

COMPREHENSION AT THE CROSSROADS OF PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY THE CASE OF MASTRI AND BELLUTO'S *DISPUTATIONES IN DE ANIMA* (1643)

Claus A. Andersen

1. INTRODUCTION

John Duns Scotus, in his *Tractatus de primo principio*, states that *God is his own comprehension* and that, by contrast, *God is incomprehensible to any finite being*, since no finite being is omniscient or possesses such an infinite cognitive power which a comprehension of God would demand.¹ Thomas Aquinas could not agree more; God comprehends Himself, but creatures do not comprehend Him, and this is because of their finite cognitive power.² Now, whereas in Thomas Aquinas's theology the concept of comprehension enjoys some prominence (figuring as it does even in article titles within the *Summa theologiae*), there is surprisingly little that Duns Scotus has to say on the matter. A 17th-century connoisseur of the works of Thomas Aquinas and Scotus, one Jean Lalemandet of the Order of the Minims, testifies that he did not find more than one explicit statement on the subject in Scotus's

¹ Joannes Duns Scotus, *Tractatus de primo principio*, cap. 4, concl. 10 (ed. Müller: 126–127): “[T]u es comprehensio tui ipsius [...]. Tu incomprehensibilis, infinitus; nam nihil omnisciens est finitum, nullum infinitae potentiae est finitum, nec supremum in entibus; nec finis ultimus est finitum; nec per se existens simplex penitus est finitum.”

² Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 12, a. 7, co. (ed. Leon. IV: 127a): “[C]omprehendere Deum impossibile est cuicumque intellectu creato”; *ibid.*, q. 14, a. 3, co. (ed. Leon. IV: 170a): “Deus perfecte comprehendit seipsum.” For a statement regarding a created intellect's inability to comprehend God, see Thomas Aquinas, *SCG* III, cap. 55, n. 2320 (Marietti 1961: 75a): “Virtus finita non potest adaequare in sua operatione obiectum infinitum”, or the short formula in Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 10, a. 1, co. (ed. Leon. XI: 148a): “[I]n finitum non comprehenditur a finito.”

œuvre.³ Since this one statement to which Lalemandet refers is not the one from Scotus's *Tractatus de primo principio*, which was by and large ignored in Baroque-age Scotism, we may infer that his judgement perhaps is not one hundred percent trustworthy. It does, however, give a general idea of the rather minimal rôle this concept plays in Scotus's thought. It is therefore surprising to find Lalemandet's Scotist contemporaries pay considerable attention to this heavily theology-laden concept, which some of them, starting with the two Conventual Franciscans Bartolomeo Mastri and Bonaventura Belluto in the early 1640s, even discuss in the context of their textbooks on cognitive psychology. Such textbooks formed a standard part of any *Cursus philosophicus*, the preferred genre of this age's scholastic philosophy, which had moved beyond commenting on Aristotle's works and instead gave systematic discussions of the topics formerly dealt with in the commentary format.⁴ The reorganization of philosophical knowledge that was the result of this move has been aptly described, by Paul Richard Blum, as an "anarchical process",⁵ one which was not steered from above or did not unfold according to any kind of master plan. For instance, there is no obvious reason, why Scotist authors should discuss comprehension in their philosophical textbooks on cognitive psychology, both because it is not a key concept of their own tradition and because they themselves, Mastri and Belluto and other Scotists (in this they agree with some non-Scotist authors),⁶ admit that the

³ Jean Lalemandet, *Cursus theologici*, t. I, disp. 7, sect. 2, n. 3 (Lyons 1656: 204a): "*De comprehensione Dei nihil expresse reperio apud Scotum, nisi quod in 3. dist. 14. q. 2. dicit, cognitionem comprehensivam non solum debere adaequari obiecto extensive, sed etiam intensive, eo modo, & claritate, qua obiectum potest cognosci.*"

⁴ For general observations on this development, see Sven. K. Knebel, *Suarezismus, Erkenntnistheoretisches aus dem Nachlass des Jesuitengenerals Tirso González de Santalla (1624–1705), Abhandlung und Edition* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: Grüner, 2011), 51–60, and Charles B. Schmitt, "The Rise of the Philosophical Textbook", in Charles B. Schmitt et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 803–804.

⁵ Paul Richard Blum, *Philosophenphilosophie und Schulphilosophie. Typen des Philosophierens in der Neuzeit* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 171.

⁶ *Disputationes in Aristotelis Stagiritae libros De anima* [henceforward *DA*], disp. 6, q. 12, n. 345 (Venice 1708: 208b; for the edition used in this present article, see note 8): "*Quaesitum hoc de natura comprehensionis tractari solet a Theologicis in materia de visione beatifica, re tamen vera limites*