive that for Scotus, the individual human nature exists either independently (in a human person) or dependently (in a divine person), but in either case it does not have an inclination to depend. For human persons, its independent existence is actualized and maintained by God’s creating will, which could also have made another choice, namely, actualizing and maintaining it in a dependent existence, as in his incarnation. Only a divine person has absolute independence, because for a divine person the possibility for dependent existence, which is open to human beings, is ruled out. We may observe that in this way Scotus

¹⁹ This can be derived from the comparison with the separated soul and from the images employed by Scotus. Cf. *Ordinatio* III 1, 45: a stone which is *aptum natum* to fall downwards unless it is impeded by a table or hand.

²⁰ Of course, human nature must still be such that it *can* be assumed. For this reason Scotus can speak of *aptitudo obedientiae* (e.g. in *Ordinatio* III 1,46). But then “aptitude” is taken in the minimal sense just described.

²¹ Of course, not all creatures are equally suited for this “obedience,” since a creature can only express God’s character to the extent that it is similar to it. A stone, for instance, cannot express God’s mental or spiritual nature because it only has a material nature itself; but a human being can – although he or she cannot, in turn, express the infinity of God’s mental nature: that can only be expressed by God and in God himself.

²² This means that out of the three ways in which a negation or denial of dependence can be taken (see Scotus’s explanation in §45) the third one is actually applied to the incarnation, although Scotus does not explicitly say so. There is only an explicit application of the first kind of negation to divine personhood (see §46).

in fact recurs to his theory of synchronic contingency.²³ A major difference between human and divine personhood is that in human beings personhood is a synchronically contingent fact, a “given” for which there is a simultaneous alternative,²⁴ whereas in God it is a synchronically necessary fact, for which there is no such alternative.²⁵

It is clarifying to add that, strictly speaking (Scotus sometimes uses a less strict phrasing), one cannot say “a divine person is necessarily independent whereas a human person can be dependent.” As we have seen, for Scotus a *person* is *defined* by independence; so if “it” exists dependently, it ceases to be a person. In fact, the subject of this sentence has shifted: from person to individual nature. Obviously, we need a more careful wording here in order to do justice to Scotus’s conception: it is the individual human nature that can exist dependently or independently, and only in the latter case it is called a human person. So independence is a feature necessary *for* human personhood; but it is not a necessary feature in itself, for the individual human nature *can* exist dependently. In other words, independent existence is

²³ For this theory, see e.g. Johannes Duns Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom. Lectura I 39*, Introduction, Translation and Commentary by A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, A.H. Looman-Graaskamp, E. Dekker, N.W. den Bok, *The New Synthese Historical Library* 42 (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 23-32.

²⁴ This is more explicit in *Ordinatio* III 1 46: an individual human nature is not a human person “when it is given” to depend on the Word (*quando datur*, elsewhere *dum*). This might raise the question of Scotus’s alleged voluntarism, for at every moment this given *can* be different from what it actually is. God is consistent in his choices, however, and in themselves his choices are never arbitrary. There are good reasons for an actual state of affairs even though it *can* be different from what it is.

²⁵ Hans-Joachim Werner in “Unmittelbarkeit und Unabhängigkeit. Zur anthropologischen Bedeutung zweier personaler Bestimmungen nach Duns Scotus,” in Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (eds.), *Individuum und Individualität im Mittelalter* (Berlin/NewYork: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 24, 389-405 suggests a parallel between the synchronic contingency of every man to be a person and the synchronic contingency of every man’s acts of will. An act of the will is a human person “in Ausdruck und in Vollzug” (402). Cf. also Werner, “*Incommunicabilitas et libertas: La métaphysique de la personne selon Thomas d’Aquin et Duns Scot*,” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 83 (1999): 21-34.

an essential property of personhood, but it is not an essential property of an individual human nature. If it were, incarnation would be impossible. This means that being a person does not add anything to being this particular human nature – just like Scotus claims. It only indicates that this particular human nature has received independent existence. To use a metaphor similar to the one already used at the beginning of this section: a human person is the individual human nature standing on its own feet. This “standing on its own feet” is a contingent fact, for an individual human nature *can* stand on divine feet.

Our analysis has shown that the negation of an inclination for dependence in an individual human nature simply means that there is no such inclination. This in turn means that this inclination does not have to be impeded in the sense that the inclination is there but is prevented from being actualized by an external agent or cause. To Scotus’s mind there simply is no natural inclination for dependence in human nature which in human persons might be suppressed and in incarnation might be released and fulfilled.²⁶ At the same time, on occasion Scotus does use impediment and violence terminology (as in § 46). Most likely this is due to the fact that his concept of person – adding dispositional independence to factual dependence – is mainly derived from the second way to define personhood. As we have seen, this way is compared to the soul separated from the body; in this condition the soul does have an inclination to be (re)united with her body – some medievals express it as a yearning. However, this inclination does not reach its goal because of an external cause (death, imposed on human beings). If, by contrast, in human nature there is *no inclination* for dependence, as Scotus claims, then there is *no inclination* to be united with God, and then, of course, there is also no need to hinder or block that inclination, to prevent it from reaching its natural goal. Yet even then it is not completely inappropriate to say that by the divine act of incarnation an individual human

²⁶ Scotus explicitly says this in *Ordinatio* III 1: the individual human nature does not have a disposition for “dependence” because *alioquin violenter quiesceret in persona creata*.

nature is in fact “prevented” from existing independently (as a human person), or conversely, that by the divine act of creation it is “prevented” from existing dependently (in personal union with the Word). For although in these cases there is no hindrance or blocking involved, it is still true that, if human nature does not exist independently (as a human person), it must exist dependently (as God’s incarnation) and in both cases it is not man, but God who determines which actually is the case.

So both in the case of creation alone and the case of incarnation, there is an external factor causing each case; yet it imposes no restraint on, nor causes change in, the natural make-up of human beings. Scotus puts this in another way (see § 47) by remarking that the second case (human nature existing dependently) is in fact miraculous, because it is realized in only one case, yet “it does not run against human nature.” We can also put in terms of the “obediential potentiality” already mentioned: this possibility that human nature shares with all creation in regard to God, Scotus says, does not correspond to an inclination, it is ‘neutral’ which means: it can be actualized either way (by creation alone, or by incarnation), without being *inclined* to one way or the other.²⁷ It is an aptness (for either way) which is not a tendency (for one of these ways).

4. PERSONHOOD DEFINED BY INDEPENDENCE

Before we proceed, let us recapitulate Scotus’s attempt to define the feature proper to personhood. A mind-gifted nature²⁸ can only exist in an individual form, as *this* nature,

²⁷ In modern terminology, it could still be called a disposition, because the modern “disposition” is wider than “inclination” (see Guus Labooy, *Freedom and Dispositions. Two main concepts in Theology and Biological Psychiatrics: a Systematic Analysis*, Peter Lang, *Contributions to Philosophical Theology* 8, (Frankfurt a.M.: 2002), 99ff; e.g. glass has the disposition “breakability” (it can break), but it does not have the tendency to break (it only breaks by an external cause). See also above, n. 20.

²⁸ This is our translation of *rationalis* (in *natura rationalis*). In twelfth and thirteenth century theology it usually means “having a soul or mind” or, more specifically, “having will and intellect.” So with this term both mental powers, and not just one of them (discursive reasoning), are meant.

Scotus says; as such it can have four ways of existing, however. A mind-gifted individual nature can have

- (a) dependent existence (when it is actually “carried” by another being)
- (b) independent existence yet with the inclination for dependent existence
- (c) independent existence without the inclination for dependent existence
- (d) independent existence without the possibility of dependent existence

Scotus claims that only in case (c) and (d) is an individual mind-gifted nature called a person.²⁹ The difference between the two kinds of person basically is, that in case (c) personhood is a contingent fact, whereas in case (d) it is a necessary fact. If we call (c) “radical independence” and (d) “absolute independence,” we can say that there are two kinds of persons: person defined as an individual mind-gifted nature having radical independence, and person defined as an individual mind-gifted nature having absolute independence. There is created and uncreated personhood.

Of course, in the context of distinction III 1 Scotus’s analysis of personhood is largely confined to (a), the case of incarnation. Here, the fact that a created individual mind-gifted nature is not a person, means that it does not have *its own* personhood. It does have personhood, however. In the terminology of Scotus and his contemporaries, it is “personified.” Jesus’ individual human nature is personified *by another* personhood. In fact, Scotus adds, that other personhood can only be a divine personhood. In other words: just as human nature cannot exist as a general nature, but only as a “this,” so it cannot exist without having personhood; but it does not have to have its own personhood, it can be person in virtue of another being. It does not have to “stand on its own”; it can “stand in virtue of someone else.” Only in the first case is the individual human nature an independent agent. In a more modern way we might say that only when existing indepen-

²⁹ Case (b) is in fact the case of the soul separated from the body; but such a soul is not called a person.

dently a particular man really is a self, a subject of his own acts and possessor of his own being. In the second case all his natural features and activities (like having a body and acting by it, or having a mind and thinking or willing by it) cannot properly be called his own; ultimately, they are another person's.

Let us now take one more look at the positions (the two ways) rejected by Scotus, for it will throw some light on his own view beyond the clarification acquired so far.

(1) The first way mentioned by Scotus to understand personhood (*Lectura* III 1, 36) reads that an individual human nature needs an extra positive entity on top of individuality in order to be a person. We have already remarked that within the framework of Scotus's analysis this positive entity must be an independence which can only be found in God: the impossibility to depend on a different person (see §44). One might suggest that that "positive entity" may also be taken in a more modest form, not as "having necessary independence," but as "having an inclination for independence." Nowhere, however, does Scotus discuss this option.³⁰ Besides, this option would create the reverse problem compared to the option he does discuss. For just like human nature would exist in an "unnatural" way in human persons if there were a disposition for dependence, so human nature would exist in an unnatural way in Christ if there were a disposition for independence. In that case, in Jesus a natural human inclination has to be suppressed, or taken away. So it seems most consistent with Scotus's exposition in *Lectura* III 1 to suppose that human nature, which has no inclination for dependence, has no inclination for independence either.³¹ Human

³⁰ Not even in §47 where he speaks of *aptitudo ut non debeat*. If here Scotus would think of a disposition for independence, he would "drag a non" (L.M. de Rijk), for then he should have said "non [*habet natura*] *aptitudinem ut debeat*." But that would be an error quite unusual to Scotus's logical mind.

³¹ In his concise monographic article on incommunicability and independence as the Scotian prerogatives of personhood ("Unmittelbarkeit und Unabhängigkeit," *op.cit.*), Werner is right in saying that in some contexts Scotus's *aptitudo* does not mean "die natürliche Wesenstendenz" of human nature, but the *potentia obediens* (395) and that in human na-

nature only has the possibility to exist either dependently or independently, without any natural “drive” or “longing” or “potential” for the one or the other. The only requirement is that it is such that it *can* be taken in personal union with God. And this requirement is met because of a fundamental feature of its nature: that it is created.

(2) The second way mentioned by Scotus while defining personhood (*Lectura* III 1, 37) is closer to his own position. Yet there still is a major difference. Scotus rejects the view that in human persons the individual human nature has only actual independence. In this way it can still have an *inclination* for dependence. Duns simply claims that such an inclination does not exist. Human nature is more independent than this view assumes. In this view it is actually assumed that there is an inclination in human nature to be the incarnation of God. In Jesus human nature has actually dependent existence, so in him a deep-seated natural tendency of human nature is released and fulfilled. All human beings somehow *tend to* be in a personal union with God, which is only realized in Christ. Conversely, no human beings apart from Christ enjoy a supreme unfolding and fulfillment of *their* nature. In “ordinary people” something is blocked which is realized in Jesus.

It is remarkable that this second way can be recognized in some modern interpretations of Scotus’s Christology, like that of Heribert Mühlen, as well as in those of older Catholic Scotus scholars such as Déodat de Basly and Léon Seiller. These authors consider the disposition for dependence as

ture there is a “Möglichkeit ihres Wesens (...) von einer anderen Person abhängig sein zu können auch wenn letzteres nich auf einer besonderen Hinneigung beruht” (403). To our mind he is not right, however, in saying that *this aptitudo* is an “Eignung als *inclinatio* zur unabhängigen Existenz” (395), nor in saying: “Weil trotz der Tendenz der menschlichen Natur zur Unabhängigkeit und Unmittelbarkeit die Möglichkeit des Gegenteils eben nicht ausgeschlossen ist” (398). Other Scotus texts can very well be read in line with the interpretation given by us (e.g. *Quodlibet* XIX 90 saying that “my own nature is disposed to subsist in itself and not inclined to depend upon an extrinsic person”; or *Ordinatio* III 1, 54 saying that in a nature, which is per se, there is no *aptitudo dependentiae* even if she exists dependently.

a natural inclination in human nature, which in Christ can fully and freely take its course; or they consider the obediential potency as an “openness” of human nature, which defines its relational character and which is full-filled in Christ. So in human persons there is a potential that is suppressed or unfulfilled (that is how they explain Scotus’s “negation”). Moreover, they tend to identify the disposition for dependence, or the obediential potency, with the desire for God (*desiderium naturale*) which is supposed to be a disposition belonging to human nature, to be fulfilled by God.³² For Scotus, however, in human nature there is no tendency to depend on God (to be an incarnation of God); nor is obediential potency for dependence a kind of inclination or openness *to be fulfilled*. So whether or not there is a *desiderium naturale* in human nature, to Scotus’s mind it is not connected with incarnation.

By rejecting the second way to define personhood Scotus rejects the view that incarnation liberates and fulfills a natural tendency (for instance, a natural desire) present in every human being. Put in a positive way, Scotus maintains that human nature is complete both in ordinary humans and in Christ. In this (middle) way Scotus has taken a position capable of safeguarding two things at once: the independence of creation, especially man, and the freedom of God to become

³² See M. Burger, *Personalität im Horizont der absoluten Prädestination: Untersuchungen zur Christologie des Johannes Duns Scotus und ihrer Rezeption in modernen theologischen Ansätzen* (Münster: Aschendorf Verlag, 1994), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, Neue Folge 40: 166-90 (on De Basly), 191-95 (on Seiller), 203-49 (on Mühlen). To give one example: Burger summarizes Mühlen by saying (251): “Der Mensch soll die in der hypostatistischen Union vorgebildete Relation zur göttlichen Person sich ontisch zu eigen machen; er muss seinen Selbststand in gewisser Weise aufgeben, begibt sich in Abhängigkeit.” In her own position, which is hard to get in focus, Burger stays closer to Scotus, yet does not seem to leave his *secunda via* altogether. It reads that in Christ the independence of the human person is replaced by the divine person, who is fully relational – for in the Trinity independence is translated in terms of communication. This relational personhood (the “who”) fulfills the individual mind-gifted nature of man (the “what”), and in this way a universal human possibility is realized (see e.g. 256). Christ, however, remains unique; unlike him, “normal” human beings will never be able to lose the *ultima solitudo*.

incarnate. Creation depends on God for its very existence, but as such it receives its *own* existence. By being created a human being receives its own identity, without the inclination to be something else. This allows God the liberty to extend *his* self-identity by making a different nature his own. He does not *have to* do so in order to fulfill the human beings he created. Nevertheless it is true that this one man “assumed” by God shows what human nature can be at its very best.

5. PERSONHOOD DEFINED BY INCOMMUNICABILITY

So far we have seen, with Scotus, that an individual human nature can be taken in personal unity with God. This is still rather imprecise, however, for Scotus says that this nature is taken into a personal unity not with God as such, but with a divine person – in fact the second divine person, the Word. Why these extra qualifications? We have already touched upon them, but let us now turn to them. Of course, here Scotus is faithful to mainstream Christianity, offering his own understanding of this article of belief. So let us follow him in his explication of the main reasons for believing it, since it will reveal an important detail in his concept of person.

We have seen that in Jesus an individual human nature is not independent, but dependent on another being. This other being is, and can only be, another *person*, in fact a divine person, a person who of itself has another nature, the divine nature. So why, we may ask, does Scotus think that in Jesus the individual human nature does not depend on the divine nature?³³ The reason is that an individual nature can only depend on something incommunicable (*incommunicabilis*),³⁴

³³ We may also ask: why a person of *another nature*? In *Lectura* III 1 Scotus does not argue for that, he just assumes it. To our mind it is another feature pointing at a shift in the person terminology when transposed from the human to the divine level (see below, § 6 and 7).

³⁴ In other Scotian terms: only something incommunicable can be the end term (*potest terminare*) of something communicable. This can also be put in terms of dependence (see below in this section, n. 38): something can only depend on something independent – which is quite illuminating in itself, for otherwise there would be an infinite regress.

something that cannot be communicated, or be common, to more than one. However, from traditional Trinitarian theology, which Scotus accepted with heart and mind, he derives the idea that the divine individual *nature* is *not* incommunicable, for in virtue of generation and procession it is common to three divine persons. As we have seen, the individual human nature is not incommunicable either, because it can be the nature of a human person, but also the nature of a divine person. God incarnate and human beings can have it in common. There is one major difference, however: in more than one human person the individual human nature cannot exist without being multiplied, whereas in God the three divine persons have the one and only individual divine nature. Only in God, Scotus says, do we find this supreme kind of communication without multiplication. “Outside God” there is more than one individual nature if there is more than one person.³⁵ The reason for this is that only God’s nature is infinite. Multiplication of individual natures is only possible – and will necessarily occur when there is more than one person – when the natures are finite.³⁶

From this Trinitarian clarification it becomes clear that Scotus distinguishes between two kinds of individuality: the individuality of a nature and the incommunicability of a person. The first kind of individuality is the “finishing touch” in the ontological structure of the essence of a thing. Finite (created) things have general and more specific features (a human being, for instance, is an animated being which is mind-gifted at that); but they also have a most specific feature: being individual. For Scotus, as we already noted, this final feature is not derived from matter, nor is it accidental; it is an essential feature. Yet, it is distinct from another kind of essential-individual feature, namely the one called personhood, for we can always ask: whose individual nature? This body and soul: to whom do they belong? This additional individuating feature is also essential because an individual

³⁵ This is also true for Christ: if we take his person and a human person, we have two individual human natures.

³⁶ See N. den Bok, “A beautiful mind. A review of Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*,” in *Ars Disputandi*, <http://www.ArsDisputandi.org> 7 (2007), par [1]-[21].

nature can only exist when having a “bearer” or subject (*suppositum*), which only in the case of a nature endowed with intellect and will is called a person (*persona*).

As we have seen, being the subject of a nature is defined in a rather particular way by Scotus. For him, a human being’s individuality (*haecceitas*) is the finishing property of his nature which nevertheless does not make him a person. A human being is a person in virtue of the fact that his individual nature exists independently. Traditionally, however, being a person is defined in terms of individuality. In the twelfth and thirteenth century one of the favorite terms for the kind of individuality proper to a subject or person is incommunicability (*incommunicabilitas*). We already observed Scotus resuming this term,³⁷ but now we must add that he does so by actually giving it a new meaning. As can be expected from his analysis of personhood so far, Scotus defines incommunicability not in terms of individuality, but in terms of independence.³⁸ A subject is an individual nature existing independently – a person is a mind-gifted individual nature existing independently.

This Scotian redefinition of incommunicability has an important consequence: a *human* person is not individual in virtue of his personhood, but in virtue of his essentially individual nature. The reason is rather obvious, for what is negated, in the case of a human person, is in itself not an individual, but a general feature of the individual human nature. The negation of dependence, Scotus says in *Lectura*

³⁷ See esp. *Lectura* III 1, §§85-86, where he says, in a rather Porretan way, that there are two kinds of *incommunicabilitas*. Things cannot be “common to more than one” (*communicabilis*) either by their “what” (*quod*) or by their “by which” (*quo*). A person, Scotus says, is incommunicable in both respects, an individual nature is only incommunicable in the first respect.

³⁸ This is clear from the *Lectura*, but even more so from the *Ordinatio*. See e.g. *Ordinatio* III 1, 84-85 (in our translation): “there is no positive entity added to the individuality by which the complete individual becomes incommunicable, but on the contrary, a negation of communicability or dependence (which means: not capable of being communicated) is added to individuality. The negation of communicability or dependence can be understood in three ways (...) factual, possible and dispositional dependence (...).”

III 1 (§42), is not by itself a “this” (*de se haec*). This means, conversely, that the feature by which a human person is only this human person is the individuality of his nature, not its independent existence. For God things are different, however, since God’s individual nature is “carried” by three subjects or persons, not one. God has a Trinitarian character. Therefore, that which makes a *divine* person only this person cannot be defined by the individuality of his divine nature. It must be defined by an additional feature. For this feature, of course, Scotus would suggest independent existence, which in God must be necessary independent existence. A divine person, then, is the divine individual nature having necessarily independent existence. By saying this, however, we have only said that in God, like in human beings, nature and person are distinct ontological features, so that the divine nature must have a ‘bearer’ as well – at least one bearer, that is. Christian belief maintains, however, that the divine nature has in fact three bearers, or to put it conversely, that there are three subjects or persons having the one divine nature. These persons all have necessarily independent existence, which distinguishes them as persons from the divine nature. Yet, by that feature they cannot be distinguished from each other.

Scotus follows mainstream Augustinian Trinitarian theology by saying that the divine persons are distinguished from each other by mutual relations of origin only (see § 62). The divine persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – are internally distinct by generation and procession.³⁹ This does not seriously affect the fact that they *share* the property of personhood defined, by Scotus, as “having the divine individual nature existing in a necessarily independent way.” It does imply, however, that divine persons have a distinctive essential property *in addition to* that of independent existence, a property which human persons do not seem to have.

³⁹ For the nature of these two kinds of production and the differences involved in them, see A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, E. Dekker, N.W. den Bok and A.J. Beck, *Duns Scotus on divine love. Texts and Commentary on Goodness and Freedom, God and Humans* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2003), 208ff and esp. Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005), 131ff.

Here we stumble on a real equivocity in the Scotian concept of person, which Scotus does not seem to have realized.

He did realize, however, that there is a major difference between human and divine personhood. We already pointed at this major difference between anthropological and Trinitarian personhood: a human person is actually incommunicable, whereas a divine person is necessarily incommunicable. The independent existence of an individual human nature, by which it is a person, is a synchronically contingent fact, but the independent existence of the individual divine nature is a synchronically necessary fact. For this reason Scotus can say that a divine person is more perfect than a human person. Only a divine person is complete (§ 91).⁴⁰

We are now able to finish our analysis of Christological personhood. Since the divine nature is not carried by one person, but by three persons, that nature cannot be, in turn, the bearer of the individual human nature in Christ. The person having an individual human nature in Christ must be one of the divine persons. According to classical Christianity this person is in fact the second divine person, the Word or Son. In *Lectura* III 1 Scotus simply presupposes this, without arguing for it. He only explains why the divine essence cannot be the end term of dependence of the individual human nature.⁴¹ Something can only be such an end term – that on which the individual human nature rests as on its bearer (*suppositum*) – if it is not just individual, but incommunicable; and it is incommunicable only if it exists independently. So it has to be a person, a divine person.

6. PERSONHOOD, HUMAN AND DIVINE

We have seen how Scotus in *Lectura* III 1 develops his concept of person along the lines of human personhood fit to function in a Christological context. We have also seen how

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ordinatio* III 1,51.

⁴¹ *Terminare* means “to be the end term (*terminus*) of a relation,” in our case a relation of dependence. The end term of a relation has to be something non-relative (*absolutum*), like the individual human nature. The divine nature cannot be an end term, Scotus says, because it is communicable (see above in this section).

he offers some necessary extrapolations into the context of Trinitarian theology. Let us summarize his view and pursue these extrapolations a little more, in order to see the range and impact of his new conception.

As is well known, for Boethius the distinctive feature of being a person is individuality.⁴² However, whether we take individuality in Boethius' own Ancient-minded sense or in the new Scotian sense of essential "thisness," we would still have to conclude that not only every human being, but also God is a person, one person, and that Christ is two persons. In order to avoid these consequences and remain faithful to the insight gained by the early church – holding that God is a trinity of persons, whereas Christ is only one person having two natures – Scotus considers independence, not individuality, as the distinctive feature of personhood. Independence presupposes individuality, for only an individual nature can exist independently. The reverse is not true, however, since an individual nature can exist either independently or dependently.

To Scotus's mind, a person is an individual mind-gifted nature actually existing independently without having an inclination to exist dependently (or independently, for that matter). In this way *Lectura* III 1 in fact develops a univocal concept for the distinctive characteristic of personhood,⁴³ since it is valid for both human and divine personhood. However, the actual independent existence of an individual mind-gifted nature can be a contingent fact or a necessary fact – here, we have a fundamental difference between human and divine personhood.

This concept of personhood enables Scotus to maintain that essential individuality or haecceity is the *ultimate positive* entity in the ontological structure of beings. Personhood does not add another positive entity to this individuality.

⁴² *Persona individua substantia rationalis naturae est*. Scotus largely followed Richard of St. Victor in his famous criticism of this definition by redefining person as an *exsistentia incommunicabilis* of a mind-gifted nature.

⁴³ This, of course, is not the same as a univocal definition of a person. For a definition of person all essential properties of a person must be included, not only its distinctive feature (*proprium*, see above, n.10).

Personhood only refers to the fact that an individual nature does not depend on something else, but “stands on itself.” In this way personhood is defined by a negative qualification (“does not depend on”), which actually is a positive feature (“standing on itself”), although it remains true that it is not a positive *entity* added to the individual nature.⁴⁴

Now the independence of an individual mind-gifted nature is also described as incommunicability. As we have said, this incommunicability cannot be taken in the traditional sense of individuality, since being independent is in itself a general property. Yet it does seem to refer to some kind of individuality, for it is said to refer to each human being, to Jesus, to God the Father, to God the Son and to God the Holy Spirit: each one of them can only be *just this one*, a non-exchangeable personal being. How is it possible to account for the *individuality* of these singular “beings,” all of whom in traditional theological language are called person (*persona*)?

Let us start with Christology: how does Scotus explain the individuality of the one Jesus, who is the one unique God having assumed an individual human nature? If in Christ two natures are united in one person, how does he account for this oneness? Within his analysis of personhood Scotus must say that Jesus is (a) an individual human being because of his individual human nature; that he (b) has the one unique divine nature as well, so that he must also be individual as God somehow; and that he (c) is only one person because he is one divine subject (*persona*) having both the individual human nature and the divine nature.

We have already pointed at the fact that Scotus cannot simply say, instead of (c), that Jesus is one individual because of *the only one* divine person who is the bearer or subject of the one divine nature. For unlike in human beings, in God there is no singular personhood. In God there is only a triple, Trinitarian personhood. This entails that the *individuality* of Jesus cannot be defined by his divine *nature*, which must

⁴⁴ It still is difficult to see the difference between a positive entity (which “being independent” is *not*, as Scotus claims for a human person) and a positive ontological aspect (which independence is, if it is necessary, as Scotus claims of the divine person).

be individual somehow since only God can have it.⁴⁵ In this respect the situation for human persons is different, because their individuality is defined by the individual human *nature* which each person has, and not by its independence. The individuality of Jesus, however, must be defined by a divine *person*, in fact by (only) one of the three modes in which the individual divine nature is necessarily *independent*.

We may ask whether this conclusion is not unnecessarily complicated. For it is difficult to see why the divine nature is not necessarily independent itself.⁴⁶ The divine nature cannot exist in another being than God. So why is it impossible to say that the divine nature, like the individual human nature, exists in one divine person? Even when we suppose, with classical Trinitarianism, that there cannot be one divine person, that there must be three (and only three) divine persons, we still need a qualification *on top of* independence in order to define divine personhood, simply because necessary independence is what all three divine persons have *in common*.

For Scotus, drawing on Augustinian Trinitarian theology resumed and elaborated by his illustrious predecessors such as Anselm and Richard of St. Victor, that feature distinctive for divine personhood must be a relation of origin explained in terms of perfect mental processions.⁴⁷ The divine persons are distinct from each other in virtue of specific relations of origin produced by the “acts” of God’s perfect mental powers, knowing and willing. The divine nature is communicated from the Father to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. In this way the individuality of the divine persons is explained in terms of very specific communications because of which the

⁴⁵ Scotus is reluctant to apply his notion of *haecceitas* to the reality of God, although he does say that the divine nature is *de se haec* (*Ordinatio* II 3.1.1 n.39, quoted and translated by Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, 167). Cross takes the liberty to call the divine nature, as Duns sees it, a universal (e.g. in *Duns Scotus on God*, 165ff).

⁴⁶ Cf. Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, 181: “To be independent is to be *per se* subsistent. There is only one independent item in God, namely, the divine essence. But each divine person is *per se* subsistent (...) *derivatively* so.”

⁴⁷ Namely, as the generation of the perfect knowing from the perfect memory and the procession of perfect willing from both. See further, R. Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, 203-32.

individual divine nature is common to three persons. Now we can see that independence and incommunicability cannot be identified after all, at least not in Trinitarian theology.⁴⁸ Because of their internal communications the divine persons are different from each other; but the necessary independence by which they have the divine nature is a feature they share.

This, of course, accounts for another serious equivocity in the concept of person. There is quite a contrast between one human being who also is one person and the one divine being who is – three persons. This contrast, however, seems at least partly based on the fact that the same word (*persona*) is used in different meanings. So we may wonder whether man is not made “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:26) *more* than Scotus’s *terminology* suggests. For it does not seem impossible that God, too, might be called one person consisting of, or having, three – *personae*.⁴⁹

Let us recapitulate Scotus’s concept of person by visualizing its main constitutive features, for

God:	Christ:	a human being:
(individual)	(individual)	(individual)
divine nature	divine nature	human nature
independent	independent	independent,
necessary	necessary	contingent
+ specific relation of origin	+ specific relation of origin <i>united to</i> (individual) human nature dependent contingent	

⁴⁸ A *prima facie* reason for this is found by asking how *communicating* the divine nature makes it *independent*.

⁴⁹ Cf. the English *persona*. For God this term must refer to an essential “role” embracing his entire mental life.

When we summarize this recapitulation, we get a surprisingly modern result: a person is an individual mind-gifted nature existing independently.⁵⁰ We have detected a peculiar shift in this concept when it is transferred from the human to the divine level. In Trinitarian theology an extra feature comes in, a relation of origin. Apart from that feature, nothing seems to prevent us from saying that the concept of person just mentioned applies to human beings and to God – to the one God.

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⁵⁰ Cf. above, n. 28.