

SCOTIST METAPHYSICS IN MID-SIXTEENTH CENTURY PADUA

GIACOMINO MALAFOSSA FROM BARGE'S *A QUESTION ON THE SUBJECT OF METAPHYSICS*

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Summarium: Iacobinus Malafossa de Bargis († 1563) cathedram metaphysicam “ad mentem Scoti” Universitatis Patavinae plus quam quadraginta annos in medio 16. saeculo tenebat. In sua *Quaestione de subiecto metaphysicae in qua est inclusa quaestio an metaphysica sit scientia sententiam notabilem proposuit de obiecto metaphysicae: metaphysicam scil. duo quidem habere obiecta – ens inquantum est ens et Deum –; scientiam sensu stricto tamen non dici posse nisi prout de Deo tractat. Ratio est, quia secundum strictam scientiae notionem Aristotelicam obiectum scientiae proprietates habere debet demonstrabiles; quas habet Deus, verum non ens inquantum est ens. Habet quidem ens inquantum est ens quasdam proprietates, passiones scil. transcendentales, quae tamen non sunt vere demonstrabiles. Malafossae *Quaestio* Averroistarum cum Scotistis conflectionem in universitatibus Italicis aetatis renaissance testatur, necnon ipsius traditionis Scotisticae perplexitatem. In hac dissertatione introductoria fontes Malafossae prae oculis ponuntur eiusque doctrinae receptio critica apud Scotistas posteriores investigatur.*

Abstract: For more than four decades around the middle of the sixteenth century, Giacomino Malafossa from Barge († 1563) held the Scotist chair of metaphysics at the University of Padua. In his *A Question on the Subject of Metaphysics, in Which Is Included the Question, Whether Metaphysics Is a Science*, he developed a remarkable stance on the subject matter of metaphysics. Metaphysics has two objects: being qua being and God. However, only when it deals with the latter object can it be said to be a science in a strict sense. The reason is that the strict Aristotelian notion of science presupposes that the object of any science has demonstrable properties, which is the case with God, but not with being as being. Although being qua being does have certain properties, namely the transcendentals, these cannot be truly demonstrated. Malafossa's *Quaestio* bears witness both to the clash between Averroism and Scotism at the Italian Renaissance universities and to the complexity of the Scotist tradition itself. This introductory article highlights Malafossa's sources and traces the critical reception of his views among later Scotist authors.

Keywords: Giacomino Malafossa from Barge (Bargius), metaphysics, ontology, transcendentals, Scotism, Aristotelianism, Averroism, Renaissance, Bartolomeo Mastri, Peter Tartaret, Nicoletto Vernia, John of Jandun

Hic modus dicendi non sit tenendus, cum non sit Aristotelicus.

GIACOMINO MALAFOSSA¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Metaphysics has two objects: being qua being and God. Only when it deals with the latter object can it be said to be a science in a strict sense. The reason is that the strict Aristotelian notion of science presupposes that the object of any science have demonstrable properties, which is the case with God, but not with being qua being. Although being qua being does have certain properties, namely the transcendentals (*passiones entis*), these cannot be demonstrated in any strict sense. Such is the stance on the object and scientific status of the discipline of metaphysics expressed by the Paduan Scotist Giacomino Malafossa from Barge († 1563) in his *Quaestio de subiecto metaphysicae in qua est inclusa quaestio an metaphysica sit scientia* from 1551 (printed 1553).²

At the University of Padua around the middle of the sixteenth century, Malafossa held for more than four decades the chair of metaphysics “*ad mentem Scoti*” (there was also a chair “*ad mentem Thomae*”), while for a good deal of this time also lecturing on theology in the famous Franciscan Convent of the same city. According to this Scotist philosopher and theologian, meta-

¹ Giacomino Malafossa [Iacobinus Malafassa de Bargas], *Quaestio de subiecto metaphysicae, in qua est inclusa quaestio, an metaphysica sit scientia* (Padua 1553: f. 9v); cf. n. 27 in the translation below.

² Cf. the recent studies of this text (both with references to further literature) in Antonino Poppi, “L’oggetto della metafisica nella *Quaestio de subiecto metaphysicae* di Giacomino Malafossa (1553)”, *Medioevo* 34 (2009): 105–122, and Claus A. Andersen, “The *Quaestio de subiecto metaphysicae* by Giacomino Malafossa from Barge (ca. 1481–1563). Edition of the Text”, *Medioevo* 34 (2009): 427–474. The second part of Malafossa’s *Quaestio* is also studied in Claus A. Andersen, *Metaphysik im Barockscotismus. Untersuchungen zum Metaphysikwerk des Bartholomaeus Mastrius. Mit Dokumentation der Metaphysik in der scotistischen Tradition ca. 1620–1750* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2016), 505–514. For the Scotist context in Padua, see Pietro Scapin, “La metafisica scotista a Padova dal XV al XVII secolo”, in *Storia e cultura al Santo fra il XIII e il XX*, ed. A. Poppi (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1976), 485–546.

physics is certainly not a *transcendental science*, if by this is meant a science which has its primary focus on being qua being and its properties. Malafossa's stance is remarkably controversial when seen against the background of a fairly recent historiographical model which regards the transcendental turn of metaphysics as one of Duns Scotus's chief accomplishments, one that influenced the further development of the discipline for centuries.³ Yet, Malafossa finds support for his position in the Scotist tradition, in particular among Scotist authors of the previous generation. Nevertheless, almost one hundred years after the composition of his *Quaestio*, Malafossa's stance was discussed and rebutted by, among others, one of the leading Scotists of the Baroque age, the Conventual Franciscan Bartolomeo Matri. Out of this discrepancy emerge two significantly divergent views on metaphysics and its object within the Scotist tradition.

Any attempt at an adequate historiography of the Scotist tradition and its metaphysics must take the sheer complexity of its development into account. Malafossa, however, also deserves attention as a witness of the interaction between the Scotist tradition and the Aristotelian university philosophy that thrived in his surroundings. In this introduction to Malafossa's text, I shall highlight the background and sources of his discussion and trace its critical reception among later authors.

³ Cf. notably Ludger Honnefelder, *Ens inquantum ens. Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979), 403: "Wie man mit aller Vorsicht sagen könnte, wird mit dieser formalen Bestimmung der Metaphysik als einer 'scientia transcendens' noch ganz im Kontext des Hochmittelalters ein Metaphysikpostulat formuliert, das für die folgenden Jahrhunderte Metaphysik als Transzendentalwissenschaft zum Programm werden läßt und das in seinen späten rationalistischen Ausgestaltungen noch den Ausgangspunkt für die neue transzendente Philosophie Kants abgibt." This historiographical hypothesis is further corroborated in Ludger Honnefelder, *Scientia transcendens. Die formale Bestimmung des Seienden und der Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit (Duns Scotus – Suárez – Wolff – Kant – Peirce)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), 403–421.