

William of Ware on the distinction of divine attributes¹. A question of 'sensitivity'?

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Extremely interesting path from a historical-philosophical point of view (condenses all previous opinions) and from a conceptual point of view (outlines the distinction of reason ['formal?'] as independent from intellectual, divine or human, activity).

Chronological history of previous opinions ('unbalanced' in fidelity and precision on Henry of Ghent, who is the 'real' interlocutor in the question)

- 1) pre-thomists (but also Egidio Romano): imperfection of human intellect
 - a. "Opinio una est quod distinctio attributorum accipitur partim ad intra propter summam perfectionem et excessum a parte divinae essentiae, et partim ab extra ab intellectu nostro propter defectum ipsius" .
 - b. "Pluralitas solum est in intellectu nostro, et ista pluralitas est solum secundum rationem"

- 2) Thomas Aquinas: distinction of attributes derived from the human intellect. It emphasizes the supreme simplicity of the divine essence²
 - a. "Dicunt alii quod ista distinctio attributorum accipitur per comparisonem ad extra et non ad intra (...). Cum igitur attributa differunt sola ratione in divinis, ista differentia accipitur a differentia reali illarum perfectionum in creaturis tantum; igitur differentia attributorum accipitur a creaturis"

- 3) Henry of Ghent: distinction of attributes derived from the divine intellect (Henry's novelty), without reference to creatures. It emphasizes a quasi-potentiality 'already' present by nature in the divine essence
 - a. "Dicunt alii sic quod essentia divina potest dupliciter considerari (...). Est ergo in Deo omnimoda unitas sine omni ratione pluralitatis in essentia divina absolute considerata, et similiter ut cadit in actu simplicis intelligentiae secundum modum quo habet esse in se, sed tamen in eo est multitudo attributorum in quantum intellectus circa ipsam essentiam **negotiat** distinguendo penes se quae sunt in essentia adunata"

¹ I have greatly benefited from the work conducted by Garrett R. Smith and incorporated into his doctoral dissertation entitled *The problem of divine attributes from Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*, University of Notre Dame (Indiana), December 2013. That dissertation also contains a provisional edition of William of Ware's Question of Divine Attributes.

² In reality, however, Thomas is not averse to attributing some *fundamentum in re*, independent of the human intellect, to the multiplicity attributed: Thomas Aquinas, *I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, co.: "Et sic patet quartum, quod pluralitas istorum nominum non tantum est ex parte intellectus nostri formantis diversas conceptiones de Deo, quae dicuntur diversae rationes, ut ex dictis, art. anteced., patet, sed ex parte ipsius Dei, in quantum scilicet est aliquid in Deo correspondens omnibus istis conceptionibus, scilicet plena et omnimoda ipsius perfectio, secundum quam contingit quod quodlibet nomen significantium istas conceptiones, de Deo vere et proprie dicitur; non autem ita quod aliqua diversitas vel multiplicitas ponatur in re, quae Deus est, ratione istorum attributorum".

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- i. The divine essence can be considered in two ways:
 1. As an absolute nature: supreme simplicity and no plurality (attention: **nisi almost in potentia tantum!**)
 2. As a 'truth' understood by the intellect: two further sub-modalities of understanding:
 - a. Effectively understood as simple nature: no plurality of reason
 - b. Understood in a 'constructive' way (*negotiatum*): that 'quasi-potentiality' of attributes multiplicity takes place (attention: **reducendo quasi de potentia in actum!**)

4) Godfrey of Fontaines: distinction of attributes derived from the divine intellect (importance of Henry of Ghent's opinion), but with necessary reference to creatures (recovery of a position closer to Thomas). It emphasizes the dependence of the multiplicity of attributes by the confrontation with creation, but one can no longer ignore the divine intellectual activity in the 'discovery' of this richness

- a. "Alia est opinio quod differentia attributorum accipitur per comparisonem ad extra. In hoc tamen differt a praecedentibus quia ista ponit quod ista differentia fiat per actum intellectus divini distinguendo istas perfectiones attributales in se ipso per comparisonem tamen ad consimilia extra in creaturis quae differunt ibi"

William of Ware's position: do we go 'beyond the intellect'? The implicit 'tension' of Henry of Ghent's position explodes, namely that the divine intellect and will are distinct independently of their own activity

5) *Opinio propria*: distinction of attributes as a distinction of reason, independent of intellectual, divine or human activity

- a. "Alia est opinio quod circumscripto omni intellectu creato et increato adhuc ista attributa differunt ratione"
 - i. "istae perfectiones attributales ibi sunt unitissime et verissime" (De divinis nominibus, c. 5)
 1. Unitissime: "tollitur omnis compositio quae arguit imperfectionem, et est ibi maxima simplicitas"
 - a. 'Neoplatonism' as the supreme way of unity?
 2. Verissime: "sunt ibi verissime perfectiones talium attributorum et proprietater, ita quod essentia divina omni intellectu circumscripto habet rationem movendi ex proprietate sua voluntatem, similiter et intellectum, et per consequens est ibi verum et bonum in quantum essentia divina sic est nata movere voluntatem et intellectum"

b. 'Actualizations' different and independent from the intellectual or willed acts of the same divine essence: "veritas ex proprietate sua aliter habet immutare quam bonitas ex proprietate sua (...) quia ibi erit vera ratio boni ex hoc quod essentia divina nata est sic movere voluntatem,

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et similiter ratio veri ex hoc quod nata est movere intellectum circumscripto omni intellectu"

- i. Anteriority of the distinction on the operative potentialities
- ii. "**Formales rationes** obiectorum suorum ante omnem operationem sunt distinctae"
- iii. "Et tunc habebimus distincta attributa, videlicet **potentiam** (nb: intellect/will), **actum** (nb: intellection/feeling) et **obiectum** (nb: verum/bonum) **sine omni operatione intellectus**"

c. "Dico ergo quod circumscribendo omnem operationem intellectus creati et increati distinguentem et operantem distinctionem attributorum, attributa differunt in divina essentia pro eo quod ex parte sua nata sunt diversimode immutare intellectum et voluntatem"

6) Duns Scotus: the formal distinction. 'Anticipated' by William of Ware's observations?

- a. "Est ergo ibi distinctio praecedens intellectum omni modo, et est ista, quod sapientia est in re ex natura rei, et bonitas in re ex natura rei, - sapientia autem in re, formaliter non est bonitas in re "³

³ Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 8, q. 4 (ed. Vaticana, vol. IV, p. 261).