

**«QUÆ IN HAC QUÆSTIONE TRADIT DOCTOR
VIDENTUR HUMANUM INGENIUM SUPERARE».
SCOTUS, ANDRÉS, BONET, ZERBI, AND TROMBETTA
CONFRONTING THE NATURE OF METAPHYSICS***

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«Ad dubium sextum <Doctor> disputat, quomodo esse, et primitatem esse, demonstrat metaphysicus de Deo; et ostendit eiusdem scientiæ esse, demonstrare passionem communem simplicem de subiecto, et alteram partem passionis disiunctæ; cuiusmodi est respectu entis, primum, vel non primum. Certe, quæ in hac quæstione tradit Doctor, videntur humanum ingenium superare»
MAURITIUS HIBERNICUS, *Castigatio* to JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS,
Quæstiones super libros Metaphysicorum, I, q. 1.¹

I. The framework of the late medieval debate on the subject/object of metaphysics²

I. a. THE ROOTS OF THE DEBATE: SOME ARISTOTELIAN TEXTS

The doctrines formulated by late medieval thinkers on the nature of metaphysics and the subject/object of this science are rooted in a debate that at the end of the 13th century was already sixteen centuries old. Some statements contained in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics* represent the roots of this debate.

In the former work, the Stagirite provides a definition of scientific knowledge and incorporates knowledge through demonstration into it. We have scientific knowledge of a thing – writes Aristotle – when we know the causes of this thing as the causes of it and, in addition, we know that this thing cannot be otherwise³. Knowing a thing through demonstration – continues the Stagirite – enables us to acquire scientific knowledge of that thing⁴. Now, there are three things involved in demonstrations: what is demonstrated, i.e. the conclusion, which expresses the fact that an attribute belongs *per se* to a genus; the axioms; and the subject genus (*ghénos ypokeímenon*), whose *per se* attributes are revealed by the demonstration⁵. And he pursues: each science, with respect to its own demonstrations, possesses the genus which is proper to it, and to which both principles and conclusions of the demonstrations of that specific science belong⁶.

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¹ MAURITIUS DE PORTU HIBERNICUS, *Castigationes scotice metaphysices*, on SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, in JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Opera omnia*, ed. by L. Wadding, Sumptibus Laurentii Durand, Lugduni 1639 (fac. Olms, Hildesheim 1968), vol. 4, p. 521b.

² Let me recall that a more complete version of this part of my essay appears in M. FORLIVESI, *Approaching the Debate on the Subject of Metaphysics between Later Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: The Ancient and Medieval Antecedents*, «Medioevo», 34 (2009), in print.

³ ARIST., *An. post.*, I, 2, 71b.

⁴ ARIST., *An. post.*, I, 2, 71b.

⁵ ARIST., *An. post.*, I, 7, 75a-b.

⁶ ARIST., *An. post.*, I, 28, 87b.

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle does not use the notion of ‘subject genus’⁷, and yet he provides at least four different descriptions of what metaphysics deals with. In the first book of the *Metaphysics*, we read that all men suppose what is called wisdom to deal with the search for the first causes and the principles of things⁸. In the fourth book we read that there is a science that considers being as being and the attributes belonging to it in virtue of its own nature⁹. In the sixth book our author develops the following argument: if there is something which is eternal and immovable and separate, then the knowledge of it belongs to a science which is distinct from physics and from mathematics; but if the divine exists, it exists in things of this sort; hence, the science that deals with them is called theology¹⁰. Finally, in the seventh book he writes that the question concerning ‘what being is’ is equivalent to the question concerning ‘what substance is’¹¹.

This does not mean that the *Metaphysics* contains no suggestions useful to understand metaphysics as a unitary science, but these very suggestions give rise to further questions. In the first book we read that the wise man is he who knows all things. Aristotle immediately specifies that this does not mean that the wise man has knowledge of each single thing; and yet, some lines below, he reiterates that he who possesses universal knowledge must know all things¹². Furthermore, in the same page he moves from the theme of universals to that of the causes¹³. Thus, we might wonder whether, in such a context, by ‘universal’ Aristotle means ‘that which is the cause of more than one thing’, instead of ‘that which is common’. If it were so, the unity of metaphysics appears to rest on the fact that this science deals with the first causes of all things.

This doctrine can easily be combined with the theory expressed in the fourth book. On the one hand, the first book states that there is a science which is concerned with the first causes; on the other hand, the fourth book states that there is a science which is concerned with being and its attributes; thus, it is possible to conceive of a single science dealing both with principles and with the attributes of being.

However, in the first chapter of the sixth book Aristotle seems to propose a different criterion for grounding the coherence of this science. Here he writes that physics deals with non-separate and non-immovable realities; mathematics (or at least some parts of mathematics) with immovable but non-separate realities; first philosophy with realities which are both separate and immovable¹⁴. Consequently, the different ‘distances’ from matter and from motion appear to be the roots both of the distinction between the different theoretical sciences and of their intrinsic unity.

I. b. SHAPING THE PROBLEM: THE MEDIEVAL THOUGHT

The problems that arise reading these texts by Aristotle were not transmitted to Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages in the form of a historiographical debate; rather, they spread in the form of a theoretical reflection that thrived in late ancient, Arabic, and late medieval intellectual speculation, giving rise to several doctrines concerning the nature of the subject/object of a science and, in particular, concerning the question of the subject/object of metaphysics.

⁷ Actually, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle sometimes uses ‘genus’ to refer to ‘what a science is concerned with’, but he neither says that being is a genus nor that metaphysics is concerned with a ‘genus’, nor does he explain what the ‘genus’ possibly studied by metaphysics is. It is true that in *Met.*, I, 1, 1026a he writes that the highest science must deal with the highest genus, but the latter is the genus of things that exist separately and are immovable. In short: in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle does not isolate a purely epistemological meaning of ‘genus’ from the metaphysical meaning of this notion.

⁸ ARIST., *Met.*, I, 1, 981b.

⁹ ARIST., *Met.*, IV, 1, 1003a.

¹⁰ ARIST., *Met.*, VI, 1, 1026a.

¹¹ ARIST., *Met.*, VII, 1, 1028b.

¹² ARIST., *Met.*, I, 2, 982a.

¹³ ARIST., *Met.*, I, 2, 982a-b.

¹⁴ The correct reading of this passage of the *Metaphysics* is the object of a widely known philological controversy; yet, it is certain that most medieval readers adopted the version I have just summarized. See also – primarily as a general introduction to the question of the subject/object of metaphysics in medieval thought – P. PORRO, *Introduzione. Dalla ‘Metafisica’ alla metafisica, e ritorno: una storia medievale*, «Quaestio», 5 (2005), pp. IX-LI, in particular XIX-XX.

Actually, there is a component of the debate that remains essentially unchanged through the centuries: it is the question concerning whether and how metaphysics deals with real beings, substances, accidents, spiritual substances, material substances, beings of reason.

By contrast, other components of the problem undergo changes and developments. Since Alexander of Aphrodisias, the ‘subject genus’ of the *Posterior Analytics* becomes a ‘subject’, i.e. an epistemological genus as distinct from the metaphysical genus. The Arabic and late medieval thought modifies and interprets the very epistemological role of this subject in a plurality of ways, so that from the last quarter of the 13th century the notion of ‘subject of a science’ is frequently coupled with the notion of ‘object of a science’, becoming variously interlaced with it.

Therefore, in spite of the fact that, after the reception of Arabic philosophy among Latin authors, most academic thinkers identify the subject/object of metaphysics with being as being, nonetheless it is clear that the different writers give different meanings to the syntagma ‘being as being’.

In order to further outline the framework of the later-medieval debates, we might say that, along the Middle Ages, at least four questions contributed to determine the nature of metaphysics and of its subject/object.

The first concerns the degree of penetration of metaphysics into the objects it considers. In other words, assuming that metaphysics deals with being as being, or with created being, or with substance, one may ask whether it deals with all beings – or created beings, or substances – in detail or just in general, and whether it studies all beings according to the same degree of ‘pervasiveness’.

A second question concerns the role assigned to God and to the separate substances within metaphysics. Assuming that metaphysics deals with being as being, one may ask whether this means that it deals solely with *rationes generalissimæ*, or with *rationes* proper to the separate substances as well. Furthermore, assuming that these *rationes generalissimæ* leave out matter, one may ask whether this independence from matter simply rests on the intrinsic nature of these *rationes*, thus is grasped by the mind in virtue of a simple act of abstraction; or it rests on the – at least possible – existence of the spiritual substances, thus is grasped by the mind only thanks to a demonstration of the non-contradictoriness of these substances¹⁵.

A third question concerns the ‘epistemology’ that governs the role of the subject/object of a science. A cursory reading of the texts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is enough to perceive that the different authors assign different meanings to the notions of subject and/or object of a science. It follows that, in order to understand and situate the thought of an author, we need more than determining that he maintains, for instance, that God is cause of the subject of metaphysics, or rather that God is part of this subject; we also need to determine what epistemological role he assigns to the subject/object of a science, if he distinguishes between subject and object of a science or not, and how he presents, or removes, this distinction.

A fourth question concerns the relationship between metaphysics, or rational theology, and revealed theology. Assuming that both metaphysics (or at least rational theology) and revealed theology deal with the separate substances, and in particular with God, what is the relationship

¹⁵ A historically important instance of this issue is contained in the first book of the medieval Latin translation of Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*. Here we read that «consideratio de substantia in quantum est ens vel est substantia, vel de corpore in quantum est substantia, et de mensura et numero in quantum habent esse et quomodo habent esse, et de rebus formalibus quae non sunt in materia, vel, si sint in materia, non tamen corporea, et quomodo sunt illae, et quis modus est magis proprius illis, separatim per se debet haberi. Non enim potest esse subiectum alicuius scientiarum de sensibilibus nec alicuius scientiarum de eo quod habet esse in sensibilibus. Nam aestimatio est expoliatio a sensibilibus; haec autem sunt de universitate eorum quae habent esse separata a materia. Manifestum est enim quod esse substantiae, in quantum est substantia tantum, non pendet a materia; alioquin non esset substantia nisi sensibilis» (AVICENNA Latinus, *Liber de philosophia prima*, lib. 1, 2). We read also that «ad hoc ut ens sit substantia non eget esse naturale vel disciplinale (hic enim sunt substantiae aliae praeter illas)» (*Id.*, lib. 1, 4). These statements appear to signify what follows: the autonomy of being (or at least of the *esse substantiae*) from matter depends upon the fact that separate substances do exist; consequently, also the awareness of the autonomy of being depends upon the cognition of the fact that those substances actually exist. Nonetheless, a few pages further we read that «res et ens et necesse talia sunt quod statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus se» (*Id.*, lib. 1, 5). Well, this statement appears to mean the opposite of the previous ones: now the *ratio* of being seems to be generated in the mind before every other notion and not developable any further.

existing between these two disciplines? The problem can be formulated as follows: either metaphysics (or rational theology) and revealed theology have the same subject/object, or they do not; if they do, then they are in fact the same science, thus either revealed theology is subordinated to metaphysics or metaphysics is subordinated to revealed theology; if they do not, then it is necessary to clarify what is – and how great is – the difference separating them.

II. The case of John Duns Scotus¹⁶

II. a. APPROACHING THE QUESTION OF THE NATURE OF METAPHYSICS: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL ROLE OF THE SUBJECT/OBJECT OF A SCIENCE

In order to understand Scotus's position on the four questions seen above, it may be useful to investigate the thought of this author starting from his doctrine about the epistemological role of the subject, or object, of a science.

The Subtle Doctor's lexicon concerning the subject of a science undergoes a slight evolution. In his *Quæstiones super libros Metaphysicorum* he writes that, wishing to designate what a science deals with (namely, its *materia circa quam*), the term '*obiectum*' is preferable to the term '*subiectum*', just as we prefer to speak about the object, instead of the subject, of virtues¹⁷. Nevertheless, in this work he ordinarily uses the noun '*obiectum*' as correlated with the terms '*potentia*' and '*habitus*'¹⁸, whereas, in order to designate what a science deals with, he uses the noun '*subiectum*'. In the *Ordinatio* things change. Here the term '*obiectum*' (taken precisely in the sense of 'subject/object of a science') is superimposed on the term '*subiectum*' and replaces it, whereas the latter is assigned the task of designating the subject of the properties and of the predicates that are considered in a science¹⁹.

On the contrary, the relationship between the subject/object and its properties and the question of the knowability of the latter are described in the same way both in the *Quæstiones* and in the *Ordinatio*: the subject is constituted in a definite way; hence it includes properties, i.e. predicates, and it includes them either essentially, or virtually²⁰, or – as we shall see below – potentially.

As a result, three types of intellectual *habitus* are possible. The first type formally refers to one single state of affairs to be considered (*complexum speculandum*). The second type refers to this state of affairs only virtually, as it is formally oriented not to consider this state of affairs, but something virtually contained in it. Each *habitus* of the first type refers to one single knowable; contrariwise, the *habitus* of the second type can concern a multiplicity of states of affairs (*complexa*). When taken as a *habitus*²¹, a theoretical science cannot properly be a *habitus* of the first type; rather, it can be a *habitus* of the second type. In this case, its subject/object (and the *notitia* of

¹⁶ Among the essays on Scotus's thought worthy of reading, one can mention the recent work by D. DEMANGE, *Jean Duns Scot. La théorie du savoir*, Vrin, Paris 2007 («Sic et non»), in particular pp. 79-82, 108-114, 218-229, 341-352, 372-402, 449-452. The reader will excuse me for not discussing the theses about which I disagree with this author or, far more radically, with many others. I prefer merely to suggest to examine that good study, since I believe that comparing the analyses developed in it with those I develop in the present article will encourage the reader himself to formulate interpretations of Scotus's doctrines sharper than those presented up to now.

¹⁷ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, Prol., §[10], n. 32.

¹⁸ See, for example, JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[12], nn. 55 and 59.

¹⁹ See and compare, for example, JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[15], n. 174; *Id.*, §[15], n. 176; *Id.*, §[18], n. 189. In the essay *Jean Duns Scot. Introduction a ses positions fondamentales*, Vrin, Paris 1952 («Études de philosophie médiévale», 42), in particular pp. 45-46, Étienne Gilson appears to think that – according to Scotus – the subject and the object of a science are distinct insofar as the latter is nothing but the former considered as being known. As I see it, Scotus does not distinguish '*subiectum*' from '*obiectum*' of a science in the way described by Gilson. Besides, in support of his thesis Gilson does not refer the reader to any passage from Scotus's works.

²⁰ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[8], n. 39; JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §§[4-5], nn. 142-149, and §[19], n. 185.

²¹ According to Scotus, a theoretical science can also be considered as a conceptual representation (*notitia*), as I will explain below.

this latter) is precisely what virtually contains all the predicates considered by that science and all the principles and conclusions composing it²².

Besides these, a third type of intellectual *habitus* is possible: that referring to a multiplicity of states of affairs which are not contained in a subject virtually, but potentially or generically (*in universali*). This is the case of a science considering what is proper to the inferiors of its subject/object. What is proper to those inferiors can properly be known only in virtue of the *rationes* proper to them; hence, a science that only considers what is common to those inferiors shall deal with what is proper to them in a merely generic way²³.

It should be added that, if considered as being conceptual representations (*notitiæ*), the theoretical sciences of a multiplicity of states of affairs can bear three degrees of unity. Taken as incomplex cognitions of something incomplex, they are sciences just virtually and each of them has the unity of a species. Taken as knowledge of all the conclusions contained in their own subjects/objects, they are sciences in a formal way and can bear two different types of unity. Those sciences that are knowledge of all the conclusions virtually contained in their subjects/objects have the unity of a proximate genus; those sciences that are knowledge of all the conclusions potentially contained in their subjects/objects have the unity of a remote genus²⁴. If applied to theoretical sciences, this scheme produces the following result: metaphysics has the unity of a proximate genus, while mathematics and physics have the unity of a remote genus²⁵.

Now, the subject/object that virtually contains all the predicates considered by the science of which it is subject/object is the first subject/object of this science. The ‘primacy’ (*primitas*) here at issue has two meanings: it expresses both the fact that this subject/object matches (*adæquat*) the entire field of what is considered by that science²⁶ and the fact that it virtually contains this field just in virtue of itself²⁷. Actually, in order to designate the subject/object of a science, in the *Ordinatio* Scotus uses ‘*primum obiectum*’ and ‘*primum subiectum*’, as well as ‘*obiectum adæquatum*’ and ‘*subiectum adæquatum*’.

This was the doctrine expounded in the *Quæstiones super libros Metaphysicorum* and in the *Ordinatio*. Notice, however, that in his (or, at least, attributed to him) *De cognitione Dei* Scotus develops a partially different thesis. Also in this text he presents the subject/object of a science as what virtually includes the ‘things’ considered by the science as well as the propositions composing it; and yet he adds that, in case such a subject/object does not exist, we may have recourse to a subject/object common by way of predication to what that science considers. Concerning metaphysics, he explains that being, which is the subject of this science, is subject of it in two senses: as regards that part of metaphysics having the transcendentals as its object, being is subject «*secundum perfectam rationem illius primi subjecti, scilicet secundum rationem virtualis continentiae*»; as regards metaphysics as a whole, being is subject «*imperfecte, quia non nisi secundum adæquationem communitatis ad subjecta continentia virtualiter veritates quas ipsum non continet*»²⁸.

II. b. THE FRAMEWORK OF THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF METAPHYSICS AND ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF THIS SCIENCE WITH REVEALED THEOLOGY: THE TWO SORTS OF METAPHYSICS

The Subtle Doctor’s basic position about the subject/object of metaphysics is known: metaphysics is that science whose first subject is being as being. A simple formulation, yet

²² JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[8], n. 40.

²³ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[9], n. 42.

²⁴ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[9], nn. 41-42.

²⁵ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[12], n. 58.

²⁶ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 4, §[3], n. 11. Cfr. also ID., *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 9, q. 5, §[7], n. 28; ID., *Quodl.*, q. 5, a. 2, §§10-11; ID., *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[4], n. 143; ID., *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars 1, qq. 1-2, §[21], nn. 69-70.

²⁷ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[4], n. 144.

²⁸ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 2, [f. 152v], ed. by C.R.S. Harris / E.G. Parker, in C.R.S. HARRIS, *Duns Scotus*, vol. 2 *The Philosophical Doctrines of Duns Scotus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1927 (fac. Thoemmes Press, Bristol 1994), pp. 379-398, in particular 392-393.

underlying a complex speculative proposal, in which Scotus's doctrines concerning the subject/object, extension, procedures, and 'intension' of this science are involved.

Scotus's conception of metaphysics depends on the interaction between his theses about the nature of science and his theses about the nature of human knowledge. In his *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum*, our author writes that the perfect science proceeds through *propter quid* demonstrations; i.e. it starts from the knowledge of the essential causes and properties of things and comes to account for the characteristics of these things. This way of proceeding should also be proper to metaphysics: for metaphysics should be based on the knowledge of the ultimate essential constituents and of the first causes of things, hence it should account for the essences of the latter²⁹.

Now, this metaphysics *secundum se scibilis*, as Scotus himself names it, conflicts with the way in which man knows in his present state. According to the Subtle Doctor, it is a matter of fact that – in the present state – our intellectual knowledge is not intuitive but, on the contrary, is based on the abstraction of the intelligible from the sensible. Further, it does not proceed from the intrinsically (*in se*) better known to the intrinsically less known, but from what is sensible and less known *in se* to what is immaterial and better known *in se*; in other terms, it proceeds through *quia* demonstrations.

Consequently, metaphysics, as we elaborate it and as Aristotle transmitted it to us, does not correspond to what it should be³⁰. Thereby Scotus offers to his readers not only a distinction between metaphysics as it is for itself and as we, in our present state, can develop it, but also a terminology to designate the two: '*secundum se scibilis*' (or '*considerata a parte scibilium*') and '*ut a nobis scibilis*'.

This thesis appears, in an enlarged form, in *De cognitione Dei* too. Here the author distinguishes between the two sorts of metaphysics by using the expressions '*in se* metaphysics' and '*in nobis* metaphysics', and explores their similarities and differences by comparing them on four levels: that of the subject (*subiectum*); that of the adequacy of the concepts they use; that of the nature of the demonstrations constituting them; and that of the 'intension', namely of the 'depth' according to which they explore the *rationes* they deal with.

As regards the subject, the two sorts of metaphysics present no differences: the first subject of both is being taken as transcendental (*transcendens*). But they differ as to the second and the third aspect. Scotus observes that there are many determinations of which man, in the present state, cannot have proper concepts: among them, for instance, that of 'infinite'. It follows, he writes, that *in nobis* metaphysics does not extend – with respect to God – to all that to which *in se* metaphysics extends. This limitation is due to the starting point of metaphysics we can develop in our present state: sensible things, i.e. things that are intrinsically less known. The same limitation also underlies the difference between the two sorts of metaphysics on the level of procedures and demonstrative capacities. *In se* metaphysics is a science constituted by *propter quid* demonstrations; *in nobis* metaphysics is able to build *propter quid* demonstrations about some things, for instance about absolute transcendental concepts, but in other fields, such as the determination of disjunctive transcendentals, it can only make use of *quia* demonstrations. Moreover, the starting point of *propter quid* demonstrations of *in nobis* metaphysics corresponds in any case to data merely known through *quia* demonstrations³¹.

II. c. THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF THE 'INTENSION' OF METAPHYSICS: METAPHYSICS IN FRONT OF PARTICULAR REAL *RATIONES* AND THE OTHER SCIENCES

The identity as to the subject and the difference as to the starting point characterizing the two sorts of metaphysics affect the question of their respective 'intensions'.

²⁹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaest. super Met.*, Prol., §[9], nn. 25-26.

³⁰ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaest. super Met.*, Prol., §[9], n. 27; *Id.*, I, q. 1, §[37], n. 121; *Id.*, I, q. 1, §§[40-41], nn. 134-136.

³¹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 149r and 151v], pp. 384-385 and 390. Cfr. also JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaest. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[45], n. 150.

We have said that, according to Scotus, metaphysics deals with being as being; this means that it deals with being as considered as nothing but being, i.e. with being within the limits of what being is. However, this does not mean that metaphysics fulfils its task in saying what being is. If we look through the *Quæstiones super libros Metaphysicorum*, we notice that here Scotus – in addition to analyzing the prerogatives of metaphysics itself – deals with causality, with transcendental *rationes*, both absolute and disjunctive, with the ten categories, with substance and accident, with form and matter, with the principle of individuation, with the intelligibility of the singular, with common nature, with act and potency. Now, what criterion can determine what metaphysics must and must not deal with?

II. c. 1. The criterion set by Scotus in order to determine what metaphysics deals with and what it does not deal with

In his *Quæstiones* Scotus uses a well-defined criterion. Considering – he clarifies – that we are speaking of that science which can be acquired by man «ex naturali lumine intellectus, scilicet ex principiis cognitis via sensus»³², we should say that metaphysics has the task of dealing with being as being and with its properties (*passiones*), which – just like being – are transcendental³³; consequently, its task is to deal with each quiddity, insofar as it is a quiddity and insofar as it is this quiddity³⁴, and with all that of which merely transcendental properties can be proved³⁵. Contrariwise, it does not belong to metaphysics to deal with each quiddity considered according to any accidental property of that quiddity³⁶ and, in general, with anything insofar as nontranscendental properties are proved about it³⁷.

For this reason – to give an example – it deals with the ten categories³⁸ or with the intelligibility of the singular³⁹, but it does not deal with subjects and with properties the other theoretical sciences deal with, namely, with what is comprised in motion or quantity. Hence, once again metaphysics does not include in itself the whole sphere of the sciences of real beings and does not eliminate the possibility that other theoretical sciences exist⁴⁰.

But this does not settle the question. As we saw, in his *Quæstiones* Scotus sets the boundaries of the ‘intension’ of metaphysics by formulating a well-defined premise: he will deal with that science

³² JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[9], n. 45.

³³ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, Prol., §[5], nn. 17-18.

³⁴ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 9, §[1], n. 6.

³⁵ In virtue of the thesis claiming that scientific *habitus* are virtually included in their own subject (cfr. JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[8-9], nn. 39-42), Scotus also relates the criterion of the *modus definiendi* with the above mentioned criterion. In the case of metaphysics, «Ex ista distinctione penes subiecta [cfr. nn. 55-58] prima patet causa illius distinctionis quam Aristoteles ponit in littera, scilicet penes modos definiendi. Ideo enim metaphysicus, definiendo, omnino abstrahit a materia, quia sicut ens quod primo considerat, ita et quidlibet, in quantum sub eius consideratione cadit, non includit materiam secundum quod vult Avicenna I *Metaphysicae*». JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[13], n. 61.

³⁶ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 9, §[3], n. 15. Cfr. also *Id.*, §[10], n. 52.

³⁷ In JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[12], nn. 55-57 our author presents quite a radical scheme: «Intelligendum est ergo ex dictis quod si scientia dividatur penes obiectum primum, qualis est prima divisio eius, ut dictum est (quia differentiae specificae sunt ignotae), quod sic poterit divisio procedere: scientia alia est de conceptu communissimo per se passiones habente, scilicet de ente, et alia de conceptu minus communi primo passiones habente. Et per ‘primo’ excluditur omne accidens, intelligendo sic quod primo habens passiones non sit passio alterius. Uterius, secundum membrum dividitur in scientiam de substantia incorporea – quae non est nobis possibilis pro nunc – et in scientiam de substantia corporea. Tertia divisione secundum membrum subdividitur in scientiam de substantia corporea, in quantum sic et sic consideratur». As for the ‘*scientia de substantia incorporea quae non est nobis possibilis pro nunc*’, cfr. *infra*.

³⁸ About them «ex principiis notis via sensus non sunt aliae passiones demonstrabiles nisi transcendentis». JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[10], n. 48.

³⁹ Observe, however, that «quaestio est metaphysica quatenus quaerit de intelligibilitate simpliciter; pertinet autem ad librum De anima quatenus quaerit de intellectualitate singularis respectu intellectus nostri». JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 7, q. 15, §[15], n. 12.

⁴⁰ See the considerations that Scotus expresses, formulating them as difficulties, in JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 9, §[1], n. 5, and *Id.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[1], n. 5.

which can be acquired by man «ex principiis cognitivis via sensus». But what would it happen if we possessed a knowledge able to proceed from what is better known *in se* to what is less known *in se*?

Confronted with this question, Scotus appears to move in two diverging directions. On the one hand, he writes that – taking the matter on the side of the knowables (*quantum est ex parte scibilium*) – demonstrating something of God taken as God and considering the other separate substances as for themselves are both tasks of a particular science which is distinct from metaphysics⁴¹. This means that an intellect able to know the immaterial substances as to their proper *rationes* (*sub proprias rationes*) would produce not three but four theoretical sciences: metaphysics, whose subject is being as being, hence deals with the transcendentals and demonstrates that they are properties of those things of which they are properties; a science whose subject is the incorporeal substance; mathematics, whose subject is the corporeal substance as being endowed with quantity; and physics, whose subject is the corporeal substance as including the principles of motion and of action⁴².

On the other hand, there are passages in the *Quæstiones* where Scotus almost seems to ascribe the very differentiation of the three theoretical sciences to the actual conditions in which our knowledge operates⁴³. Moreover, what he writes about metaphysics, when he views it as a *propter quid* science, might induce one to consider the latter as fully embracing the entire reality with all its details⁴⁴.

The *Ordinatio* does not seem to clear up the question either. Here Scotus specifies that the subject (*subiectum*) of most common principles does not include *propter quid* any particular property (*passio*); hence he infers that these principles – each separately taken – merely enable to know the most common properties⁴⁵. Nevertheless, in this case too he develops his doctrine from the premise that, in the present state, human beings neither can naturally know the proper characteristics of the separate substances through a *propter quid* demonstrative process, nor can they through a *quia* demonstrative process. Precisely from this he infers that, in the present state, it is not possible to develop a metaphysics able to disclose those characteristics⁴⁶.

Indeed, in this work Scotus briefly and implicitly delimits the ‘intension’ of metaphysics in relation to the other sciences on the basis of two considerations we might formulate as follows: on the one hand, metaphysics mostly knows all things in a merely confused way; on the other, even if metaphysics knew things in a clear and more perfect way, it would still be true that the other sciences know their own propositions immediately, and not thanks to a demonstration performed by the metaphysician⁴⁷. However, it should be added that our author holds that the *theologia divina*, i.e.

⁴¹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[48], n. 159.

⁴² JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §§[10-12], nn. 46-57.

⁴³ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[17], n. 56 and §[18], n. 58.

⁴⁴ «Aut igitur <omnia entia> considerantur ibi in quantum attributa, quia ex notitia Dei ibi cognoscuntur; aut quia ex eorum notitia Deus cognoscitur. Primo modo esset illa <metaphysica> de Deo, et esset scientia propter quid. Secundo modo, quia. Primo modo natae essent istae res cognosci, et haec scientia esset prima de eis, quia est de eis in quantum attribuuntur ad simpliciter primum. Non sic quod ibi non cognoscerentur res omnes secundum propriam essentiam (aliter enim non cognoscerentur), sed cognitio essentiae ipsarum haberetur in quantum attribuuntur ad ipsum Deum. Talem metaphysicam habet Deus (...).» JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[40], nn. 134-135. In *Id.*, §[42], n. 138 Scotus adds: «Deus qui habet metaphysicam propter quid, ita per essentiam suam cognoscit omnia in particulari sicut in universali». This statement is situated within the context of an objection that Scotus formulates against his own positions; however, let us observe that, in the answer to that objection, he does not contest this statement.

⁴⁵ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 1, q. un., §§[30-31], nn. 86-89.

⁴⁶ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 1, q. un., §[14], nn. 40-41.

⁴⁷ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 4, qq. 1-2, §[29], n. 216. This does not mean that for Scotus metaphysics does not help to improve the ‘quality’ of the knowledge proper to the other sciences: as we can read in JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars. 1, qq. 1-2, §[25], n. 81, once a specific notion is known by «aliis scientiis specialibus, sequitur metaphysica de conceptibus communis, ex quibus potest fieri reditio per viam divisionis ad inquirendum quiditates terminorum in scientiis specialibus sic cognitivis, et tunc ex illis quiditatibus sic cognitivis distinctius cognoscuntur principia scientiarum specialium quam prius».

the theology possessed by God and having God as its object, «est de omnibus cognoscibilibus» and «est omnis cognitio possibilis Deo de eis»⁴⁸.

In fact, there is a work in which Scotus develops considerations and arguments that are particularly useful for solving the problem of the relationship between metaphysics and the other sciences: it is the above mentioned *De cognitione Dei*.

Here the author writes that any knowable truth is resolvable into a first adequate quidditative concept (*primum conceptum quidditativum adaequatum*): the one in which this truth is contained without regard to any other concept (*per impossibile quolibet conceptu alio quidditativo circumscripto*). If such concepts were more than one, they would convert one into the other; hence, such concept is only one. Moreover, all truths resolvable into such concept belong to the science having that concept as its subject. It follows that if known truths of a specific subject exist, but are resolvable into a higher concept, then they do not belong to the science having that specific subject as its subject; rather, they belong to the science having the higher concept as its subject. For this reason, theoretical sciences are to be distinguished according to the distinction between the quidditative concepts that virtually contain the knowable truths concerning what is resolvable into those very concepts⁴⁹.

It should be noted that these considerations also and even particularly apply to *in se* sciences, and that, conversely, supposing that certain truths are contained in a certain subject, then this subject – although differently known in the *in se* science and in the *in nobis* science – is the subject both of that specific *in se* science and of that specific *in nobis* science⁵⁰. So, for Scotus, both *in se* metaphysics and (with limitations) *in nobis* metaphysics have as their subject being as being and deal both with the universal properties of being and with the properties of being as determined by one of the parts of some disjunctive property (for example: ‘finite being’, ‘infinite being’)⁵¹.

At this point, Scotus sets himself two main and one additional tasks. The first task consists in demonstrating that not God, but being is the subject both of *in se* metaphysics and of *in nobis* metaphysics. The second consists on the one hand in demonstrating that both *in se* metaphysics and *in nobis* metaphysics consider God, and on the other – but simultaneously – in defining the respective limits within which the two metaphysics deal with this object. The third task consists in showing that the discourse developed by metaphysics does not descend to the subjects/objects of the other theoretical sciences and, particularly, that this science does not deal with being as determined by the properties ‘mobile’ and ‘immobile’.

We will see Scotus’s remarks about the first two items in a while. As for the third problem, he proposes – if I rightly understand the complex writing of our author – a two-phase solution. In the first phase he excludes that ‘mobile’ and ‘immobile’ are properties of being as being. Given a pair of opposite properties, writes Scotus, if one of the two properly belongs to a lower *ratio*, this happens in virtue of this lower *ratio*; hence, neither that property nor the totality of the two properties are proper properties of the higher *ratio*. In the case of the pair ‘mobile-immobile’, they are properties of the substance and do not belong to being in virtue of its *ratio*; hence, they do not belong to being as being. In the second phase Scotus excludes that the science of being as being should deal with them. Given a pair of opposite properties, he writes, the science having to deal with them is the same dealing with that by means of which the occurrence of the compound of a subject and one of the two properties is known. In the case of the pair ‘mobile-immobile’, that in

⁴⁸ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §§[22-23], nn. 196-201. But see also *Id.*, §§[23-24], nn. 202-203 and §§[24-25], nn. 204-206, where the author explicitly indicates characters and limits of the theology of the Blessed and of the theology of itinerants – respectively – in relation to the theology possessed by God.

⁴⁹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 2, [f. 152r], p. 391.

⁵⁰ Cfr. JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [f. 149v], p. 385 and [f. 150r], 386.

⁵¹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [f. 149r], p. 384. In *Id.*, a. 2, [f. 152v], p. 393, he specifies what metaphysics is about using the following words: «passiones tantum transcendentales, (...) alias partes entis, ut ens, et passiones earum, et cetera quae ad nullam scientiam specialem dicuntur pertinere. Et forte secundum aliquos hujusmodi sunt omnes quidditates specificae, ut quidditates, et ad minus substantiae immateriales secundum illos conceptus proprios quos potest intellectus creatus habere de eis naturaliter».

virtue of which the occurrence of the compound ‘mobile being’ is known is not the *ratio* of being. Consequently, the science that must deal with mobile being is not the science of being as being⁵².

II. c. 2. What the late medieval and renaissance interpreters of Scotus could know about the criterion set by him in order to delimit the field of metaphysics

Scotus’s position looks quite clear; but to his followers it might have appeared not so well-defined. His *De cognitione Dei* is not supposed having widely been circulated in manuscript and was certainly only published in the 20th century; thus, apart from those who personally heard the Subtle Doctor, almost no one knew the theses contained in this short text⁵³. Later Scotists were therefore provided with only two points of reference: on the one hand the distinction between *in se* metaphysics and *in nobis* metaphysics, which is contained in the *Quæstiones super libros Metaphysicorum*; on the other, the distinction between *in se* theology and *in nobis* theology, which is proposed in Scotus’s several commentaries on the *Sententiæ*⁵⁴.

These distinctions might lead Scotus’s readers to interpret *in se* metaphysics as a science covering the contents of every other science and being equivalent to *in se* theology. This actually happened. Muiris o’ Fithcheallaig (*Mauritius Hibernicus*)⁵⁵, wishing to comment the passage of the *Quæstiones super libros Metaphysicorum* I cited in footnote 44, writes:

«adverte bene ad totum digressum, et specialiter ibi, ubi dicit – n. 40 – *Talem metaphysicam habet Deus ecc.*, cum tamen 3. q. prolog. habeat Deum nullam scientiam habere præter theologiam, hoc tamen non obstat, quia metaphysica talis, est vera theologia»⁵⁶.

II. d. THE SPECIAL PROBLEM OF THE ‘INTENSION’ OF METAPHYSICS: METAPHYSICS IN FRONT OF GOD, RATIONAL THEOLOGY, AND REVEALED THEOLOGY

Scotus’s doctrine about the relationships of metaphysics with the particular *rationes* and with the other sciences has an important as well as critical field of application, which is equally a testing ground: the theme of the relationships of this science with God, rational theology, and revealed theology.

II. d. 1. The features of the metaphysical treatment about God

As for the relationships of metaphysics with God, Scotus’s primary concern is to explain what is the place of God within the field of what is object of study of this science. In order to do so, our

⁵² JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [f. 150r-151v], pp. 387-390.

⁵³ After the Harris / Parker edition, a second manuscript of this work was found in the library of the Sacro Convento of Assisi: Fondo antico comunale, ms. 172, ff. 117v-120v.

⁵⁴ Strictly speaking, in the *Ordinatio* Scotus precedes the distinction between *in se* theology and *in nobis* theology with a general distinction between *scientia in se* and *doctrina nobis*. Actually, in that context, he merely applies this distinction to theology. Cfr. JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[4], n. 141.

⁵⁵ Fithcheallaig was active in the same milieu as Antonio Trombetta (about whom cfr. *infra*) and his career was quite similar to that of the latter: he was a Minor Conventual, resided in the convent of St Anthony in Padua, was regent of the *Studium* of the Order located in that convent, was a member of the Theological College of Padua University, was professor of theology in the Faculty of Arts of that University, and participated in the fifth Lateran Council. Cfr. P. SCAPIN, *Maurizio O’ Fihely editore e commentatore di Scoto*, in A. POPPI (a cura di), *Storia e cultura al Santo di Padova fra il XIII e il XX secolo*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 1976 («Fonti e studi per la storia del Santo di Padova», III, 1), pp. 303-308.

⁵⁶ MAURITIUS HIBERNICUS, *Castigationes scotice metaphysices*, on SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1. These *Castigationes* were published for the first time in 1497, as an appendix at the end of the first printed edition of Scotus’s *Questiones subtilissime in Metaphysicam* (i.e. the *Quæst. super Met.*), which was prepared by Fithcheallaig himself. Here I quote the text of his commentary as it was published in the Wadding edition of Scotus’s works, Lugduni 1639, IV, §54, p. 523b. Relying on the same premise – according to which God possesses a sole science having himself as its object – Giles of Rome had come to the conclusion that revealed theology in itself (*in propria forma; apta nata*) is able to know all things considered by all other sciences as well. If this does not occur in our minds, he added, the deficiency is situated «ex parte nostra, quia ea imperfecte possidemus» (ÆGIDIUS ROMANUS, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1, q. 2, respondeo, in ID., *Primus Sententiarum*, Sumptibus et expensis heredum quondam Octaviani Scoti, Venetiis 1521, f. 3ra).

author states that God is neither the subject of metaphysics nor the cause of this subject. A science of being, argues Scotus, is possible; hence, even supposing that there is a science having God as its subject, there must also be a science having being as its subject; such science is metaphysics.

Now, two points are here to be clarified. First, according to Scotus, even if God is not the subject of metaphysics, nonetheless he is part – or, at least, he is the cause – of the subject of this science⁵⁷. Second, God is not a natural agent, i.e. not one such as to act necessarily; therefore, he is not one such as to necessarily manifest his essence to some creature. It must be added that no creature can represent in itself the divine essence. It follows that there can exist no science of God, taken as God, capable of being naturally acquired (i.e. generated by a natural agent, that is by one having been created, or, in any case, being such as to act necessarily) by any created intellect⁵⁸.

The latter specification does not exclude the possibility of a science having God as its subject; but such science is only possible as a result of a free decision made by God. Moreover, metaphysics too can produce some scientific knowledge of God. Indeed, God is not only part of the subject of that science, but he is even the first and chief part of that subject and he is that the study of which is the reason why that subject is studied⁵⁹. Because of this, and before any other consideration, it can and must be said that metaphysics is ‘theology’: it is theology as regards its goal and – considering the intrinsic order of the intelligibles it studies – antecedently to any other knowledge it develops⁶⁰.

The basic reason why metaphysics possesses this capacity is that the *ratio* of being virtually includes not only absolute transcendental properties, but also disjunctive transcendental properties (i.e. for instance, ‘infinite/finite’, ‘necessary/possible’). It ensues that being virtually includes also the fact that some being is the first being (both in the sense of ‘if it is’ and of ‘what it is’) and that metaphysics has the task of dealing not only with properties convertible with being, but also with the single parts of disjunctive properties⁶¹.

The limit to the competence of metaphysics consists in the fact that it cannot go beyond its *genus*, namely, the *conceptus metaphysici*. Metaphysics studies God in the mere context of the proper conditions of being in general; it merely deals with transcendental properties and all that it proves about God are transcendental (although disjunctive) properties. Thus, the knowledge it provides of that object does not reach its proper characteristics and remains confused⁶².

⁵⁷ Cfr. JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[18], n. 59; *Id.*, §[36], n. 118; *Id.*, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[20], n. 193; *Id.*, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 147r-v and 149r-150r], pp. 379-380 and 384-385. I have specified ‘or, at least, he is the cause’ because according to me – and against the interpretation of Scotus’s thought offered by Zimmermann – it is not perfectly clear whether Scotus includes God among the immaterial substances. Cfr. for instance JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[14], n. 43, *Id.*, §[17], n. 55, and *Id.*, §[19], n. 61, where he distinguishes between the case of the immaterial substances and the case of God: the former seem to be definitively part of the subject of metaphysics, whereas the latter might be included in this science just because he is the cause of its subject. Gabriele Zerbi (on whom cfr. *infra*) interprets Scotus precisely in this way: Gabriel ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 2 *Utrum ens simpliciter sumptum commune quiditati et modo sit scientie metaphysice subiectum primum primitate adæquationis, an ens solum commune deo et creature, Propter tertium*, Per Johannem de Nordlingen et Henricum de Harlem socios, Bononie 1482, f. (unnumbered; I refer to the gathering) a8va.

⁵⁸ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars 1, qq. 1-2, §[16], n. 57.

⁵⁹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[43], nn. 140-141; *Id.*, §[46], n. 153; *Id.*, § [49], n. 161.

⁶⁰ *Id.*, *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars. 1, qq. 1-2, §[2], n. 17. Observe, however, that this passage is placed in an addendum inside the *declaratio* of q. 1 and is followed by a significant contrary argument. This raises doubts about the fact that here Scotus thoroughly expresses his thought about the ‘theological’ nature of metaphysics.

⁶¹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[48], n. 159; *Id.*, *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars. 1, qq. 1-2, §[2], n. 17; *Id.*, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [f. 150r], p. 387. Cfr. also *Id.*, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[21], n. 194, where Scotus observes – against Averroes – that if physics proved that separate substances exist and if this was presupposed by metaphysics, then physics would be presupposed by metaphysics. On the contrary, he continues, not only metaphysics can prove that a first being exists, but this knowledge is more perfect than that provided by physics, which at most can demonstrate that a prime mover exists.

⁶² JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[43], n. 142; *Id.*, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, n. 190 (N.B.: the Wadding edition does not give this text; rather, in §18 it gives a text that, according to the edition ed. by the Commissio Scæstica, proves to have been deleted by Scotus); *Id.*, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [f. 150r], p. 387. Cfr. also *Id.*, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §§[48 and 49], nn. 158 and 161.

All this applies to metaphysics as considered *a parte scibilium*, that is leaving out the actual conditions in which a certain intellect elaborates it. Our metaphysics too is able to achieve a scientific knowledge of God, yet it can only investigate the disjunctive properties of being starting from *quia* demonstrative processes. This is due – writes Scotus in the more clarifying pages of *De cognitione Dei* – to the fact that a determination such as ‘infinite’ is not included in the concept of common being that we abstract from things and that is the subject of our metaphysics. This, on its turn, is due to the fact that the concept of ‘infinite’ is neither virtually nor quidditatively included in any object capable of moving (*objectum motivum*) our intellect in the present state⁶³.

The author’s persisting reaffirmation that, in inquiring about God, metaphysics remains in the field of the transcendentals⁶⁴ does not exclude that, in any case, there exist some asymmetries between the way in which it deals with the spiritual substances and the way in which it deals with the material substances.

First of all, there is an asymmetry as to the goal of this science: as we saw, according to Scotus, God is the chief part of the subject of this science and he is that the study of which is the reason why this subject is studied.

Secondly, we should also consider the author’s persisting reaffirmation that metaphysics does not only deal with absolute transcendentals, but also with disjunctive ones, hence it has the task of demonstrating the properties of the parts of these disjunctions as well. Now, the field of these transcendental properties – both absolute and disjunctive – appears quite wide. Among them are not only ‘infinite/finite’, ‘necessary/possible’, but also ‘first/second’, ‘large/small’, and even ‘wise’⁶⁵. It follows that Scotus’s metaphysics should be described as a ‘transcendentology’ rather than an ‘ontology’, and that, in the case of this author too, the notion of ‘ontology’, instead of being a light illuminating his thought, is rather a shadow concealing it.

Furthermore, as already mentioned, for Scotus our metaphysics thoroughly embraces the field of knowledge that concerns the spiritual substances and that, in the present state, is accessible to us naturally, whereas it does not thoroughly embrace the field of knowledge that concerns the material substances and that is accessible to us naturally⁶⁶.

Finally, note that our author maintains that in the present state the disjunctive properties relative to the separate substances can only be investigated in virtue of *quia* demonstrative processes.

In the *Quaestiones*, the above seen asymmetries appear to carry no consequences⁶⁷; by contrast, in *De cognitione Dei* they give rise to a distinction of great historical interest⁶⁸. In this work there

⁶³ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 147r-v, 149r-v and 151v], pp. 380-381, 385 and 390.

⁶⁴ In JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 147r and 149r], pp. 379-380 and 384 the author clearly states that the thesis according to which being is the subject of metaphysics holds both for *in se* metaphysics and for *in nobis* metaphysics, as well as whether we consider the level of the sole universal properties, or we descend to what is known of being through one of the two parts of the disjunctive properties.

⁶⁵ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaest. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[48], nn. 158-159; ID., *Quodlibet*, q. 6, a. 1, de tertio, §1.

⁶⁶ Cfr. JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaest. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §§[48-49], nn. 159 and 161; ID., *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[21], n. 194. The reader should consider that I understand the expression ‘*naturaliter*’ appearing in these passages as being referred to the present state in which our intellect operates. What we read in the above mentioned passage (in ID., *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars 1, qq. 1-2, §[16], n. 57) suggests, however, that the theology included in metaphysics is the only theology man can acquire naturally, whatever ‘state’ his intellect is in. Nevertheless, Scotus’s doctrines might provide theoretical room for a ‘pneumatology’ that can be acquired naturally *ex natura potentiae* (where the potency here at issue is the agent intellect) and that merely relates to created spiritual substances.

⁶⁷ In JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaest. super Met.*, lib. 6, q. 1, §[12], n. 58, we read that «*metaphysica, in qua primo stat divisio, est una unitate generis proximi, non habens sub se nisi species specialissimas*».

⁶⁸ Compare Scotus’s statements that I present below with the distinction established by Francis of Marchia between *metaphysica communis* and *metaphysica particularis*, about which see S. FOLGER-FONFARA, *Das „Super“-Transzendente und die Spaltung der Metaphysik. Der Entwurf des Franziskus von Marchia*, (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 96), Brill, Leiden 2008, ID., *Franziskus von Marchia: Die erste Unterscheidung einer Allgemeinen und einer Besonderen Metaphysik*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale», 16 (2005), pp. 461-513, and A. POPPI, *Ontologia e ‘scienza divina’ nel “Commentario alle Sentenze” di Francesco della Marca O. Min. (1319)*, «Miscellanea francescana», 104 (2004), pp. 100-120, in particular 105-111. As it clearly appears, the thesis according to which Francis of Marchia was the first to propose a distinction

are places where Scotus distinguishes between the *metaphysica transcendens* (dealing with being and its universal properties) and the metaphysics descending to the discussion of being as considered with respect to each of the two disjunctive properties (each separately taken) that can be attributed to being and convene in it⁶⁹. In other places, however, he refers to *metaphysica specialis*, specifying that it is the metaphysics dealing with infinite being⁷⁰, and he even distinguishes between *metaphysica transcendens simpliciter* and *metaphysica transcendens ad considerationem immaterialium*⁷¹. Finally, there also appears a distinction between *metaphysica primo modo dicta* (which merely considers the absolute transcendental properties of being) and *metaphysica totalis* (which considers the parts of being as beings)⁷².

A second question of historical relevance concerns the existence of some natural-theological premise in the speculative path by which Scotus determines the nature of the subject of metaphysics. The problem can be expressed in the following terms: does the separate knowledge of the *ratio* of being involve that it must be previously known that this *ratio* can also exist in a state of immateriality, or even infinity?

Scotus answers this question in three stages. In the *Ordinatio* he introduces two distinctions. The first (which corresponds to the first stage of his answer) seems to me interpretable as follows: one thing is being understood as a definite, unitary, and intelligible *ratio*, hence considered separately from any other intelligible; another thing is being understood as included in every intelligible. Understood in the first sense, being is also contained in the sensible quiddity; now, this type of quiddity is accessible to our intellect in the present state too; hence, understood as a definite, unitary, and intelligible *ratio*, being is knowable naturally in the present state as well. Understood in the second sense, being would be knowable naturally only if every single intelligible in which it is included were knowable naturally. Well, in the present state, the intellect has no access to objects capable of generating in it the knowledge of the proper characteristics of immaterial beings. It follows that being, understood as included in every intelligible, is not knowable naturally in the present state.

The second distinction introduced in the *Ordinatio* (which corresponds to the second stage of Scotus's answer) separates being understood as the adequate object of the intellect from being understood as the object of metaphysics. Taken as the adequate object of the intellect, the being at issue should be being understood as included in every intelligible. But we saw that being, understood in this sense, is not knowable naturally in the present state; this is why, concludes Scotus, being is not the adequate object of the intellect in the present state. However, if taken as the object of metaphysics, the being at issue is being understood as a definite, unitary, and intelligible *ratio*. For this reason, according to Scotus, being not only can be the object of metaphysics in the present state, but its mere abstractability from the sensible is what justifies the distinction of metaphysics from physics⁷³.

The third stage, i.e. the ultimate clarification of the relationships between metaphysics – *in se* and *in nobis* – and being, is exclusively formulated in Scotus's *De cognitione Dei*. Here the author explains that the being that is the subject of metaphysics is undoubtedly being understood as a definite, unitary, and intelligible *ratio*, but also understood as somehow containing the propositions of this science. So, in the case of *in se* metaphysics, that *ratio* virtually contains the fact, for

between general metaphysics and special metaphysics is questionable, although it is dubious that Scotus's *De cognitione Dei* was circulated.

⁶⁹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 147r and 149r], pp. 379-380 and 384.

⁷⁰ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [f. 147v], p. 381.

⁷¹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 2, [f. 151v], p. 390.

⁷² JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 2, [f. 152v], p. 393.

⁷³ Cfr. JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 1, q. un., §§[32-33], nn. 90-92, with reference to ID., *Ord.*, Prol., pars 1, q. un., §[1], n. 1, and ID., *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars 1, q. 3, §[4], n. 124, with reference to ID., *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars 1, q. 3, §[3], nn. 117-118. These places also provide the right interpretation of the renowned passage of ID., *Ord.*, Prol., pars 1, q. un., §[12], n. 33, where Scotus states that Avicenna could maintain that «ens esse primum obiectum intellectus nostri, et hoc secundum totam indifferentiam entis ad sensibilia et insensibilia» just because he introduced into his philosophy theses of a religious nature.

instance, that there is an infinite being; moreover, it contains this fact in such a way that this truth is deducible from the *ratio* of being through a *propter quid* process. Using a terminology widely adopted in philosophical historiography, although not brilliant, we can say that – according to Scotus – being is the absolute starting point of *in se* metaphysics. In the case of *in nobis* metaphysics, however, the available notion of being is abstracted from the sensibles; hence it cannot generate any appropriate information about infinite being in the intellect. In this case, the subject of metaphysics contains the potency towards the predicate ‘infinite’ not in an evident way, but only in an eminent way (*eminenter ex se*). It follows that our intellect, once it has a conception of the extremes of the proposition, is able to draw evidence of this potency, but is unable to conceive of a *ratio* of being including – with evidence or otherwise – the predicate ‘infinite’. Thus, we could say that, in the case of *in nobis* metaphysics, being is the starting point of this science, however it is not the absolute starting point of it⁷⁴.

In conclusion, the answer to the question about the existence of a ‘theological-natural’ premise in the speculative path by which Scotus determines the nature of the subject of *in nobis* metaphysics could be the following. Scotus rejects the hypothesis of a ‘strong’ presupposition: the comprehension of the *ratio* of being, taken as unitary and intelligible, remains unchanged all along the development of metaphysics. Nevertheless, our author’s doctrine appears to give access to a ‘weak’ presupposition: the knowledge relating to which properties are virtually contained in the *ratio* of being expands during the progress of metaphysics.

Still, no doubt that Scotus regularly minimizes this ‘presupposition’, for he thinks that, properly speaking, in the present state our intellect cannot rightly understand the immaterial properties, nor – therefore – does it understand them as virtually contained in the *ratio* of being, but it just conceives of them as a part of a total concept (for example, the pair ‘finite/infinite’) of which we determinately know only one of the parts (in our example: ‘finite’). However, in this way, Scotus drastically restricts the *in nobis* validity of his epistemology of the ‘*continentia virtualis*’, as the reader may notice in the passages I quoted at the end of the section II.a. of the present study.

II. d. 2. The relationships between metaphysics and the theologies

As regards the relationships between metaphysics and theology (or rather, the theologies), one point is certain: although metaphysics deals with God with respect to disjunctive transcendentals as well, nevertheless it does not deal with God taken as a definite (*hic*) nature or *sub ratione deitatis*. Hence, taking the matter on the side of the knowables, or, likewise, supposing that there can exist some science that deals with God taken as God and that considers the other separate substances as for themselves, then such science is distinct from metaphysics⁷⁵.

As we have just seen, this applies to the relationships between theology and metaphysics as taken *ex parte scibilium*; however, if these sciences are considered just as they exist in our minds, then some clarification must be added.

As regards the theology naturally acquirable in the present state, Scotus holds that it is totally included within metaphysics; namely, metaphysics provides the whole theological knowledge accessible to man naturally in the present state⁷⁶.

By contrast, the revealed theology available for man *in statu viæ* markedly differs from *in nobis* metaphysics.

On the one hand, metaphysics does not subordinate revealed theology. In the *Ordinatio* Scotus argues as follows: it is true that the subject of theology (of revealed theology too) is included in the subject of metaphysics, but it is also true that no specifically theological property can be demonstrated in theology by means of the principles of being or of some *ratio* derived from the *ratio* of being. And in his *De cognitione Dei* he specifies what follows: proving that the subject of

⁷⁴ Cfr. in particular JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 148r-v and 149r], p. 382 and 384.

⁷⁵ Cfr. also JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Quæst. super Met.*, lib. 1, q. 1, §[48], n. 159 and ID., *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, n. 190 (N.B.: the Wadding edition does not give this text; rather, in §18 it gives a text that, according to the edition directed by the Commissio Scotistica, proves to have been deleted by Scotus).

⁷⁶ Cfr. also JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[21], n. 194.

some science (including theology) simply exists is not the proper work of a further science which is such as to subordinate the first science to itself; rather, it is the work of the dialectician (*litigiosus*)⁷⁷.

On the other hand, revealed theology does not subordinate metaphysics. It is true, writes Scotus, that the *rationes* of things which are present in God can move the human intellect to the perfect knowledge of the principles of these things, but it is also true that the intellect can be directly moved to the knowledge of the principles of things from things themselves; and yet, in order that subordination can exist, it is necessary that the principles of the superior science are the only cause of the knowledge of the principles of the inferior science; *ergo* etc⁷⁸.

Despite what precedes, we can finally observe that, according to Scotus, there is some continuity also between the metaphysics and the revealed theology that are available to man, but just in the direction going from the former toward the latter. The object of *in se* theology and the object of our revealed theology, writes Scotus, are the same: God taken as God. Nevertheless, in the present state, human intellect has no available proper notion of God; hence our theology must assume the infinite being as its proper object. With a precaution though: this concept, insofar as we know it, neither contains our theology virtually nor does it contain it as being known to us. Yet, it contains it within itself, so that, if we knew it according to what it actually is, it might provide theological truths with evidence. Consequently, in the present state this concept is object of that science only according to an imperfect notion, namely, insofar as, among the concepts at our disposal, it is the nearest one to the object of *in se* theology⁷⁹.

III. Two pupils of Scotus

Scotus's direct pupils were certainly influenced by the doctrines of their master, yet they developed their positions by independently rethinking the theses of the Subtle Doctor. The extent of this independence is well exemplified by the writings of Antonio Andrés and Nicolas Bonet.

III. a. ANTONIO ANDRÉS (CA. 1280 - CA. 1320)

III. a. 1. The nature of the subject of a science

In order to designate the subject/object of a science, Andrés does not use the term '*obiectum*'; rather, he goes back to Aristotle's '*subiectum*'. Yet he adds the specification '*adaequatum*' to the notion of '*subiectum*', thus precisely resuming Scotus's reflections on the meaning of the 'primacy' of the subject/object of a science.

While asking what the *subiectum primum* of metaphysics is, Andrés specifies that he does not want to determine what is the subject of metaphysics that is first as to perfection, but rather what is the subject of this science that is first as to adequacy. The subject of a science that is first as to perfection, writes Andrés, is the most perfect being among those considered by that science; in the case of metaphysics, such being is God. To the contrary, the subject of metaphysics that is first as to adequacy is being⁸⁰.

⁷⁷ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 4, qq. 1-2, §[29], n. 214; ID., *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 148v-149r], pp. 383-384.

⁷⁸ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 4, qq. 1-2, §[29], nn. 214-216. But see also *Id.*, I, dist. 3, pars. 1, q. 3, §§[1 and 26], nn. 109 and 190, where Scotus respectively presents and confutes the milestones of Thomism (and of Augustinianism), according to which, in order to gain entire knowledge of a participated *ratio* (that is, in the creature), it is necessary to have some knowledge of the unparticipated *ratio* (that is, in the divine essence).

⁷⁹ JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[12], nn. 168; JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 1, [ff. 148v-149r], pp. 383-384.

⁸⁰ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Questiones super Methaphysicam Aristotelis*, I, q. 1 *Utrum ens simpliciter sumptum quod est commune Deo et creature sit scientie methaphysice subiectum primum primitate adaequationis*, Instantia expensisque Nicholai Petri de Harlem coadiuvante Hermanno de Levilapide de Colonia, In civitate Vicentina 1477, f. (unnumbered; I refer to the gathering) A2rb.

Nevertheless, the meaning attributed to the noun ‘*subiectum*’ in Andrés’s pages does not seem to be identical with that ascribed to it in Scotus’s pages. On the one hand, ‘*subiectum*’ is that about which properties and causes – within the science having it as its subject – are demonstrated⁸¹; on the other, it is primarily that which is present in all ‘things’ considered by that particular science and which allows that science to consider them⁸². It seems to me that, doing so, Antonio Andrés merges in one notion both what Aquinas called ‘subject’ and what Aquinas called ‘object’. Moreover, it seems to me that the Spanish Franciscan looks at the *subiectum* in a way that, while being allowed to some extent by Scotus’s *De cognitione Dei*, still does not represent the main tenet of the Franciscan master’s epistemology. The Subtle Doctor too conceives of the subject/object as of something about which a particular science proves the properties, yet he presents it primarily as that which virtually includes the ‘things’ considered by that science as well as the propositions composing it. Only in case such a subject/object does not exist, explains Scotus in *De cognitione Dei*, we can have recourse to a subject/object common by way of predication to what that science considers. Well, Andrés does not hold this position; rather, he presents the *subiectum* simply as something included in all ‘things’ considered by the science of which it is *subiectum* and, conversely, whose inclusion in those ‘things’ is precisely what allows a particular science to consider them. In conclusion, here is what he writes about the subject of metaphysics that is first as to adequacy:

«primitas sive prioritas adequationis notat equalitatem prescisam subiecti ad scientias quoniam scilicet scientia non excedit subiectum nec e converso. Sed quicquid cadit aliquo modo sub consideratione scientie cadit sub ratione formali subiecti et e converso, quicquid participat rationem formalem subiecti cadit sub consideratione illius scientie. Verbi gratia si ens in quantum ens ponitur subiectum primum methaphisice tali primitate quicquid participat rationem entis ut sic cadit sub consideratione methaphisice et quicquid methaphisica considerat sub ratione entis considerat»⁸³.

III. a. 2. The subject and the ‘intension’ of metaphysics

In the case of metaphysics, writes Andrés, the adequate subject of this science is being as being, i.e. being taken in an absolute way (*simpliciter sumptum*), or else, being understood as common to God and creature.

In his *Questiones* the Spanish Franciscan collects four arguments in support of this thesis. *i)* The subject of a science must be that to which the properties studied by the science originally belong *per se*; now, metaphysics deals with metaphysical properties; but just being as being can be their subject; hence, being as being is the subject of metaphysics. *ii)* If being as being were not the subject of metaphysics, then there would exist another science that studies it; hence, there would exist four speculative sciences, which contrasts with what Aristotle states. *iii)* A further consequence of the same observation is that there would exist a science having a more general subject than the subject of metaphysics; hence, there would exist another science above metaphysics. *iv)* Metaphysics is the highest science; now, the highest science deals with the highest knowables; but being as being is the highest knowable because it is the first known and the most certain among what is known; hence, metaphysics deals with being as being⁸⁴.

These arguments have the purpose of assigning metaphysics the study of the most universal *ratio*; however, they say nothing about the limits of the ‘intension’ of metaphysics. In order to know more about Andrés’s view on this point, we need to examine some further places of his work.

In the *Expositio* he develops a quite simple doctrine. Certainly, writes our author, the task proper to the metaphysician is to know all things, but, he adds, just in a universal way. The point is that in

⁸¹ Cfr. JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS [actually ANTONIUS ANDREA], *Expositio in XII libros Metaphysicorum*, I, summa 1, cap. 1, n. 18, in JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Opera omnia*, Lugduni 1639, vol. 4, 10b-11a, and ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Questiones*, I, q. 1, f. A4va-b.

⁸² ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Questiones*, I, q. 1, f. A2rb. Actually, in his *Expositio* Andrés seems to hold a ‘virtual inclusion theory’ as well: cf. the passage referred to in footnote 85.

⁸³ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Questiones*, I, q. 1, f. A2rb.

⁸⁴ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Questiones*, I, q. 1, respondeo, quantum ad tertium, tertia conclusio, f. A4va-b.

order to know a universal we do not need to know in detail all that is contained in it; nevertheless, he who knows a universal knows all that is contained in it *in potentia et in communi*. Now, the metaphysician knows being in a universal way; hence he knows everything. This does not imply, however, that he knows everything in detail, nor that knowing everything in detail is his task⁸⁵.

The doctrine Andrés expounds in his *Questiones* is more complex. Facing the question *Utrum ad methaphisicum in quantum talis per se pertineat cognoscere omnes quidditates rerum in particulari*, he writes that this question allows only two possible valid answers. We may say that it belongs to metaphysics to know each quiddity, insofar as it is a quiddity and it is this quiddity, but it does not belong to metaphysics to know the *ratio* of any accident of that quiddity. Or else, we may say that it belongs to metaphysics to know each quiddity, insofar as it is a quiddity and it is this quiddity, as well as the *ratio* of the *per se* accidents of that quiddity, but it does not belong to metaphysics to know the *ratio* of the *per accidens* accidents of that quiddity.

Andrés's thesis can be literally found in Scotus's *Quaestiones*; nevertheless, the arguments by which he defends it may be interpreted as a simplified version of the treatment developed by the Subtle Doctor. The fact that metaphysics has the just mentioned task, writes Andrés, is demonstrated by the fact that the first knowledge of a thing is the knowledge of its quiddity; but this knowledge belongs to metaphysics; ergo. The fact that metaphysics has to limit itself to this task is demonstrated by the fact that, if not, all sciences would be subordinated to metaphysics⁸⁶.

So it clearly appears that, according to Andrés, metaphysics does not deal with all things in detail. But it is equally clear that in our author's mind metaphysics specifically deals with the separate substances; one may ask, therefore, whether this science deals with these substances in detail.

In his *Questiones* the Spanish Franciscan first of all summarizes Scotus's position: «de substantiis separatis sunt multe proprietates cognoscibiles quantum est ex parte illorum, sed non a nobis via sensus. Ideo aliqua scientia speculativa est possibilis haberi de eis sed non a nobis. Proprietates autem que sunt scibiles a nobis via sensus de illis substantiis sunt sole passiones entis»⁸⁷. By way of this brief observation Andrés attains two results: incorporating the science of the separate substances into metaphysics; preventing that metaphysics, when developed *pro statu isto*, deals with the totality of the properties of the separate substances.

Now, the thesis expounded in the *Questiones* appears to leave no room for the possibility of a metaphysics that, *pro statu isto*, deals with the properties of these substances in detail. By contrast, the *Expositio* seems to allow this possibility.

In his commentary on chapter 1 of *Metaphysics* VI, Andrés writes that here Aristotle confronts the following difficulty: if it were true that metaphysics deals with the immovable and separate being, then it would deal with a particular being; hence it would not be true that it deals with being just in general (*in communi*). Well, in Andrés's view, the passage where Aristotle writes that if there were no substance (i.e. no immaterial substance) besides natural substances, then physics would be the first science etc.⁸⁸, is precisely an answer to that difficulty.

The Spanish Franciscan paraphrases that passage as follows. If there were no substance besides natural substances, then each being would be material (*physicum et naturalem*); hence, physics would be the first among the sciences. But an immovable substance does exist, and its study belongs to metaphysics; hence metaphysics is the first philosophy. Consequently, adds Andrés reporting Aristotle's words, metaphysics will be the most universal science because it will have to speculate about being as being, so that this science is the first both as to the priority of dignity (since it deals with the divine being), and as to the priority of universality (since it deals with being in a universal way)⁸⁹.

⁸⁵ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Expositio*, I, summa 1, cap. 2, n. 21, p. 13a.

⁸⁶ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Questiones*, I, q. 9 *Utrum ad methaphisicum in quantum talis per se pertineat cognoscere omnes quidditates rerum in particulari*, ff. C2rb-C3va.

⁸⁷ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Questiones*, I, q. 1, respondeo, quantum ad secundum, f. A3rb.

⁸⁸ *Met.*, VI, 1, 1026a.

⁸⁹ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Expositio*, VI, summa 1, cap. 2, nn. 13-14, p. 210a-b.

Below I will deal with Andrés's position concerning the problem of the unity in one science of the study of the most general *rationes* and the study of the spiritual beings. Here I just focus my attention on the following question: what is the reason why Andrés needs to make clear that metaphysics deals both with being *in communi*, and with immaterial substance? The point is that, according to our author, dealing with being as being already means dealing both with the immaterial substances and with the material substances, though both of them are considered just as beings. Thus, the fact that he highlights metaphysics' capability of dealing with the immaterial substances would seem to imply that this science devotes special attention to these substances. Nevertheless, as far as I could see, Andrés does not go in depth into the nature of this attention, nor into the degree of 'intension' by which this science studies these substances.

III. a. 3. The cohesion of metaphysics

In the paragraphs of the *Expositio* we have just examined, Andrés explicitly maintains that metaphysics deals both with the separate substances and with being *in communi*, but he does not account for this statement. In effect, the *Expositio*, VI, *summa* 1, cap. 2, n. 14, ends with the following words: «ejusdem scientiæ est considerare de ente in communi, et de substantia immateriali, et immobili, ut de nobiliori parte entis, ut declaratum fuit in primo libro». The problem arising here concerns therefore the way in which in the commentary on the first book of the *Metaphysics* Andrés approaches and solves the question of the unity in one science of the study of the separate substances and the study of the most general *rationes*.

In that place the Spanish Franciscan develops the following consideration: according to Aristotle, metaphysics has to deal with the first causes and the first principles⁹⁰; this implies that the metaphysician must know everything (i.e., explains Andrés, must know the most universal of universals) and must account for everything (i.e. must know the first causes of things)⁹¹. Now, in the commentary on the first book of the *Metaphysics* our author says nothing more; hence, we should ask what is the reason why he thinks that these statements are sufficient to *declarare* the fact that it belongs to one and the same science etc.

In my opinion, the answer to this question lies in the commentary on the sixth book of the *Metaphysics*. Here Andrés makes clear that the separate substances are the incomplex principles of being, i.e. its true causes⁹². We may conclude that he proceeds in the following way. In the commentary on the first book he explicitly maintains that the metaphysician must know the first causes of things and – less explicitly – that these first causes have the most universal among universals as their effect. At the beginning of the commentary on the sixth book, he identifies the first causes of being with the separate substances. Now, there is no doubt that for Andrés being is the most universal among universals. The answer provided by the Spanish Franciscan to the question of the unity of the two 'parts' (strictly speaking, Andrés does not use this term) of metaphysics is therefore the following: the first causes of being are the first causes of all things; the first causes of being are the separate substances; then the separate substances are the first causes of all things; hence the metaphysician, who has to deal with the first causes of all things, has to deal both with the separate substances (as they are the first causes of being) and with being (which is the effect of these causes).

If this interpretation of Andrés's thought is correct, it gives rise to a further interpretative problem. Positing the doctrine we have just seen, one may ask whether our author thinks that the being whose cause are the separate substances is the being which is the adequate subject of metaphysics. If our author gave a positive answer to this question (and so it appears), it would ensue that he advocates the thesis that the separate substances are outside the subject of metaphysics. Hence we might deduce that Andrés's position is close to Thomas Aquinas's position: metaphysics has to deal with the separate substances not as a part of the subject of this science, but as the cause of this subject. However, if this really were Andrés's position, it would conflict with the thesis –

⁹⁰ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Expositio*, I, *summa* 1, cap. 1, n. 18, pp. 10b-11a.

⁹¹ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Expositio*, I, *summa* 1, cap. 2, n. 20, p. 12a-b.

⁹² ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Expositio*, VI, *summa* 1, cap. 1, n. 2, p. 205b.

explicitly held by our author – according to which immaterial substance is the most noble part of being. By contrast, if the answer to the debated question were negative, then Andrés’s thesis would be identical with that of Scotus. Yet, in this case too, a difficulty would arise: what difference would there be – in our Franciscan’s view – between the being which is the adequate subject of metaphysics and the being whose cause are the immaterial substances?

To these observations it should be added that in the same *summa* 1 of *Expositio* VI Andrés explains the distinction of the different theoretical sciences and their respective internal cohesion by means of a criterion which is different from the one we have just seen: the criterion of the *modum diffiniendi et considerandi*. Physics, mathematics, and metaphysics, writes our author, can be distinguished because the first considers things and concepts that are not separated from matter according to being or according to consideration; the second considers concepts that are separated from matter according to being but not according to consideration; the third considers concepts that are separated from matter both according to being and according to consideration⁹³.

The criterion of unification and distinction we have just seen differs from the one that is grounded in the link between the subject of a science and the cause of this subject. Now, Andrés explicitly relates the *modum diffiniendi* proper to a science to the subject of that science. At the beginning of *Expositio*, VI, *summa* 1, cap. 2, n. 12, he writes: «Notandum etiam, quod ex distinctione harum trium scientiarum speculativarum, quæ assignata est penes earum subiecta prima, patet causa distinctionis huius, quam ponit Aristoteles in litera, penes modo diffiniendi». This occurs because, explains our author, the ways of abstracting from matter that characterize the three theoretical sciences are precisely those that characterize their respective subjects⁹⁴. But the clarifications provided by our Franciscan come here to an end. We may conclude that even in this place he does not clearly define what relation exists between the unifying scheme that is grounded in the link between ‘subject of a science’ and ‘cause of the subject’ and the unifying scheme that is grounded in the ‘way of considering’.

III. b. NICOLAS BONET (CA. 1280 - 1343)

Among Scotus’s direct pupils, there were others, such as Francis of Marchia and Nicolas Bonet, who moved in a radically different direction: the separation of metaphysics as the science of being as being from metaphysics as the science of the separate substances. The former author has already become an object of study⁹⁵, whereas the latter requires deeper investigation⁹⁶.

III. b. 1. The nature of the subject of a science

Extensive explanation of Bonet’s complex epistemology is mostly contained in the first book of his *Metaphysica*⁹⁷.

In the first part of chapter 3 of this section of his work, Bonet explains that the ‘subject’ whose nature he intends to study is the subject matter (*subiectum*) of scientific consideration, i.e. the subject *circa quod*. Actually, a science does not reside in its own subject in a subjective way (i.e. as accidents are located in a subject); rather, a science is something concerning – existing about – this subject taken as object (*est circa illud tamquam obiectum*).

⁹³ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Expositio*, VI, *summa* 1, cap. 2, nn. 8-11, pp. 208a-209b.

⁹⁴ ANTONIUS ANDREA, *Expositio*, VI, *summa* 1, cap. 2, n. 12, p. 209b.

⁹⁵ Cfr. the essays by Folger-Fonfara and by Poppi already mentioned in footnote 68.

⁹⁶ I consider here Bonet’s work published under the title: Nicholaus BONETUS, *Habes (...) quattuor volumina: metaphysicam videlicet, naturalem philosophiam, predicamenta necnon theologiam naturalem*, ed. by L. Venier, Mandato et expensis heredum Octaviani Scoti – Per Bonetum Locatellum, Venetiis 1505.

⁹⁷ Bonet places the enquiry about the nature and characteristics of the subject of a science at the beginning of metaphysics not for the sake of didactic convenience, but because he believes that this enquiry is truly and properly a part of metaphysics. Cfr. BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 3 *De proprietatibus subiecti scibilis*, f. 5vb: «Et quia ars ista dicitur universalis et transcendens: ad ipsam pertinet tractare de communissimis: et per consequens de proprietatibus subiecti scibilis in universali que per se sibi insunt: et omni subiecto scibili. Et ideo intellectus qui est semper inquisitivus poterit faciliter omnes predictas proprietates ad suum propositum applicare».

Strictly speaking, explains Bonet, there are two ways according to which a science can ‘exist about’. First: science can be about the demonstrated conclusion as a whole. In this case, the subject about which there is science properly is a knowable subject (i.e. – it is understood – not a knowable subject in a proper sense, but just a knowable subject). Second: science can be about the subject (i.e. the grammatical subject) of the demonstrated conclusion. Considering ‘subject’ according to this meaning, the subject of a science is the subject of the first proposition of that science, of its first conclusion, and of the first property considered by that science. In this case, the subject about which there is science properly is a subject (i.e. – but this is merely implicit – a subject in a proper sense)⁹⁸.

In the third part of chapter 3, Bonet explains in detail his thought about the possible types of subject that is such in a proper sense. Here he distinguishes between knowable subject taken in a proper sense, subject of a piece of knowledge (*subiectum notitie*), and subject of an immediately understood piece of knowledge (*subiectum intellectus*). The first is the subject of the property (*passio*) in the demonstrated conclusion. The second is the subject of a property that inheres in it in an immediate and unprovable way; which happens when this subject is a thoroughly simple quiddity, so that it can neither be defined nor resolved into constituents that are prior to it. The third is the subject of the principles of a science, i.e. the subject of one of the premises of the conclusion. Now, it may happen – as Bonet points out – that the subject of a science is a knowable subject in a proper sense, or rather a subject of a piece of knowledge, or rather a subject of an immediately understood piece of knowledge⁹⁹.

The second part of chapter 3 is devoted to the definition of the requisites (*proprietates*) a subject must satisfy in order to be the subject of a science. Here Bonet finds out seven negative requisites and seven positive requisites. Strictly speaking, the former apply to the subject of a science in general, while the latter merely apply to the knowable subject (*subiectum scibile*) of a science¹⁰⁰. The negative requisites of the subject are: it must not be a contradictory being (*prohibitum*); it must not be an equivocal being; it must not be an accidental being; it must not merely be a being *in anima* (namely: a being whose only existence/‘substance’ is the one provided by the copula in the proposition¹⁰¹); it must not be a corruptible being (namely: a being whose quiddity is not stable); it must not be an incommunicable being (namely: a unique case); it must not be a being provable within the science of which it is subject¹⁰². The affirmative requisites of the knowable subject are: it must be definable; it must be caused; it must be prior to its knowable properties; it must be posterior

⁹⁸ «Subiectum quintum est subiectum circa quod: quia scientia non est subiective in subiecto scientie: sed est circa illud tamquam obiectum. Et hoc dupliciter vel circa conclusionem demonstratam: et tunc proprie habet rationem subiecti scibilis: vel circa subiectum conclusionis: et tunc proprie habet rationem subiecti: quia subiectum conclusionis est subiectum prime propositionis et primarum propositionum illius scientie: et est subiectum primarum passionum: immo omnium vel mediate in post assumendo: vel immediate: et in latus que probantur in illa scientia. Unde proprie subiectum scientie est subiectum prime propositionis prime conclusionis prime passionis: et sic patet quid sit subiectum scientie» (BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 3, f. 4ra). In the note written in the margin of the cited excerpt, Lorenzo Venier explains the passage containing the expressions ‘*in post*’ and ‘*in latus*’ with the following words: «Divisiones non per media augentur: sed in post assumendo: capiendo subiecta et passiones differentia ordinem aliquem inter se vel secundum sub et supra: vel secundum prius et posterius. Augentur etiam in latus: cum eadem passio de duobus subiectis coequis demonstratur».

⁹⁹ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 3, f. 5va-b.

¹⁰⁰ In the chapter here in question our author is not totally explicit on this point; however, the same subject clearly emerges in BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 6 *De subiecto huius metaphysice*, f. 11va-b, where he has recourse to what he writes in the third part of the chapter here under consideration, i.e. in *Id.*, cap. 3, f. 5ra-va. As regards these passages, cfr. *infra*.

¹⁰¹ In this context, Bonet explains that the being *in anima* should not be confused with the being of reason. The being of reason is that being whose only existence is the objective existence, namely, the existence something has as it is known (*quod habet esse obiective in anima sicut cognitum in conoscente*), or else the existence the intellect conveys to the known object (*aliquid derelictum in obiecto cognito*). The being *in anima* is that being whose only existence/‘substance’ is the one brought about by the copula between predicate and subject. This existence/‘substance’, points out Bonet, results from the work of composition and division of the intellect. Cfr. BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 3, f. 4va.

¹⁰² BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 3, cc. 4ra-5ra.

ex natura rei to the middle term of the demonstration; it must comprise a knowable quiddity; this knowable quiddity must be really identical with it; this knowable quiddity must be formally distinct from it¹⁰³.

In the following chapter 4, Bonet approaches the question of the nature of the first subject of a science. He starts by introducing some clarifications. He distinguishes between the first subject having primacy of perfection and the first subject having primacy of adequacy. The first subject of a science which is first due to its primacy of adequacy is the subject of the first proposition of that science and of the first property studied by that science. Now, every science owns a subject which is first due to its primacy of adequacy; by contrast, not every science has to own a subject which is first due to its primacy of perfection. Moreover, if a science contains a first subject having primacy of perfection, this one does not necessarily coincide with the first subject having primacy of adequacy¹⁰⁴.

Once clarified this, our author criticizes some ideas concerning the first subject of a science¹⁰⁵. He denies that it is determined by the converging in only one being of the primacies of perfection and of adequacy. He also denies that it is determined by the modality of abstraction¹⁰⁶ or by the virtual inclusion in it of all the properties considered by that science¹⁰⁷. Finally, he expounds his position: the first subject of a science is that subject in which the property inheres first, for itself, in a convertible as well as in a universal way¹⁰⁸.

III. b. 2. The nature of the subject of metaphysics

The long chapter 6 of Bonet's *Met.*, lib. 1 is devoted to the discovery of the subject of metaphysics. At the outset Bonet distinguishes between two different senses of the term 'being'. Taken in the first sense, it is meant to designate all that is positive, i.e. other than nothing; hence it includes in itself both what is real and what is of reason, both what is directly part of a predicament and what is reductively part of it as well as what is not part of it at all. Taken in the second sense, it is meant to designate a particular *ratio*, which is distinct from other *rationes* and quiddities¹⁰⁹.

Once this is made clear, Bonet puts these two notions through the sieve of the seven negative requisites that are proper to the subject of a science and of the seven positive requisites that are proper to the knowable subject of a science.

The first of the two notions of being does not satisfy the second negative requisite: the unequivocality. A notion is univocal – writes our Scotist, thus implicitly allowing a Thomistic argument – when it does not include the differences that contract it; but being, taken in the first sense, also embraces every possible contracting difference; hence it cannot be univocal. It ensues that it cannot be the subject of any science¹¹⁰.

By contrast, the second of the two notions of being satisfies all seven negative requisites proper to the subject of a science. In particular, this notion is univocal. To be more precise, it is univocal when considered as comprising the ten predicaments, the real being, the being of reason, the first intelligence¹¹¹, and any other thing; however, it cannot comprise the being *in anima*, the other transcendental notions (*sue passionēs*), and the ultimate differences. Therefore, when taken

¹⁰³ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 3, f. 5ra-va.

¹⁰⁴ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 4 *De primo subiecto*, f. 6ra.

¹⁰⁵ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 4, f. 6ra-va.

¹⁰⁶ Note that the thesis criticized here is not the one availing itself of the degree of abstraction but the one availing itself of the modality, i.e. the procedure, of abstraction. In a marginal note, Venier observes that this is Auriol's position.

¹⁰⁷ Venier observes that this is Scotus's position. This attribution seems not perfectly correct to me. It can be added that it is also Hervæus's position.

¹⁰⁸ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 4, f. 6va-b.

¹⁰⁹ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 6, f. 7ra.

¹¹⁰ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 6, f. 7ra-va.

¹¹¹ This is true, explains Bonet, under the condition that the first intelligence is not an eminently existing being, understanding the expression 'eminently existing being' according to the following meaning: such as to correspond to the very universal concept of being. In this case, there would be no concept common to the first intelligence and the other things. Cfr. BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Theologia naturalis, lib. 1, cap. 1 *Quid sit prima intelligentia in universali*, f. 91va.

according to this second meaning, being can be the subject of a science, and in particular it can be the subject of metaphysics¹¹².

Eventually, Bonet introduces two important clarifications. First of all, being as being (i.e. being taken according to the second meaning) cannot be the knowable subject of metaphysics: this happens because it does not satisfy the first, nor the second, nor the fourth positive requisites proper to the knowable subject of a science¹¹³. Secondly, only being as being can be the subject of metaphysics; this happens because metaphysics is a universal science, hence its subject must be a universal quiddity; but only being as being satisfies this requisite.

It ensues that metaphysics possesses a subject, and that this subject is being as being. Nevertheless, this subject is not a knowable subject; rather, it is a subject of some immediately understood pieces of knowledge¹¹⁴. By contrast, a knowable subject of metaphysics is all that includes being according to the first *per se* mode¹¹⁵.

III. b. 3. Three clarifications: metaphysics between intellectual knowledge and the other sciences

Bonet's doctrines summarized above do not exhaust our author's thought about the nature of metaphysics and its subject. In order to draw a correct representation, it is necessary to relate at least three other theses held by our Franciscan.

The first concerns the distinction between the object (*obiectum*) of the intellect and the subject of metaphysics. In the seventh book of his *Metaphysica*, Bonet explicitly asks whether the object of the intellect is identical with the subject of metaphysics. He answers by distinguishing three cases: that of the first object of the intellect which is such as to adequacy, that of the first object of the intellect which is such as to perfection, and that of the object of the intellect which is such as to origin.

The subject of metaphysics – explains our author – is the adequate object of the intellect neither as regards moving the intellect to its act, nor as regards being the target of that act. The reason for this statement is simple: if nothing else moved or fulfilled the act of the intellect «nisi precise quidditas eius [i.e. of being as being] ut prescindit ab omni alio», then «alie quidditates non essent cognite». At most, we can say that the subject of metaphysics is in fact identical with the object of the intellect as regards fulfilling its act. We can also say that the adequate object of the intellect is being taken as a word signifying every positive which is outside the nothingness; yet, taken according to this meaning, being is not the subject of metaphysics¹¹⁶.

It should be added that being as being is not the object of the intellect having priority of perfection either. This statement as well has a simple reason: «cum inter omnia intelligibilia que cadunt sub primo obiecto intellectus ens in quantum ens sit imperfectius: quia in linea predicamentali predicata priora sunt imperfectiora posterioribus et includentibus et contrahentibus illa»¹¹⁷.

Finally, being as being does not seem to be the object of the intellect having priority of origin. Whether on the level of confused knowledge, writes Bonet, or on the level of distinct knowledge, we can observe that the intellect has not just one first object which is such as to origin; rather, we

¹¹² BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 6, ff. 7va-11rb.

¹¹³ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 6, f. 11rb-va.

¹¹⁴ Hence Bonet draws the radical conclusion that, from this point of view, metaphysics is not a science: «propter hoc enim tantum diximus subiectum metaphysicum non esse scientificum: quoniam omnes propositiones formate in metaphysica sunt immediate: ut iste: ens est unum: ens est bonum: et sic de aliis: cum non possint a priori subiecto et predicato demonstrari» (BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, *Theologia naturalis*, lib. 1, cap. 4 *An habitus theologicus sit scientia vel opinio vel intellectus*, f. 93va).

¹¹⁵ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, *Metaphysica*, lib. 1, cap. 6, f. 11va-b.

¹¹⁶ By saying this, Bonet follows Scotus, although in a creative way. Indeed, despite the statements to the contrary of some present-day writer, no medieval and renaissance authors admit a complete identity of the subject of metaphysics with the object of the intellect.

¹¹⁷ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, *Metaphysica*, lib. 2, cap. 7 [erroneously numbered 6] *De obiecto intellectus*, f. 17va.

observe that there exists a plurality of those objects and that they are not resolvable one into the other¹¹⁸.

The second thesis we must relate concerns the Bonetian tree of sciences and the distinction between metaphysics and natural theology.

Bonet thinks that metaphysics and natural theology are distinct sciences and, furthermore, are such that the second is not subordinated to the first¹¹⁹. In the context of the debate about the nature of the first subject of a science, he writes that there exist both a subject which is absolutely first as to origin and nature and a subject which is absolutely first as to perfection. And he clarifies: not only are they not identical, but even fall within the competence of two different sciences: the first of metaphysics; the second of that science having the first intelligence as its subject. The subject of metaphysics is being as being, whereas the subject of the second science is the first intelligence, i.e. the unmoved mover, namely a spiritual and unlimited substance¹²⁰.

And indeed Bonet distinguishes the different sciences, arranges their tree according to an order (with respect to priority and posteriority of origin), and prevents metaphysics from incorporating in itself every other science thanks to a quite simple principle: that of the divisions of being.

«Amplius autem manifestum est quod de ente in quantum ens erit una scienza que habeat ens pro obiectu. Secundo quod ens dividitur sic primo: ut fertur ens aliud finitum aliud infinitum de ente in quantum ens erit prima scientia: de infinito secunda. De ente finito tertia: item quia ens finitum et limitatum dividitur eque immediate: ut fertur in decem prima genera de quibus sunt decem scientie: quia qualibet quidditas predicamentalis habet suas proprias passiones cum ea convertibiles et de ipsa demonstrabiles. Et sic quarta scientia erit de substantia: quinta de quantitate: sexta de qualitate: septima de relatione: octava de actione: nona de passione: decima de situ: undecima de quando: duodecima de ubi: decima tertia de habitu»¹²¹.

Bonet's third thesis we have to relate concerns the nature of the procedure according to which it can be recognized that the subject of metaphysics includes, as univocal *ratio*, the first intelligence too. Actually, this is the problem that most challenges Bonet's elegant and simple doctrine.

First of all, we see that not only does our author separate metaphysics from natural theology, but he also neglects to establish any procedural dependence of the first on the second. More precisely, he does not display any particular link between metaphysics and natural theology even when, in the first book of his *Metaphysica*, he maintains that being (i.e. the *ratio* that is the subject of metaphysics) is univocal also with respect to the first intelligence and the other things.

The problem is the following. In order to demonstrate the univocity at issue, he formulates this sole argument: the sensible nature is able to bring about in our intellect a concept of being that allows the comprehension of something which is included in the first intelligence¹²². Now, this argument might be interpreted in the following way: Bonet proves the univocity of being with respect to the first intelligence and the other things resting on the fact that it is possible to demonstrate that the first intelligence exists. If this were Bonet's real position, a question should

¹¹⁸ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 2, cap. 7 [erroneously numbered 6], cc. 17va-18rb. But see the detailed explanations formulated in the immediately next part of the chapter and regarding the priority of origin of being as being in scientific knowledge: *Id.*, f. 18rb.

¹¹⁹ Claiming this, Bonet places himself in a theoretical perspective. Yet, he himself is aware that, from the historical point of view, things are different: «in metaphysica Aristotelis non sunt pure metaphysicalia tradita: sed sunt multa theologica de substantiis separatis: et de intelligentiis»; «in metaphysica Aristotelis ut dictum est multa traduntur que non sunt pure metaphysicalia: sicut de prima intelligentia et aliis substantiis separatis». To the contrary, specifies our author, «in nostra metaphysica (...) non probabuntur nisi pure metaphysicalia predicata cum ente in quantum ens convertibilia» (BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 2, cap. 7 [erroneously numbered 6], f. 18rb-va).

¹²⁰ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 4, f. 6ra. Cfr. also *Id.*, Theologia naturalis, lib. 1, cap. 3 *Hic stabilitur subiectum theologie*, f. 93ra-va.

¹²¹ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 2, cap. 6 *De subalternatione scientiarum*, f. 17rb. But see also the detailed explanations in *Id.*, Theologia naturalis, lib. 1, cap. 9 *Ostendit ordinem huius scientie ad alias facultates*, f. 95ra. Here our author highlights the fact that the subject of natural theology is not the infinite being, it is the unlimited substance. This, writes Bonet, makes more problematic to determine the order of origin in which the second and the fourth sciences are to be arranged.

¹²² BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 1, cap. 6, f. 9ra.

follow: how can he state that the existence of the first intelligence can be demonstrated? Assuming that his answer lies in the fact that the existence of the first intelligence is effectively demonstrated, a further question follows: does he assign this demonstration to metaphysics or to natural theology? Assuming that he assigns it to natural theology, the final question is how Bonet can separate metaphysics from natural theology.

Indeed, our author's position avoids this problem. In Bonet's view, the existence of the first mover is presupposed – rather than demonstrated – by any intellect¹²³. He further maintains that the first mover, as it is the subject of natural theology, is not demonstrated by this science¹²⁴. It clearly appears that precisely these two doctrines enable Bonet not to establish any particular link between metaphysics and natural theology.

The preceding analysis should be completed by a second observation: not only does our author not recognize any procedural dependence of metaphysics on rational theology, but, more radically, he does not recognize any conceptual dependence of the first on the second. Specifically, he thinks that the elaboration of natural theology does not bring about any modification or enlargement of the content of our notion of being. Indeed, this *ratio* – as Scotus had already held – remains unchanged all along the development of both metaphysics and rational theology. In particular, he maintains that the knowledge of the fact that the *ratio entis* exists in the first intelligence too does not modify our comprehension of this *ratio*.

Bonet's statements on this matter are explicit. In the second book of his *Metaphysica*, he writes that being is included in every other knowable object; in particular, it is included in the knowable subject of every other science. Now, the knowledge of the definition of a thing (i.e. of what is included in that thing) is a necessary condition assuring the possibility of a scientific knowledge of that thing. Hence, being is first as to priority of origin in relation to the scientific knowledge of any other thing. For this reason, metaphysics is first as to priority of origin in relation to any other science¹²⁵. A few lines below, Bonet introduces two radical considerations. First: prior predicates can be known without knowing the posterior ones; being is prior to the first intelligence; hence it can be known without knowing the first intelligence. In particular, the «subiectum metaphysice est per se conceptibile absque subiectis aliarum scientiarum». Second: the knowledge of the *ratio entis* in things that exist according to different modes (namely: on the one hand, the first intelligence; on the other hand, the other things) does not require different acts of knowledge¹²⁶.

So, in this case too, Bonet's position on the 'stability' of the notion of being (and the consequent independence of metaphysics from natural theology) depends on several well-defined doctrines of this author. As Lorenzo Venier highlights, it is the validity of these doctrines – and in particular of the second consideration seen above – that establishes the validity of the entire position of this 14th-century pupil of Scotus:

«Nota quod si variatur actus videndi ob variationes modi et existentie [sic; Bonet writes «*modi scilicet existentie*»] sub qua illud videtur rationes facte supra [i.e. Bonet's arguments] solvuntur. Si autem non ille rationes demonstrant. Unde diceret iste doctor actus non variari: licet existentie sint plures: et hoc quia ille non videntur: tu considera»¹²⁷.

IV. Two authors of the late 15th century

Reconstructing the 15th-century development of the debate on the nature of metaphysics (subject, unity, intension, relationships between this science and the other sciences, etc.) still remains a difficult task. Many texts, including some relevant ones, are still unpublished: let us

¹²³ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Theologia naturalis, lib. 1, cap. 1 *Quid sit prima intelligentia in universali declaratur*, f. 91ra.

¹²⁴ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Theologia naturalis, lib. 1, cap. 3 *Hic stabilitur subiectum theologie*, f. 91rb.

¹²⁵ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 2, cap. 7 [erroneously numbered 6], f. 18rb.

¹²⁶ BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 2, cap. 7 [erroneously numbered 6], f. 18va-b.

¹²⁷ Laurentius VENERIUS, *marginal note* to BONETUS, *Quattuor volumina*, Metaphysica, lib. 2, cap. 7 [erroneously numbered 6], f. 18vb. Strictly speaking, Bonet postpones the defense of his second consideration to the third book of his *Theologia naturalis*.

mention, for example, Paulus Venetus's *Lectura super librum Metaphysicorum*, of which at least two manuscripts are extant¹²⁸. But even published works have not aroused a quantity of systematic studies devoted to this particular question¹²⁹. Among them, let us just mention the texts by Heinrich of Gorkum¹³⁰, Jean Cabrol¹³¹, Dionysius of Leeuwen¹³², Gabriele Zerbi¹³³, Antonio Trombetta¹³⁴, Pierre Tartaret¹³⁵, Paolo Barbo from Soncino¹³⁶, Jan of Głogów¹³⁷, Gabriel Biel¹³⁸, Dominic of Flanders¹³⁹.

Here I will mainly deal with two authors, both characterized by a strong, although dissimilar, interest for Scotus: the Veronese secular Gabriele Zerbi, who taught at Padua and Bologna universities, and the Paduan Franciscan Antonio Trombetta.

IV. a. THE THOUGHT OF GABRIELE ZERBI (1445-1505)

Although Gabriele Zerbi's *Questiones metaphysice*, published in 1482, may be considered as a work of his youth, they constitute an imposing volume which consists of more than one thousand

¹²⁸ Let me also recall, as mere examples, the *Glosæ super libris methaphisice* by the Florentine Ubertino degli Albizzi – about which see the *Catalogo di manoscritti filosofici nelle biblioteche italiane*, Olschki, Firenze 1982, vol. 3, pp. 53-54 – and the commentaries *in libros Metaphysicæ* by the Parisian professors Jean Hennon and Jean le Damoisiau described by P.J.J.M. BAKKER, *Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics in Late Fifteenth-Century Paris. I: The Commentaries on Aristotle by Johannes Hennon*, «Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale», 47 (2005), pp. 125-155; ID., *Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics in Late Fifteenth-Century Paris. II: The Commentaries on Aristotle by Johannes le Damoisiau*, «Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale», 48 (2006), pp. 209-228.

¹²⁹ Anyhow, I wish to mention P.P. RUFFINENGO, *L'oggetto della metafisica nella scuola tomista tra tardo medioevo e prima età moderna*, «Medioevo», 34 (2009), in print, and V. RODRÍGUEZ, *El ser que es objeto de la metafísica según la interpretación tomista clásica*, «Estudios filosóficos», 14 (1965), pp. 283-312 and 461-492, that examines also texts by Paolo Barbo from Soncino and Dominic of Flanders (Beaudovin Lottin).

¹³⁰ HENRICUS DE GORICHEM, *Questiones in s. Thomam*, [q. 2], Propositio 1, [Conrad Fyner, Esslingen (not after 13th May 1475)] (facs. Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1967), pp. (unnumbered) 2-3.

¹³¹ Johannes CAPREOLUS, *Defensiones theologiæ divi Thomæ Aquinatis*, Prologus, qq. 3-4, ed. by C. Paban / Th. Pègues, 7 voll., Cattier, Turonibus 1900-1908, vol. 1, pp. 32b-61b.

¹³² DIONYSIUS CARTHUSIANUS, *Commentaria in IV libros Sententiarum*, In I Sent., qq. præviæ 3-4, in ID., *Opera omnia*, ed. by Monachi Sacri Ordinis Cartusienis, 42 voll., Typis Cartusiae S. M. de Pratis / Typis Cartusiae S. Hugonis, Monstrolii / Tornaci / Parkminster 1896-1912, vol. 19, pp. 74b-83a.

¹³³ Gabriel ZERBUS Veronensis, *Questiones metaphysice*, Per Johannem de Nordlingen et Henricum de Harlem socios, Bononie 1482.

¹³⁴ First edition: Antonius TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, in ID., *Opus doctrine scotice in thomistas discussum sententiis Phylosophi maxime conveniens*, Hyeronimus de Paganinis, Venetiis 1493, ff. 11ra-76rb. Second edition: ID., *Questiones metaphysicales*, in ID., *Opus in Metaphysicam Aristotelis Padue in thomistas discussum*, Sumptu ac expensis heredum Octaviani Scoti – Per Bonetum de Locatellis, Venetiis 1502, ff. 2ra-96vb.

¹³⁵ Petrus TATARETUS, *Questiones super tota philosophia et metaphisica Aristotelis cum textus clarissima expositione ac dubiorum seu difficultatum ordinatissima determinatione*, Questiones totius metaphisice, lib. 1, questio and lib. 6, questio, Per Joannem Bouyer et Guillermmum Bouchet, [Poitiers] 1493 (1494), ff. (unnumbered; I refer to the gathering) q1rb-q2ra and q6vb-q7rb.

¹³⁶ Paulus [BARBUS] Soncinas, *Quæstiones metaphysicales acutissimæ*, lib. 4, qq. 9-11 and 14; lib. 6, qq. 1 and 7-8, ed. by G. Rossetti, Apud hæredem Hieronymi Scoti, Venetiis 1588 (facs. Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1967), pp. 14a-20a, 23b-25b, 106a-107b, 113a-116a.

¹³⁷ JOANNES DE GLOGOVIA, *Commentarium in "Metaphysicam" Aristotelis*, lib. 1, nn. 1 and 6-8; lib. 4, nn. 19 and 22; lib. 6, nn. 36 and 39, in JAN Z GŁOGOWA, *Komentar do Metafizyki*, ed. by R. Tatarzyński, 2 voll., Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, Warszawa 1984 («Opera philosophorum Medii Aevi», 7), vol. 1, pp. 21-30, 56-77, 145-156, 177-187, vol. 2, pp. 3-8 and 19-26. On this author see also *infra*.

¹³⁸ Gabriel BIEL, *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, q. 9, ed. by W. Werbeck / U. Hofmann, 5 voll., J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1973, vol. 1, pp. 56-62.

¹³⁹ DOMINICUS DE FLANDRIA, *Questionum super XII libros Metaphisice*, In lib. 1, q. 1; In lib. 1, q. 7, aa. 4-6; In lib. 6, q. 1; In lib. 6, q. 3, a. 1; In lib. 6, q. 5, aa. 2-3; In lib. 6, q. 6; In lib. 6, q. 7, aa. 1 and 3, [Petrus de Quarengiis], Venetiis 1499 (facs. Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1967), ff. (unnumbered; I refer to the gathering) a1ra-a6ra, c1ra-c2va, z8ra-et1ra, et3ra-va, et8rb-con2rb, con2va-con3va. ID., *Questiones peritiles in commentaria Thome de Aquino super libros Posteriorum analeticorum Aristotelis*, lib. 1, q. 10 (*sic; legitur* q. 20 - commentary on l. 15 of Aquinas's commentary), a. 1, in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentaria in libros Perihermenias et Posteriorum Aristotilis. Fallaciarum opus* / DOMINICUS DE FLANDRIA, *Questiones in libros Posteriorum Aristotilis et in Fallacias sancti Thome de Aquino*, Per Otinum Papiensem de Luna, Venetiis 1496, f. (unnumbered; I refer to the gathering) L6va-b.

pages in folio. Moreover, here Zerbi exhibits a considerable philosophical culture, relates and examines doctrines and texts with exactness and erudition, in particular by Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, and John of Jandun. On some occasions he supports Aquinas, on some others Scotus, yet in most cases, thanks to a careful analysis of the texts of these two authors, he tries to show that their respective theses are compatible, or at least that both of them are plausible. Not seldom his efforts for *concordia* comprise Albert too.

Among the many pages that Zerbi devotes to the different aspects of the question of the nature of metaphysics, I will examine four themes: the possible asymmetry within metaphysics between the treatment of the material substances and the treatment of the spiritual substances; the possible ‘theological-natural’ presupposition in the comprehension and determination of the subject of metaphysics; the unity in the sole metaphysical science of the consideration of the *rationes generalissimæ* and of the spiritual substances; the relationship between the subject of metaphysics and the object of the intellect.

IV. a. 1. The question of the asymmetry between the treatment of the material substances and the treatment of the spiritual substances

Our author approaches the question of the asymmetry between the treatment of the material substances and the treatment of the spiritual substances in several places of his work.

In the *quaestiones* 2 and 12 on the first book of *Metaphysics*, he explicitly formulates two theses. First: metaphysics deals with God and the immaterial substances in detail, whereas it deals with all other substances just in a universal way. Second: this science deals with God and the immaterial substances just insofar as these beings are known to us naturally (*ex ratione*)¹⁴⁰.

These statements lead us to think that the asymmetry put forward by Zerbi is stronger than the one accepted by Scotus. This impression is sustained by what the Veronese thinker writes in the *quaestio* 3 on the second book. Here he asks himself how and to what extent the human intellect can intellectually know the spiritual substances. In order to formulate an answer, he presents Aquinas’s position as well as Scotus’s position and tries to show their convergence. For Aquinas, the limit that, in the present state, affects the human knowledge of these substances consists in the following fact: human beings do not know the nature (*quid sunt*) of the separate substances unmediatedly, but – thanks to the effects of these substances – they just know the fact that these substances are and possess certain properties (*quia sunt*). For Scotus, this limit consists in the fact that the human soul knows the immaterial substances just thanks to aggregate concepts; i.e., the soul knows these substances in a proper way just within the perimeter of the concept of being (i.e., as to the fact that they are beings and they include *rationes* that are characteristics of being), whereas it knows the peculiar properties of these substances just accidentally (*per accidens*). Nevertheless, continues Zerbi, the human soul, united with the body, possesses a real capability of knowing the spiritual substances not just in a confused way and by a general concept but in a distinct way and as to their proper nature¹⁴¹.

Despite what has been said, in the *quaestio* 3 on the sixth book Zerbi repeats and shares Scotus’s statement according to which «si substantia incorporea habeat passiones proprias sibi primo inherentes non tamen nobis scibiles via sensu. sed sic sole passiones entis sunt de ipsa note»¹⁴².

In conclusion, as already said, it seems to me that Zerbi thinks that Scotus’s position is compatible with that of Aquinas and that – precisely thanks to this interpretation of the two authors’ positions – he thinks that the Subtle Doctor too admits that the human soul, united with the body,

¹⁴⁰ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 2 *Utrum ens simpliciter sumptum commune quiditati et modo sit scientie metaphysice subiectum primum primitate adaequationis, an ens solum commune deo et creature*, Propter tertium, ff. (unnumbered; I refer to the gathering) a8ra-a9rb; *Ib.*, Circa lib. 1, q. 12 *Utrum metaphysici sit considerare quiditates omnium rerum in particulari*, Propter tertium, ff. d6vb-d7ra.

¹⁴¹ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 2, q. 3 *Utrum intellectus humanus unitus corpori possit intelligere substantias separatas et immateriales*, ff. f4rb-g4ra, in particular f6vb-g3rb.

¹⁴² ZERBI, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 6, q. 3 *Utrum philosophia speculativa convenienter dividatur in naturalem mathematicam et divinam*, Propter tertium, f. B5ra.

possesses a real *quia* capability of knowing the spiritual substances in a distinct way and as to their proper nature. Now, this knowledge is precisely that which is acquired within metaphysics. At the same time, this knowledge falls within metaphysics precisely because, in the present state, it is not sufficient to constitute an autonomous science.

IV. a. 2. The question of the ‘theological-natural presupposition’ in the determination of the nature of the subject of metaphysics

As far as I could ascertain, nowhere in Zerbi’s works it is clearly stated that the comprehension and determination of the subject of metaphysics involve the presupposition of the existence of the separate substances, or at least the presupposition that this existence will be demonstrated. But nowhere does he deny this thesis either, and I finally think that he shares it.

In the *quæstio* 13 on the first book he writes that «licet ens in quantum ens absolute consideratum non sit nobilissimum tamen ens sumptum sub ratione formali considerandi que sumitur a deo et intelligentiis est nobilissimum»¹⁴³. It would seem, therefore, that in his view there are two ways of considering being: first, in an absolute way (*absolute*); second, taking into account the existence of God and the intelligences. Further, it would seem that he maintains – although not explicitly – that the second way of considering being is precisely that which is proper to metaphysics.

In the *quæstio* 3 on the sixth book, Zerbi maintains the correctness and adequateness of the distinction of the theoretical science into metaphysics, mathematics, and physics, and he defends this thesis by presenting both Aquinas’s and John Duns Scotus’s doctrines on this topic as valid. In effect, the pages where he approaches this question are a collection – well-composed, indeed – of texts by these two authors. Now, all that he writes concerning the ‘immateriality’ of the *ratio* of being is the following. According to Scotus’s doctrine, «metaphisicus diffiniendo omnino abstrahit a materia. quia sicut ens quoad primo considerat ita quodlibet in quantum sub eius consideratione cadit non includit materiam secundum quod vult Avicenna primo metaphisice». According to Aquinas’s doctrine, «quedam vero speculativa sunt que non dependent a materia secundum esse sed sine materia esse possunt sive numquam sunt in materia neque in materia esse possunt sicut deus et angelus. Sive in quibusdam sunt in materia et in quibusdam non. ut substantia qualitas potentia et actus. et de his omnibus est scientia divina sive theologia qua alio nomine dicitur metaphisica quasi transphisica»¹⁴⁴.

One can see that nowhere, in the considered passages, Zerbi clearly states that the determination of the subject of metaphysics involves the presupposition of the existence of the spiritual substances or the demonstration of their existence. Yet, it seems to me that the above reported passages precisely pave the way for this thesis. First of all, it can be noticed that Zerbi establishes the harmony of Thomas and Scotus in a precise way: he presents them as sharing the view according to which the subject/object of metaphysics includes something that can really be immaterial, i.e. spiritual. Secondly, it is possible that Zerbi hints at this view even in the passage where he presents Scotus’s position. As I previously recalled, in the latin translation of the first book of Avicenna’s *Metaphysics* we can read that «res et ens et necesse talia sunt quod statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus se». Actually, in the *quæstio* 2 on the first book Zerbi emphasizes this perspective: «ens in quantum ens est manifestativum sui ipsius imo primo notum quo ad naturam cum sit primum intelligibile saltem in ordine distincte concipiendi. (...) ens enim in quantum ens est precisum et spoliatum ab omni estraneo»¹⁴⁵. However, Avicenna’s text declares also that the «esse substantiae, in quantum est substantia tantum, non pendet a materia;

¹⁴³ ZERBI, *Questiones metaphisice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 13 *Utrum metaphisica scientiarum naturaliter repertarum prima sit circa difficillima certissima maxime sciens causas libera et aliarum ordinativa*, Propter primum, f. e1rb. Already in *Ib.*, lib. 1, q. 2, f. A[first]9va Zerbi had quoted Aristotle’s (and Averroes’s) assertion according to which «si non est substantia aliqua preter naturam subsistens tunc phisica et naturalis esset prima scientia quia phisica esset de omnibus entibus sicut nunc de omnibus naturalibus», yet deriving from it the only and usual consequence that the subject of a science must be something common to what that science considers.

¹⁴⁴ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphisice*, Circa lib. 6, q. 3, Propter tertium, ff. B4va-B6rb. Quotations from B6ra and B6rb.

¹⁴⁵ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphisice*, lib. 1, q. 2, Propter quartum, f. a12va.

alioquin non esset substantia nisi sensibilis». It is thus possible that Zerbi refers precisely to this passage.

IV. a. 3. The question of the unity in one science of both the treatment of the most general *rationes* and the treatment of the immaterial substances

If the observations developed hitherto are correct, Zerbi has good reasons to maintain the coexistence in one science, namely metaphysics, of both the treatment of the most general *rationes* and the treatment of the spiritual substances: within this science it is actually possible to acquire some knowledge of the specific properties of the spiritual substances; moreover, the comprehension and the determination of the subject of this science would seem to involve – to some extent – the demonstration of the existence of the spiritual substances.

Nevertheless, the texts in which Zerbi explicitly advocates the unity of a metaphysics that considers both the most general *rationes* and the immaterial substances do imply real consistency problems. A very good example of this is a passage of the *quaestio* 2 of the first book, where our author openly avails himself of Albert the Great, yet mingles his position with that of Scotus: God falls within metaphysics because he is the cause of the subject of metaphysics; precisely for this reason, concludes Zerbi, God is part of that subject¹⁴⁶.

IV. a. 4. The question of the relationship between the subject of metaphysics and the object of the intellect

In my reading (rather limited, indeed) of late medieval texts about the nature of metaphysics I never encountered any author maintaining the existence of a full identity between the subject of metaphysics and the object of the intellect. This does not mean that there are no thinkers maintaining such thesis, but at least it enables us to deduce that it is a minority thesis. Yet, a possible exception to the preceding statement is precisely represented by Gabriele Zerbi.

In the *quaestio* 3 on the second book, he faces the following argument: «si primum obiectum nostri naturale est ens in quantum ens. ergo intellectus noster potest habere naturaliter actum circa quodcumque ens et circa quodcumque intelligibile. et consequenter...». Well, this passage can lead us to think that, for Zerbi, the natural object of the intellect is not the *ens simpliciter*, but the *ens in quantum ens*, and consequently that he believes that this object is identical with the subject of metaphysics¹⁴⁷.

In the preceding *quaestio* our author had been even more explicit: «primum et adequatum obiectum potentie intellective non excedit primum et adequatum subiectum habitus illius potentie. alias ille habitus non esset illius potentie vel saltem illi non adequatum. sed ens in quantum ens commune omni enti et non solum ens reale finitum et limitatum est adequatum et primum obiectum potentie intellective. (...) ergo subiectum adequatum metaphysice qua est habitus intellectualis est ens commune deo et creature non ergo tantum ens finitum et limitatum»¹⁴⁸. One can see that this text too confirms a conception of the *ens in quantum ens* according to which it is both adequate object of the intellect and subject of metaphysics.

Finally, in the *quaestio* 4 on the same book, our author writes that the differences that contract being – which is, as Zerbi clarifies, subject of metaphysics – to the subject of a science inferior to metaphysics are not outside being¹⁴⁹. Now, if the being that is not outside the differences contracting it is the ‘same’ being that is subject of metaphysics, then we are allowed to deduce that, according to Zerbi, the subject of metaphysics is identical with being *simpliciter*.

¹⁴⁶ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, lib. 1, q. 2, Propter tertium, ff. a10ra-a11rb.

¹⁴⁷ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 2, q. 3, f. f4rb. Unfortunately, in the discussion of this difficulty (*Ib.*, f. g2va-b) Zerbi does not even mention the question of the relationship between the object of the intellect and the subject of metaphysics. He limits himself to maintain (by explicitly referring to some texts by Scotus) that, in the present state, the object of the intellect is not the being which is common to sensible and non-sensible beings (*secundum totam indifferentiam entis ad sensibilia et insensibilia*); rather, it is the *quidditas rei sensibilis* as well as what is virtually included in this latter.

¹⁴⁸ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 2, Propter secundum, f. a8ra.

¹⁴⁹ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 4 *Utrum metaphysica subalternet sibi omnes alias scientias*, Propter tertium, f. b4va.

And yet, against this hypothesis I have to remark that the identity – admitted by Zerbi – between the being that is object of the intellect and the being that is subject of metaphysics may be of a purely ‘extensional’ nature.

In effect, Zerbi explicitly denies that metaphysics can deal with all things in detail. This is because he interprets the expression ‘as being’ in the sense of ‘according to the definite formal *ratio* of being’ (and this in a twofold sense: insofar as it precedes the mathematical being and the physical being both as to generality and as to immateriality)¹⁵⁰.

Furthermore, in the *quaestio* 2 on the first book our author distinguishes between a specifying meaning and a reduplicative meaning of the expression ‘as’. Taken in a specifying sense, the expression ‘as’ expresses the fact that «illud cui additur accipitur secundum rationem formalem». Taken in a reduplicative sense, the expression ‘as’ expresses the fact that what follows it «esse causam formalem precisam et propriam inherentie predicati ad subiectum». It ensues that, taking ‘*inquantum*’ in a reduplicative sense, ‘being as being’ is equal to ‘all beings’. Now, when we say that being as being is the subject of metaphysics, clarifies Zerbi, the ‘*inquantum*’ is taken in a specifying sense, not in a reduplicative sense¹⁵¹.

Let me add that a possible extensional identity between object of the intellect and subject of metaphysics would not look perfect either: again in the *quaestio* 2 on the first book Zerbi distinguishes the *ens comunissime sumptum ut distinguitur contra nihil* and the *ens commune quiditati et modo* from the *ens in quantum ens commune solum deo et creature*. Only the latter type of *ens*, explains our author, is the first and nearest adequate subject of metaphysics; the other two can just be denominated remote subjects of this science¹⁵².

IV. a. 5. Remarks about the reception of Zerbi’s *Questiones metaphysice*: the case of Jan of Głogów

I cannot exactly evaluate the dissemination of Zerbi’s metaphysical work. It is certain, however, that immediately after its publication it was known and used in Kraków by Jan of Głogów (1445-1507)¹⁵³. This author usually relies on Albert the Great, yet on a few occasions he makes use of argumentations formulated by the Veronese author and he does this by explicitly mentioning him.

Still, this does not mean he is a follower of Zerbi. About the question of the comprehension of the nature of being – and of the subject of metaphysics – Jan holds the thesis according to which this comprehension implies the demonstration of the existence of the separate substances in a clearer way than the Veronese author¹⁵⁴.

Regarding the question of the treatment of the separate substances developed by the metaphysics elaborated by human beings in the present state, Jan believes that this treatment is characterized by a definite limit and that this fact depends on the limit characterizing the human intellect in the present state¹⁵⁵. Nevertheless, he equally believes that metaphysics, taken in itself, can exhaust the treatment of the separate substances¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁰ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 12, ff. d4vb-d8rb, in particular d7rb-va.

¹⁵¹ ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 2, Propter quartum, f. a12vb.

¹⁵² ZERBUS, *Questiones metaphysice*, Circa lib. 1, q. 2, Propter tertium, f. a9va-b.

¹⁵³ Cfr. R. TATARZYŃSKI, *Wstęp edytorski*, in JAN Z GŁOGOWA, *Komentar* cit., vol. 1, pp. 9-17, especially 9-11.

¹⁵⁴ JOANNES DE GLOGOVIA, *Commentarium in “Metaphysicam”*, lib. 6, n. 36 *Utrum tres sint partes philosophiae theoricæ et realis scilicet metaphysica mathematica et physica*, vol. 2, pp. 4-5: «Illud autem dicitur abstractum a materia secundum esse, quod non necessario reperitur in materia, nec cuius existere est in materia. Isto modo substantia, ens et alia prædicata universalia dicuntur abstracta a materia. Si enim ens necessario esset in materia, tunc omne ens esset in materia et omne ens esset materiale, quod est falsum. Principalis enim pars entis, ut causa prima est sine materia. Similiter formæ divinæ separatae non sunt in materia, sunt enim formæ a foris manendo dictæ, eo quod ex materia non sunt compositæ».

¹⁵⁵ JOANNES DE GLOGOVIA, *Commentarium in “Metaphysicam”*, lib. 2, n. 10 *Utrum possibile sit intellectui humano pro statu præsentis vitæ cognoscere substantias divinas separatas*, p. 89: «Intellectus humanus corpori coniunctus non potest cognoscere causam primam et substantias divinas quoad quid est, sed solum quoad quia est».

¹⁵⁶ This is at least what our author seems to maintain in JOANNES DE GLOGOVIA, *Commentarium in “Metaphysicam”*, lib. 1, n. 8 *Utrum inter scientias speculativas metaphysica sit honorabilissima*, vol. 1, p. 74: «scientia dicitur divina dupliciter: primo, quia eam Deus habet; secundo, quia est de Deo et rebus divinis. Modo metaphysica est divina, cum eam maxime habet Deus, metaphysica enim est cognitio Dei et divinorum. Nullus autem ita perfecte et limpide

Furthermore, as regards the question of the coexistence in one science of the study of the most common *rationes* and the study of the separate substances, Jan of Głogów finds this unity on the fact that the most common *rationes* and the separate substances are all gathered in that which is abstract according to being and according to the *ratio* (i.e., explains this author, *secundum modum definiendi*). In effect, in none of his texts does this author hint at the possibility that the treatment of the most common *rationes* and the treatment of the separate substances give rise to two distinct sciences¹⁵⁷.

Lastly, as regards the question of the relationship between the object of the intellect and the subject of metaphysics, he has recourse to the distinction between a reduplicative use and a specifying use of the expression ‘*inquantum*’ and he does so in a particularly clear way. If taken *specificative*, explains Jan, ‘*ens inquantum ens*’ means: ‘being considered solely according to its formal *ratio* of being’. If taken *reduplicative*, ‘*ens inquantum ens*’ means: ‘being considered in virtue of the fact that it is being’, and thus ‘each being’. Well, concludes our author, when we say that the subject of metaphysics is being as being «hoc signum ‘*inquantum*’ non tenetur reduplicative, sed specificative, et specificat formalem rationem entis, secundum quam ens est subiectum primae philosophiae»¹⁵⁸.

As it clearly appears, Jan of Głogów does not exclude that the expression ‘*ens inquantum ens*’ may have a meaning even if taken according to the reduplicative sense of ‘*inquantum*’. Actually, in that case the expression in question might somehow designate the object of the intellect. An example of such a usage might be found in a text written between 1482 and 1488 by the Florentine nobleman Alamanno Donati: *Disputationes de intellectu voluntatisque excellentia*. One of the arguments put forward by Donati in this brief work written in support of the superiority of the intellect over the will reads as follows: «Quis vero negaverit intellectus objectum quod est ens quatenus ens, voluntatis objectum quod bonum est includere? Nam licet neque ens neque bonum diffiniri proprie possit, tamen si diffiniendum esset, non ens per bonum, sed bonum per ens diffiniretur, quando entis ipsius rationem comprehendentis omnia haud quicquam devitet». Like in Zerbi’s case, one might think that Donati identifies the object of the intellect with the subject of metaphysics. But one might equally think that when Donati holds that the *ens quatenus ens* is the object of the intellect, he takes the expression ‘*quatenus*’ in a reduplicative sense. In effect, precisely this appears to be the meaning that Donati gives to ‘*ens quatenus ens*’: «quando entis ipsius rationem comprehendentis omnia haud quicquam devitet» (when nothing escapes the *ratio* of the being itself that embraces all)¹⁵⁹.

Deum cognoscit nisi Deus met. Et etiam, quia ipse est causa divinatorum, maxime noscit earum naturam et proprietatem».

¹⁵⁷ JOANNES DE GLOGOVIA, *Commentarium in “Metaphysicam”*, lib. 6, n. 36, vol. 2, p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ JOANNES DE GLOGOVIA, *Commentarium in “Metaphysicam”*, lib. 1, n. 1 *Utrum ens inquantum ens sit subiectum primae philosophiae*, vol. 1, p. 23. As we saw above, Zerbi too has recourse to this distinction, which anyway is prior to both Zerbi and Jan of Głogów; see, e.g., this clear passage by Jean Buridan: «non est propria locutio. saltem vera: dicere quod ens inquantum ens sit subiectum proprium in metaphysica quia virtute reduplicationis sequeretur quod omne ens esset ibi subiectum proprium: tamen illa locutio sustineretur ad talem sensum quod ens id est iste terminus ens ita quod esset suppositio materialis secundum quod ens id est secundum illam rationem a qua sumitur hoc nomen ens est subiectum proprium in metaphysica ita quod illa dictio inquantum non teneretur reduplicative sed specificative vel determinative ita quod poneretur ad specificandum sive ad exprimendum rationem secundum quam iste terminus ens ponitur subiectum proprium huius scientie» (IOANNES BURIDANUS, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis quaestiones argutissimae*, IV, q. 5, Impensis I. Badii Ascensii, Parisiis 1518, f. 16ra-b. I use the facsimilar reproduction of that edition: JOHANNES BURIDANUS, *Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Metaphysik*, Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1964).

¹⁵⁹ Alamannus DONATI, *Disputationes de intellectu voluntatisque excellentia*, in *Alamannus Donati de intellectu voluntatisque excellentia*, ed. by L. Borghi, «La Bibliofilia», 42 (1940), pp. 108-115, quotations from pp. 110-111. (Kindly supplied by Amos Edelheit).

IV. b. THE THOUGHT OF ANTONIO TROMBETTA (1436-1517)

IV. b. 1. The properties of the subject of a science

The ninth *quæstio* of the first book of Trombetta's *Questiones metaphysicales* is devoted to the problem *Utrum de mente Doctoris Subtilis sit quod metaphysicus consideret quidditates solum in universali*¹⁶⁰. Precisely in order to solve this question the Paduan Scotist develops and exposes his doctrine concerning the epistemological role of the first and adequate scientific subject of a science (*subiectum scientificum primum et adequatum toti scientie*)¹⁶¹.

Scotus and Andrés had maintained that metaphysics alone directly considers the quiddities of things, or the proper accidents of things; by contrast – they wrote – the other sciences consider the quiddities just in relation to some accident of them, or to some *per accidens* accident of them. Trombetta takes a clear position against this doctrine¹⁶²: what is subject of a science must be considered, in that science, according to its own *quidditative ratio*; in other words, it is not enough for it to be merely considered with respect to one of the *rationes* by which it is composed, nor to be considered with respect to a proper accident of it¹⁶³.

Within a few lines Trombetta proves that the subject of a science cannot be considered by that science merely with respect to one of the *rationes* by which it is composed: in this case, he argues, that science would have a confused knowledge of its subject; but the subject of a science is that about which the science develops the best possible knowledge; ergo¹⁶⁴.

Much more laborious is the demonstration of the thesis maintaining that the subject of a science cannot be considered by that science merely with respect to a proper accident of that subject. The several and manifold arguments used by Trombetta avail themselves of the following general consideration: every accident or property of a subject, within the science dealing with that subject, can be related to – or at least is posterior to – that subject; but the first subject of a science, within that science, cannot be related to, nor is posterior to anything else; ergo.

In this context, our author introduces some further details. The science here at issue is not the one that is constituted by the single conclusion; it is the one that deals with a plurality of objects (*obiecta*). Now, Trombetta finds the cohesion of these objects on three bases. First of all, each thing a science considers is resolvable into 'something that is first', in which this resolution comes to an end (*primum ad quod stat ultimata resolutio omnium conoscibilium in tali scientia*). Secondly, each thing considered within a science is considered within that science in virtue of the formal *ratio* of a definite first subject (*ratio considerandi quecumque considerata in scientia*). Thirdly, each thing considered within a science is ordered according to an essential order (*ordo essentialis*), which refers to a 'first' defining that order.

¹⁶⁰ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, ff. 8vb-11ra. Reading through the text of lib. 1, q. 9 and lib. 6, q. 3 contained in the 1493 edition of the *Questiones metaphysicales* I found it identical with the text printed in the 1502 edition. Nevertheless, I decided to use the 1502 edition because it is a real second edition of this text.

¹⁶¹ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9rb. The above reported expression needs to be rapidly cleared up. In the *quæstio* under consideration, the syntagma by which Trombetta mostly designates what a science deals with is '*subiectum primum*'. Nevertheless, he uses also the expressions '*subiectum primum adequatum*' and – more rarely – '*obiectum primum et adequatum*'. This means that our author accepts the explanation of the meaning of '*primum*' as '*adequatum*'. Moreover, he uses the adjective '*adequatum*' to qualify not only the nature both of the *subiectum* and of the *obiectum* of a science, but also the *ratio* of that *subiectum*, which in Trombetta's mind is what determines which objects are considered by a certain science. As concerns the meanings of '*subiectum*' and '*obiectum*', I consider it would be incorrect to identify the first term with something extra-mental and the second term with a conceptual content, since Trombetta always and exclusively speaks of known objects. And yet a slight difference in the meaning of the two terms might be perceived: on at least some occasions, the use of '*subiectum*' aims at stressing the fact that the subject of a science is the basis of what the science considers, whereas the use of '*obiectum*' aims at stressing the fact that the subject of a science is what our knowledge perceives within a certain science.

¹⁶² In this passage Trombetta does not mention Andrés. Note that a few lines above he had praised his former coreligionist defining him *Scoti fidelis interpres*: TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9ra.

¹⁶³ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9ra-b.

¹⁶⁴ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9ra.

Well, in our author's view, the three 'first' we have just mentioned are one and the same 'first': i.e., the first subject of a science, considered according to the objective formal *ratio* from whose viewpoint it is considered within the science of which it is subject (*secundum rationem formalem obiectivam sub qua consideratur in scientia cuius est subiectum primum*).

Our Scotist gives no explanations about this identification. Rather, he examines in depth the distinction between the first subject of a science and the *ratio* of this subject. The first is to the second – writes our author – as a *quod* is to a *quo*, i.e., as the formal effect is to its formal principle. For this reason, he concludes, the objective formal *ratio* of the subject is prior to the first and adequate subject («*obiecto primo et adequato*», writes Trombetta) of that science¹⁶⁵.

After which, Trombetta makes clear that the first subject of a science is what that science considers in the most perfect way among all the ways a science can consider it. Otherwise, argues the Franciscan, there would be no reason why that subject is subject of that science and not of another. And he adds: the subject of a science is the «*finis obiectalis ultimus totius scientie: quia est illud per quod alia considerantur: et ad quod omnia alia considerata in scientia habent essentialem attributionem*». To summarize, the doctrine held by our Scotist on this point is the following: the first subject of a science constitutes the purpose of the knowledge developed within that science; this happens not just because the scientist goes in search of it, but also because all that the scientist looks for within that science actually bears a reference, namely an essential reference, to it¹⁶⁶.

A little further Trombetta presents a second part of his doctrine about the epistemological role of the subject of a science. He does this precisely at the point of his text where he intends to prove that metaphysics deals also with the immaterial substances in a universal way¹⁶⁷. To serve this purpose he identifies that which each science considers with the whole of the following four things: a certain first subject; the properties of this subject; the immediate subjective parts of this subject; all that includes the *ratio* of the first subject by adequacy and, more precisely, all that includes those properties or subjective parts insofar as it includes them.

Trombetta gives no long explanations in this case either. However, we may infer that the statement saying that each science considers all that includes the *ratio* of the first subject etc. represents an explanation of the thesis that the formal *ratio* of the first subject «*est ratio considerandi quacumque considerata in scientia*».

IV. b. 2. The subject and the 'intension' of metaphysics

Let us now go back to the matter examined by the ninth *quaestio* of the first book of Trombetta's *Questiones metaphysicales*: in what way metaphysics deals with the quiddities of things. Our author's solution is structured around four points: *i*) metaphysics considers each quiddity at least in a universal way; *ii*) metaphysics considers each quiddity in particular too, but just in a relative way (*respective*); *iii*) it considers the material substances – as to their particular concepts – just in a relative way; *iv*) it considers the separate substances also as to some proper concepts of them, but not as to their specific concepts.

¹⁶⁵ It may be profitable to compare Trombetta's position with that of an author who was for some time his opponent in Padua: the Dominican friar Tommaso de Vio. As we saw, our Franciscan distinguishes between: *i*) the first subject of a science taken according to the formal *ratio* from the viewpoint of which it is considered within the science; *ii*) the aforementioned formal *ratio*, which relates itself to the subject like a *quo* relates itself to a *quod* and which is that *sub qua* the first subject is considered by the science of which it is subject. De Vio (in Thomas DE VIO Cajetanus, *Commentaria in Posteriora Analytica Aristotelis*, lib. 1, cap. 22, n. 1, ed. by E. Babin / W. Baumgartener, 3 voll., Les Editions de l'Université-Laval, Québec 1951, vol. 1, pp. 157-168) distinguishes between: *i*) the *ratio formalis quæ* (or else *rei ut res est*) of the subject of whatever science; *ii*) the *ratio formalis sub qua* (or else *ut obiectum est*) of that subject. The *ratio formalis quæ* is the essential characteristic of the subject studied by a certain science; the *ratio formalis sub qua* is the essential characteristic of that subject, yet just in case the latter is understood as being known. Well, despite the differences in Trombetta's and de Vio's views, I see some parallelism in them: Trombetta's first subject of a science taken according to etc. corresponds to de Vio's *ratio formalis quæ*; Trombetta's formal *ratio* corresponds to de Vio's *ratio formalis sub qua*. I put forward the hypothesis that this parallelism was one of the reasons why some later Scotists were led to accept de Vio's terminology.

¹⁶⁶ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9rb-va.

¹⁶⁷ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, ff. 9vb and 10ra-b.

The first point is formulated and demonstrated as follows. The first subject of metaphysics by adequacy is being as being; hence, all that includes being as being, its properties, and its first subjective parts lies within the scope of metaphysics. But each quiddity, whether immaterial or material, includes being etc. by inclusion or at least by identity; ergo¹⁶⁸.

The second point is developed and expounded by Trombetta in two stages. At first our author states that metaphysics does not deal with each quiddity in particular. If it were so, he argues, every other piece of knowledge would resolve into metaphysical knowledge; hence, every other particular science would become useless. Moreover, should someone clearly know the quiddity of a subject, then he would know its effects. But the properties of a subject are effects of the quiddity of that subject. Hence, should someone clearly know the quiddity of a subject, then he would also know the properties of that subject¹⁶⁹. Once again, every other particular science would become useless.

Subsequently, however, the Paduan Scotist introduces an important clarification. He writes that all that includes being, its properties, or its first subjective parts by identical predication or by formal predication lies within the scope of metaphysics; but all quiddities include being etc. in either of these ways; hence, metaphysics deals with each particular quiddity. This does not mean that this science deals with each particular quiddity *sistendo in tali ratione particulari*, i.e. with respect to its particular principles and characteristics. Rather, it implies that this science deals with each particular quiddity just *respective*, i.e. insofar as it relates this quiddity to being and to the principles deriving from being. By contrast, the particular sciences deal with the things they deal with *absolute*, i.e. *sistendo in ipsa quidditate particulari* and studying the principles of them as they are precisely principles of these things¹⁷⁰.

Now, metaphysics deals with the material substances only in the way I have just mentioned. In order to expound and justify this thesis, Trombetta approaches the problem from two sides: on one side he proves that it belongs to metaphysics to deal with these substances; on the other side he shows the limits within which this science can deal with these substances.

As regards the first side of the question, Trombetta observes that the material substances too include being etc.; hence they too are studied by metaphysics.

As regards the second side of the question, in the first place he argues as follows. Being, that is what metaphysics considers above all, abstracts from motion, from change, and from every sensible quality. Similarly, any other thing metaphysics considers must be characterized by the same kind of abstraction (*sic abstrahit*)¹⁷¹.

A few lines below Trombetta adds some important details. It is proper to metaphysics, he writes, to abstract from motion and from sensible matter *secundum considerationem*. Now, it is true that the quiddities of the material substances are abstracted from motion and from matter according to this modality, but it is equally true that they are not abstracted from motion and from matter *secundum esse*. It ensues that they do not abstract from the principle of motion; thus, implicitly concludes Trombetta, insofar as these substances depend on this principle, they cannot be considered by metaphysics¹⁷².

In conclusion, according to our author, metaphysics does deal with the material substances *in particulari*, but just *respective*, i.e. just insofar as these substances and their principles can be related to being. For example, it belongs to metaphysics to study humanity as it includes matter and form, but not as it is a principle of operations¹⁷³.

The case of the immaterial substances is different: metaphysics deals with them not only in a universal way, but also «sub ratione particulare magis quam quidditates materiales». Also in this case, in order to expound and justify his thesis Trombetta approaches the problem from two sides: on one side he shows that the human mind can deal with these substances and how – i.e. within

¹⁶⁸ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, ff. 9ra and 10ra-b.

¹⁶⁹ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, ff. 9vb and 10ra-b.

¹⁷⁰ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10rb.

¹⁷¹ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10rb.

¹⁷² TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, ff. 10rb and 10va-b.

¹⁷³ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10rb.

what limits – it can do so; on the other side he proves that dealing with these substances falls within the tasks of metaphysics.

As for the first side of the question, our author starts by explaining that the immaterial substances are those not comprising matter nor a necessary link with it within their formal *rationes*¹⁷⁴.

About these substances, he continues, it is possible to have four types of concepts. In the first place, these substances can be known by means of transcendental concepts, some of which – like the concept of being – are quidditative and some others – like the concepts of the properties (*passiones*) of being – are qualitative. In the second and in the third place, about them it is possible to have the concepts of ‘substance’ and of ‘spiritual substance’ (yet assuming that these quiddities are comprised within some predicament). And finally, about them it is possible to have proper concepts.

Of these four types of concepts, human beings can naturally (*naturaliter*) acquire only those that can be abstracted from what is sensible and imaginable. The concepts of the first three types can certainly be abstracted from what is sensible; hence human beings can acquire them naturally. As for the concepts of the fourth type, a distinction is needed. There may be two types of proper concepts of the separate substances: those resulting from the aggregation of two concepts of the first three types (for example the concept of God as infinite being); and those that are simple and intuitive, which are the specific concepts of the separate substances. Now, by merely natural ways (*ex naturalibus*) human beings cannot have proper concepts of the second type, that is to say proper by intuition, i.e. specific; nonetheless, human beings can have proper concepts of the first type, that is to say proper by aggregation¹⁷⁵.

Thanks to the preceding observations, Trombetta proves that the human mind has access to at least some proper concepts of the immaterial substances; it is now time to determine which science must deal with them. On this point he argues as follows. The quiddities conceived in reference to (*sub*) the *ratio* of being lie within the scope of metaphysics. Among these quiddities, the following may be mentioned: necessity, actuality, simplicity, independence, infinity, etc. The separate substances can be themselves conceived in reference to the aforementioned quiddities. Consequently, it belongs to metaphysics to deal with these substances precisely taken in reference to these quiddities. Now, although the concepts of these quiddities are not specific concepts of the separate substances, yet they supply the possibility to conceive – by aggregation too – proper concepts of God and of the separate substances, such as ‘infinite’ and ‘pure act’. We should therefore conclude that metaphysics has the task of dealing with the separate substances even as regards concepts exclusively belonging to them («aliis <substantiis> non competentes»)¹⁷⁶.

The doctrine we have just seen raises at least two interpretative problems: one relating to the asymmetry, either real or apparent, existing between the way according to which metaphysics considers the separate substances and the material substances, respectively; the second relating to the internal cohesion of this asymmetrical metaphysics.

As concerns the first problem, the answer could seem to be: the asymmetry here at issue is merely apparent.

The argument by which Trombetta expounds and defends the thesis according to which metaphysics considers the immaterial substances in a special way is grounded in the following observation: the separate substances are conceived in reference to notions such as ‘necessity’, ‘actuality’, ‘simplicity’, ‘independence’, ‘infinity’, etc.; well, these notions – writes our author – belong to metaphysics precisely because they are conceived from the standpoint of (*sub*) the *ratio* of being. It could thus seem that when metaphysics considers the separate substances, it studies them from the standpoint of *rationes* that can be related to being; in other terms, in this case too metaphysics would be nothing but an ontology.

¹⁷⁴ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9va-b.

¹⁷⁵ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9vb.

¹⁷⁶ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, ff. 9vb-10ra.

Moreover, in at least one passage our author explicitly writes: «quia metaphysica est habitus universalis: est tantum ratio cognoscendi objecta in generali: non in particulari»¹⁷⁷.

Nevertheless, three remarks can be raised against this interpretation. First remark. Trombetta writes that the above mentioned notions ('necessity' etc.) are precisely what enables metaphysics to study the separate substances more in detail than it can and must do in the case of the material substances. This implies that, according to this author, the 'intension' itself that is proper to these notions is asymmetrical¹⁷⁸. Hence, when maintaining that Trombetta's metaphysics is nothing but an ontology, we should anyhow admit that it is an asymmetrical ontology.

Second remark. In one of the passages where our Franciscan excludes that metaphysics deals with the material substances in detail, he has recourse to the following argument. The separate substances are abstracted from motion and from sensible matter *secundum esse*, whereas the material substances are not. This implies, writes Trombetta, that the former belong to metaphysics more than anything else, whereas the latter do not abstract from the principle of motion¹⁷⁹. Now, the argument formulated by our author is partially elliptical, yet it can be interpreted in the following way: the fact of being independent from matter and from motion *secundum esse*, and it alone, is what enables the quiddities possessing this characteristic not to depend on the principle of motion; for this reason, only the quiddities that are abstracted *secundum esse* can be studied according to all their aspects by that science abstracting *secundum considerationem*.

Third remark. As we saw, for Scotus the immaterial substances are object of metaphysics just owing to the fact that the intellect possessed by a human being is not capable of studying them (at least in the present state) as for all that they are; in fact, an intellect capable of knowing them as for their proper *rationes* would develop a science of them distinct from metaphysics. Contrariwise, Trombetta writes that although the specific concepts of God and of the separate substances do not belong to metaphysics *prout traditur ab Aristotele*, yet the specific concept of God belongs to theology and the specific concepts of the separate substances belong to metaphysics *in se*¹⁸⁰. It follows that, from the viewpoint of the Paduan Scotist, also – and even especially – *in se* metaphysics is not merely a science of the most general *rationes*.

Let us approach the second interpretative problem: what enables, according to Trombetta, this asymmetrical metaphysics to be a unitary science.

The difficulty consists in the fact that our author delimits the tasks of metaphysics (or at least of metaphysics *prout traditur ab Aristotele*) according to four criteria. Relating to the material substances, the power of metaphysics is based on its capability of dealing with all that can be referred to being; the limit of metaphysics is based on its inability to consider what depends on matter. Relating to the separate substances, the power of metaphysics is based on its capability of dealing with all that is abstracted from matter; the limit of metaphysics is based on the impossibility, for the human intellect, of knowing the specific *rationes* of the separate substances. Well, assuming that the fourth criterion cannot be applied to *in se* metaphysics and that the second and the third are two aspects of the same capability, what links the first criterion to the second and to the third?

Trombetta answers this question, actually. In the *quaestio* under consideration, on the one hand he states that «sicut ens: quod primo considerat metaphysica abstrahit a motu et quanto: et ab omni qualitate sensibili: sic et quodlibet in quantum consideratur a metaphysica sic abstrahit»¹⁸¹. On the other, he states that «modus proprius considerandi in metaphysica (...) est abstrahere secundum considerationem». Precisely for this reason, he adds, metaphysics maximally deals with the things

¹⁷⁷ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10vb.

¹⁷⁸ Hence we may also deduce that, in Trombetta's view, notions such as 'contingence', 'potentiality', 'composition', 'dependence', and 'finitude' somehow include an unremovable reference to matter. It should be noted, however, that our Franciscan does not enunciate this thesis.

¹⁷⁹ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10rb.

¹⁸⁰ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10ra. In formulating and discussing this thesis, Trombetta actually defends the existence of a theology even facing the existence of an *in se* metaphysics; but he equally defends the existence of an *in se* metaphysics facing the existence of an *in se* theology.

¹⁸¹ TROMBETTA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10rb.

abstracted *secundum esse*: for nothing in them does not belong to the science that studies what is abstracted from matter¹⁸². And in the third *quæstio* of the sixth book he makes clear that:

«metaphysica et alie scientie: que sunt: physica et mathematica distinguuntur penes modum diffiniendi diversum: quod insequitur distinctionem obiectorum formalium: modus diffiniendi metaphysici omnino abstrahit a materia: quia sicut ens quod primo considerat: ita et quodlibet in quantum in eius consideratione cadit: non includit materiam»¹⁸³.

Moreover, it seems to me that Trombetta founds his statements on two further bases. The first lies in the doctrine of predication by identity: metaphysics deals with all that is predicated of being by identity and merely insofar as it is predicated of the latter. The second lies in the fact that, in Trombetta's perspective, the being that is subject of metaphysics does not retain any reference to matter. Actually, what our Franciscan already writes in the ninth *quæstio* of the first book suggests that, according to him, the being that is subject of metaphysics does not simply negatively prescind from matter. Certainly, it can be predicated of material beings too; hence it does not necessarily prescind from matter. Nevertheless, it bears no reference to matter; we should therefore conclude that, according to Trombetta, being 'completely' prescinds from (i.e.: is completely indifferent to) matter. And this is perhaps the keystone of the position held by the Paduan Scotist. In the following paragraph we will consider the ultimate foundation of this view: namely, the thesis held by our author on the epistemological role of the separate substances within metaphysics.

IV. b. 3. The epistemological role of the knowledge of the immaterial substances

The third *quæstio* of the sixth book of the *Questiones metaphysicales* is devoted to the problem *Utrum si esset tantum substantia natura consistens, physica esset prima philosophia*¹⁸⁴. Here Trombetta explicitly approaches the question of the 'role' of the immaterial substances – and of the knowledge of them – in metaphysics.

The discussion is occasioned by the passage in which Aristotle states that if there merely were natural, i.e. material, substances, then physics would be the first philosophy. Confronted with this passage, the Paduan Franciscan formulates the following problem. Even if there merely were natural substances, the intellect could still abstract concepts such as 'substance', 'being', 'unity', etc, from them. Further, these concepts would be conceived even if that from which they have been abstracted is not simultaneously conceived. It follows that the study of them would not be the task of physics; hence they should be considered by metaphysics¹⁸⁵.

Our Scotist's reply is clear and detailed. It is true, he writes, that even if there were no separate substances, the intellect could still abstract the concepts of being and substance from the natural substance; nevertheless, insofar as these hypothesized concepts had to comply with reality¹⁸⁶, they could not be appropriated to a substance other than the natural substance. It follows that these concepts would not be common to types of beings and substances other than material beings and substances; hence, they would not actually be more general than the concepts of 'material being' and 'material substance' (in other words, let me remark, they would have the same extension as the concepts of 'material being' and 'material substance', respectively). Moreover, they would comprise an intrinsic and unremovable reference to material substance (in other words, let me remark, they would have the same intension as the concepts of 'material being' and 'material substance', respectively)¹⁸⁷. Now, what is not more general than the subject of a certain science – or

¹⁸² TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 10rb.

¹⁸³ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48va.

¹⁸⁴ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48va-b.

¹⁸⁵ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48va.

¹⁸⁶ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48vb: «et quum dicis: quod non repugnabit conceptibus abstractis reperiri in aliquo intellectu concipiente. Negatur hoc: quia intellectus concipiens si sit verus: habet conformari rei concepte».

¹⁸⁷ Trombetta infers the intensional equivalence from the extensional equivalence; this implies that he interprets the hypothetical 'non-existence' of the immaterial substances not as a simple not existing in fact, but as an impossibility of existing. In our author's view, the centrality of the extensional aspect of the concepts here at issue is also

else includes an intrinsic reference (*ordo essentialis et habitudo*) to the first subject of a certain science – cannot be considered by a science which is different from the science considering that subject¹⁸⁸. Hence, assuming the hypothesis here at issue (i.e., if there were no separate substances etc.), it follows that a metaphysics distinct from physics could not exist.

«(...) si (ex casu) essent tantum quidditates naturales substantiarum naturalium: non essent quidditates universales: et universaliter abstracte: que essent communes alijs a substantijs naturalibus: quia (ex posito) si nullum aliud ens esset: tunc physica haberet considerare omnium quidditates: et ita metaphysica non esset prior scientia naturali»¹⁸⁹.

«(...) licet intellectus possit abstrahere a substantia conceptum entis et substantie. semper tamen consideraret ista: ut sunt aliquid substantie naturalis: quia non possent convenire alijs a tali substantia. Ex quo sequitur quod essent semper de consideratione naturalis: cum non abstraherentur ab ordine essentiali: et attributione ad subiectum primum scientie naturalis»¹⁹⁰.

Trombetta thus formulates a lucid and highly significant conclusion: one cannot assert that there is a metaphysics (which abstracts *secundum considerationem*) as distinct from physics without asserting that separate substances (i.e., abstracted *secundum esse*) are possible; the existence of these substances and the knowledge of their existence are needed in order to be able to conceive a metaphysics as distinct from physics¹⁹¹.

«(...) abstractio secundum considerationem est propter abstractionem secundum esse aliquorum que <metaphysicus> considerat. Et consideratio de abstractis secundum considerationem in metaphysica est propter considerationem abstractorum secundum esse»¹⁹².

It can thus be affirmed that, in this author's view, the determination of the nature of metaphysics and of its subject depends on a knowledge acquired by this science itself: the knowledge pertaining to the existence of the separate substances¹⁹³.

confirmed by the following passage: «<si metaphysica consideraret quidditates rerum in particulari:> consequentia Aristotelis non valeret. scilicet. si tantum esset substantia naturalis. igitur physica esset prima philosophia. quia posset dici: quod esset scientia distincta a naturali: que consideraret quidditates particulares: ut abstrahunt a motu et quantitate» (TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48vb). Indeed, it seems to me that this statement conflicts with Trombetta's aforementioned thesis according to which metaphysics cannot deal with the material quiddities in detail because, though prescinding from mobility, they do not prescind from the principle of mobility. In order to remove this conflict, I interpret this passage as follows. The material quiddities, taken in detail, can be considered in two ways: *i*) as they are movable and material; *ii*) as they simply depend on the principle of motion. Now, if metaphysics studied its own objects in detail, then it would be possible to conceive the following distribution of tasks: physics would study the material substances as they are material and movable; metaphysics would study the material substances as they prescind from the principle of motion. This solution/interpretation, however, is questionable, for it involves a contraction of the tasks of physics that Trombetta does not mention.

¹⁸⁸ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48va.

¹⁸⁹ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48vb.

¹⁹⁰ TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48vb.

¹⁹¹ I cannot presently determine if Trombetta was the first to enunciate this thesis so clearly. It is certain that the thesis defended by this author as well as the arguments formulated by him reappear in several later authors. See e.g. FRANCISCO SUAREZ, *Disputationes metaphysicæ*, disp. 2, s. 2, nn. 29-31, about which let me refer to M. FORLIVESI, *Impure Ontology. The Nature of Metaphysics and Its Object in Francisco Suárez's Texts*, «Quaestio», 5 (2005), pp. 559-586), and – for a broader analysis – to ID., *Ontologia impura. La natura della metafisica secondo Francisco Suárez* [<http://web.tiscali.it/marcoforlivesi/mf2004oi.pdf>], 2004 (previous printed edition: ID., *Ontologia impura. La natura della metafisica secondo Francisco Suárez*, in Francisco Suárez, “Der ist der Mann”. *Homenaje al prof. Salvador Castellote*, Facultad de Teología ‘San Vicente Ferrer’, Valencia 2004 («Sèries Valentina», 50), pp. 161-207).

¹⁹² TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 6, q. 3, f. 48va.

¹⁹³ Note that Trombetta denies that, *quoad naturam*, the subject of a science can be known through some other concept belonging to the science of which it is subject, and yet he does not deny that, *quoad nos*, the concept of that first subject is introduced by some other concept. Cfr. TROMBETA, *Questiones metaphysicales*, lib. 1, q. 9, f. 9rb.

V. A short afterword

The doctrines developed in the period between the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Age about the nature of metaphysics appear to be closely related to the questions concerning the plurality of the notions of ‘being’ and the possible ‘mutability’ characterizing some of them. What are the differences that distinguish notions such as ‘real being’, ‘being that is the object of the intellect’, ‘being that is the subject of metaphysics’? What are the relationships linking them? Is being a notion originally acquired by the mind in a definitive way, or rather does the progressive acquisition of the metaphysical science change its extension and intension? Under which conditions can this notion bind and connect in one science the study of the most general *rationes* and the study of the separate substances?

The inquiries presented in this essay show the importance, in Scotus’s and in his followers’ thought, of the theme of the relationship between the natural-pneumatological (or, less precisely, the natural-theological) dimension and the transcendentological (or, less precisely, ontological) dimension of metaphysics and they indicate the link connecting this theme with the questions formulated above. The present inquiries also show the diversity of the solutions adopted by the different authors. The slight asymmetry admitted by Scotus (within a unitary metaphysical science comprising both the study of transcendental *rationes* and of spiritual beings) between the study of the material substances and the study of the separate substances is removed by Scotists such as Francis of Marchia and Nicolas Bonet, who, by contrast, separate the science of transcendental *rationes* from the science of spiritual beings. On the contrary, it is progressively emphasized and justified by authors such as Antonio Andrés and – through strategies different from those adopted by the latter – Zerbi and Trombetta, who, however, bind the science of transcendental *rationes* and the science of spiritual beings.

Let me conclude by remarking that the authors and the positions examined here represent a primary and not at all a minority component of the history of philosophy. The thesis on the nature of metaphysics held by Francis of Marchia and Nicolas Bonet shall reappear in the Calvinist metaphysicians of the early 17th century and mark the development of metaphysics in Germany at least up to the Kantian age. By contrast, the basic structure of the solution proposed, possibly on Zerbi’s path, by Antonio Trombetta (and somehow shared by Jan of Głogów) shall mark the doctrines on the nature of metaphysics elaborated by most academic authors who were rooted in Catholic areas at least up to the end of the 17th century.