

**INTUITIVE AND ABSTRACTIVE COGNITION,
“PRAECISIONES OBIECTIVAE”,
AND THE FORMAL DISTINCTION IN MASTRI
AND BELLUTO AND LATER SCOTIST AUTHORS**

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INTRODUCTION

John Duns Scotus famously differentiates between an intuitive kind of cognition of objects which are present to the mind “in their own existence” (i.e., not owing to a representing medium) and an abstractive kind of cognition which is indifferent to its objects’ existence or non-existence and presence or non-presence.¹ There is scholarly agreement on the historical importance of this differentiation; in Stephen D.

Throughout the present study, all references to the philosophical writings of B. Mastri and B. Belluto are to the 1708-edition of their joint *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer* (henceforth quoted as *Cursus philosophicus*), printed in 5 volumes by the Pezzana press in Venice. I wish to thank Dr. Garrett R. Smith (University of Notre Dame, Indiana) for his valuable suggestions and the general editor of *Archivum franciscanum historicum*, Fr. Benedikt Mertens OFM, for his keen observations on some of the editions used in the article.

¹ This is the most general way to state Scotus’s distinction. Scotus’s formulations of his distinction in various contexts have been the object of a number of contributions, cf. especially S. DAY, *Intuitive Cognition. A Key to the Significance of the Later Scholastics*, St. Bonaventure, NY 1947, 39-139; L. HONNEFELDER, *Ens inquantum ens. Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus*, Münster 1979, 218-67; A.B. WOLTER, *Duns Scotus on Intuition, Memory, and Our Knowledge of Individuals*, in ID., *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*, Ithaca - London 1990, 98-122 (the article was first published in 1982). Wolter provides a chronology of Scotus’s development, though without paying attention to Scotus’s late Parisian *Reportatio*; a consideration of this text is found in S.D. DUMONT, *Theology as a Science and Duns Scotus’s Distinction between Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition*, in *Speculum* 64 (1989) 579-99. For further studies on Scotus’s doctrine on intuitive and abstractive cognition, cf. T. HOFFMANN, *Duns Scotus Bibliography, from 1950 to the Present, Eighth edition*, 2013 (<http://faculty.cua.edu/hoffmann/scotus-bibliography.htm>).

Dumont's words, it is "by all accounts one of the most influential philosophical contributions of Duns Scotus,"² and according to Katherine H. Tachau, "the history of medieval theories of knowledge from ca. 1310 can be traced as the development of this dichotomy."³ Accordingly, these and other scholars have uncovered both the historical background to Scotus's doctrine in the discussion over the scientific status of theology in the generation preceding Scotus and its immediate, i.e., early 14th-century, reception. Besides the overwhelming, positive as well as critical, response to Scotus's differentiation in late medieval discussions of theological epistemology, his doctrine also has an important long-term *Wirkungsgeschichte* in post-medieval scholasticism. This latter fact has slipped the attention of most historians of scholastic philosophy, if for no other reason than general neglect of the long continuation of the Latin scholastic tradition well into the Early Modern period.⁴

Scotus's differentiation, in fact, counts among such fundamental epistemological decisions which play a crucial role in a variety of contexts in Baroque-Age scholastic philosophy and theology. In his recent monograph on 17th-century scholastic metaphysics and epistemology, Sven K. Knebel advocates the interesting thesis that the best way to get behind the façade of conventional questions characteristic of early modern scholastic philosophy textbooks is to focus on such epistemological matters which pervade the surface structure of this kind of literature.⁵ Beyond doubt, the differentiation between the two kinds of cognition would be a case in point. However, one philosophical debate which is particularly entangled with Scotus's doctrine is the one over different kinds of "praecisiones", i.e., the version of the scholastic debate over distinctions peculiar to Jesuit scholasticism and its sphere of influence. Within Jesuit

² DUMONT, *Theology as a Science*, 579.

³ K.H. TACHAU, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham. Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics 1250-1345*, Leiden 1988, 81. The early reception of Scotus's doctrine is thoroughly documented in F. FIORENTINO, *Le cognizioni intuitive e astrattive da Scoto a Wodeham*, in *Miscellanea francescana* 108 (2008) 139-68, 357-89.

⁴ For recent discussions of the historiographical challenge posed by post-medieval scholasticism, see M. FORLIVESI, *A Man, an Age, a Book*, in ID. (ed.), *Rem in se ipsa cernere. Saggi sul pensiero filosofico di Bartolomeo Mastri (1602-1673)*, Padova 2006, 23-144: 98-114; S.K. KNEBEL, *Suarezismus. Erkenntnistheoretisches aus dem Nachlass des Jesuitengenerals Tirso González de Santalla (1624-1705), Abhandlung und Edition*, Amsterdam - Philadelphia 2011, 251-58; D.D. NOVOTNÝ, *Ens Rationis from Suárez to Caramuel. A Study in Scholasticism of the Baroque Era*, New York, NY 2013, 1-17.

⁵ KNEBEL, *Suarezismus*, 63: "Aus der erkenntnistheoretischen Perspektive kommt man bei der Literaturgattung, die uns beschäftigt, besser als aus vielen anderen Perspektiven hinter die kleinteilige Fassade ihres konventionellen Apparats von Fragen."