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A most beautiful mind

A Review of Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*

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'Scotus (..) develops one of the most compelling and powerfully coherent accounts of the Trinity ever constructed' (p. 159).

[1] Richard Cross, in recent years a very productive writer, is a specialist of late 13th and early 14th century Christology en Trinitarian theology. Yet his work is never entirely Medievalistic. On occasion it presents various links to present day philosophical and theological themes and theories, either by extrapolating his findings to an ongoing debate (on the viability of 'Social Trinitarianism', for example) or by introducing and elucidating the highly technical, for most modern readers rather inaccessible, scholastic discussions in terms of modern views (on causality, for instance). It is clear that for him Duns Scotus stands out in his remarkable analytical acumen on almost any issue, combining a strong sense for the complexity of things, requiring ever new distinctions, with an equally strong sense for the most simple solution. Cross' overview of Scotus as one of the 'Great Medieval Thinkers' (which in fact only addresses the theologian Scotus) appeared in 1999. In 2002 a close-up of Scotus' Christology¹ has followed, and now (2005) a close-up of his doctrine of God. Considering the vast field that had to be covered – the doctrine of God being by far the most elaborate part of any high-medieval theology, solving highly detailed questions by means of a complex semantic, logical and metaphysical 'tool box' – Cross' concise presentation is an achievement in itself.

1 De deo uno – de Deo trino

[2] It has become a commonplace to divide the doctrine of God in two parts, one dealing with the oneness of God, his existence and nature, and another with his Trinitarian character, the divine processions and persons. Since Cross' study presents these two parts in one volume, he allows for a detailed survey of the entire doctrine of God. For me, the most interesting chapters are those concerning

1. *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Cross has also published some background studies in 4th and 5th century Trinitarian theology and Christology.

the connection between the two parts.² What I like to show in this review is that Scotus' account of this unity is even more tight than Cross demonstrates.³

[3] Since philosophy and theology have finally divorced in the 20th century, arguments regarding God's oneness have often been considered as philosophical and those regarding his trinity as theological (or as belonging to philosophical and 'dogmatic' theology respectively). In itself this division is not entirely new; in fact, it may be traced back to Medieval views stating that the oneness of God can be discovered by natural reason, whereas the trinity of God can be explored only in virtue of divine revelation. In some respects Scotus too endorses this view (as Cross makes clear, p. 13f and ch. 9), yet with an important modification. In Scotian thought metaphysics for the first time emancipates from theology proper and becomes a relatively independent subject devoted to the study of beings qua beings. In this 'modern' conception, metaphysics is capable of proving that there must be a first infinite and uncaused being which is supremely one. However, this being could very well be one *suppositum* having a nature perfectly equipped for causing all other beings (in fact, as Unitarianism claims God to be, p. 130, cf. p. 13). Inductive reasoning (*demonstratio quia*) concluding from the existence of caused beings as effects to their cause, cannot prove there must be three supreme *supposita*. Scotus is more nuanced about deductive reasoning (*demonstratio quid*) deriving what is less evident from what is self-evident and necessary (p. 127ff).⁴ However, Cross adds, this kind of argumentation cannot prove God's Trinitarian character either, because for knowing those divine features from which the Trinity can be deduced, we depend on revelation (p. 251).⁵

[4] Cross is somewhat ambiguous about the question whether the Trinity can be demonstrated or not. Not by natural reason, Scotus says, but if we know what he means by that, it becomes clear that in a specific way the Trinity is demonstrable indeed. Scotus' term 'natural reason' does not primarily refer to a human intellectual capacity unaided by divine revelation, which could be detected in times and cultures outside salvation history (like Greek philosophy). A natural reason simply is a necessary argument.⁶ Scotus' main metaphysical

2. For this reason many Scotus-explanations offered by Cross will not be discussed here, like his instructive exposition of the *distinctio formalis* (e.g. p. 104) and the relation eternity-time (p. 84), his postscriptum about the status of religious language, or his mistaken interpretation of the distinction between *relatio rationalis / realis* (p. 103).

3. Cross often formulates in a (rather un-Scotian, more postmodern) tentative style suggesting there may be many more possibilities or probable interpretations. A more material indication that Cross detects less 'necessities' than Scotus does, is Cross' voluntarist reading of Scotus' ethics, see p. 10, 88.

4. In his *opus magnum*, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, Antonie Vos offers, among many other things, a very exact reading of Scotus' terms concerning proof en provability, like *demonstratio quid* and *-quia* (p. 344ff, unfortunately in this case without explaining the terms themselves).

5. Cross' book can be seen as an intelligent concatenation of Scotus-passages followed by systematic commentaries (cf. below, n. 26). For this reason it can be used as a study/textbook.

6. For 'ratio naturalis', see Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, p. 339. It may be that Cross mixes knowing (requiring either intuitive or abstractive knowledge, both of which are possible if God presents himself directly or in a physical representation) with reasoning (which,

point is that things which are (synchronically) contingent *cannot* be *deduced*. They can only be known by observing whether it is or is not the case (by ‘intuiting’, Scotus says). Theology proper deals with God in his acts, like revealing, saving and sending the Son and the Holy Spirit—all of which are contingent. So they are the kind of ‘things’ that simply *cannot* be derived, that can only be witnessed. For Duns’ entire conception of things human and divine, creation and Creator, the metaphysical demarcation line between the necessary and the contingent is fundamental. It does require a distinction of two dimensions in the doctrine of God.⁷ However, this distinction between the necessary and the contingent, between what is natural and what is free does not correspond with that of the one God and the Trinity. God is not only Trinitarian in his acts, he is essentially Trinitarian.

^[5] God can only be known from his (free) acts, his works and deeds. Scotus is very consistent in arguing for God’s existence and character by starting from contingent reality, which can only be ‘observed’. Against a deep-seated Ancient epistemological principle, he states that we can have certain knowledge of contingent things: by using our senses. For Scotus the existence of contingent beings is evident (not self-evident). From this starting-point he shows by inductive arguments that there must be a necessary uncaused being causing all contingent things. He immediately adds that this must be a free cause, a being causing in a synchronically contingent way (see p. 57), for if that being would cause necessarily, he could only cause necessary things. So, ‘since there is contingency (freedom) in the world, there must be freedom in God’ (Cross, p. 11). Another word for a power causing contingently is: a will. Hence, the first being must have a will. But then he must also have an intellect providing the knowledge on which the will can act. In sum, the source of all other beings has intellect and will. From these mental attributes, derived from things that can be observed everywhere, Scotus in turn derives the Trinitarian character of the first being, as we will see.⁸ In this perspective the traditional divide between the doctrines *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino*, which is already considerably diminished when we join mainstream 13th century theology, might be removed altogether.

2 Productions of intellect and will

^[6] In an intricate and intriguing chapter (16) Cross shows that according to Duns each divine person has the divine essence completely, so including its mental powers and their operations. This means that for instance the Father

for Scotus, can only provide a lesser kind of knowledge).

7. For the constitutive role of this distinction – in medieval terms, a disjunctive transcendent property – in Scotus’ thought, see A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, E. Dekker, N. den Bok, A. Beck, *Duns Scotus on Divine Love. Texts and Commentary on Goodness and Freedom, God and Humans*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2003, ch. 1.

8. But cf. Cross (p. 180): ‘Scotus’ arguments in favour of the Trinity require not only that God is necessarily a Trinity, but that we can have some reasonably secure understanding of this simply by reflecting on the notion of God’. On p. 209 this is repeated in more technical ‘Crossian’ terms.

not only remembers, but understands and wants as well. For Scotus subscribes to the argument that, if the Father would ‘merely’ be God’s memory, he would understand through the Son and hence, would not have all divine perfections himself.⁹ Besides, how can the Father *communicate* to the Son (and to Holy Spirit) what he does not have himself? To avoid this inequality of the divine persons Duns distinguishes between essential and notional acts: between the operations of intellect and will (namely, understanding and loving) on the one hand, and the production of intellect and will (generation and procession) on the other. Conceived in this way, the production of the Son and the Spirit are caused by the divine intellect¹⁰ and will respectively, and not from some other divine power. Here we spot an instance of Scotus’ sense of parsimony; he solves a number of issues in Trinitarian theology by recurring to only these two causal powers in God as the main constituents of the one divine essence. This move enables Duns to offer not only a brilliant argument showing that there can only be three divine persons (ch. 11), but also an original and cogent argument at once for the *filioque* (§15.4) and for the famous rule that *opera divina ad extra indivisa sunt* (§16.2).¹¹

^[7] What exactly does it mean that divine persons are ‘produced’ by the divine intellect and will respectively, or that the divine essence is ‘communicated’ to the persons produced? Scotus assumes that this production or communication is a real causing-to-be. What it brings into existence, however, is not the divine essence (for nothing can cause itself), nor a replica of it (for there can be no other Gods), but only divine persons – that is, ‘instances’ of the one divine essence, ‘instantiated’ only by the relations between the persons. This ‘only’ has to be stressed because the two processions leave the divine essence exactly as it is: individual and numerically one, infinite and supremely simple. So producing or communicating the divine essence means ‘reproducing’ that essence *in mente divino*. What is really produced is not one or two more essences, but the only one divine essence *as known* and *as willed*. In a very precise and restricted sense this can indeed be seen as (two distinct) communications of the divine essence. Taken in this sense the difference between notional and essential acts becomes clear.¹² In itself the divine essence comprises both intellect and will and their proper

9. For Scotus’ adherence to this Augustinian (in fact anti-Eunomian, cf. below, n. 35 argument, see Cross, p. 218.

10. To be more precise: Scotus speaks of the productive capacity of the divine memory (Cross, p. 63). This might entail a kind of redoubling, for if (cf. p. 134) the memory already has its objects present somehow, why still produce them by understanding? Primarily it seems to mean that when generation (an act of knowing) is seen from one end-term, it can be called memory, when it is seen from the other end-term, it can be called intellect.

11. See below, n. 24 . Unfortunately, in Cross’ book the headings above the pages do not show the number of the chapters while the sections are not indicated by a chapter number either (there is only the section number, e.g., 2 instead of 16.2). In this way the – very many – cross-references are not easy to check.

12. Cross (p. 225): ‘the correlation between notional and essential acts extends only as far as essential *powers* (of memory and will; not *acts* of knowledge and love)’. But Duns contradicts this in a text quoted on p. 223. It seems Cross wants the memory to do something other than remembering and the will something other than willing.

operations. When, however, these powers are directed to the divine essence, each one embraces the entire essence, so including its two powers and their operations, yet one of them by knowing it and the other by loving it.¹³

[8] At this point Cross is less clear than Scotus allows. If, as Scotus claims, the divine intellect is not only capable of producing perfect knowledge, but also of producing other divine persons, this does not in any way mean that the divine intellect, the power by which the second divine person is generated, somehow duplicates the divine essence including intellect *and* will (and everything involved in their operations). To my mind, this *cannot* be the case because the intellect – or a suppositum operating by means of the intellect – can produce knowledge, but cannot produce love, nor can it produce the will, or itself for that matter. However, the intellect can produce *knowledge* of intellect *and* will, and of knowing *and* willing—just like the will can produce love for both will and intellect, willing and knowing, in fact for the entire divine essence. This means that the persons cannot be distinct solely by their different relations of origin, nor only by the *formal* relations of the mental powers in their specific order of operating. There must also be a ‘material’ difference given by the mental powers themselves, for, as Scotus explains, the relations constituting the persons are in fact different kinds of causal relations. So for Scotus, there are two kinds of ‘reproduction’ of the divine essence: one by knowing and one by willing. He might even say that they are the only two possible kinds. In this way it becomes immediately clear that the Trinitarian productions or communications are *internal* to the one divine essence. Moreover, it seems appropriate to say that the primary agent in God operating by intellect and will in regard to himself and all other beings, in fact is the one divine essence.

3 Generation, Christian and Pagan

[9] Up till now I have approached the Trinity from the dynamics of the divine essence. Consisting of two powers, intellect and will, the divine essence produces two acts, knowing and willing. Yet by its own activity each act embraces the same ‘object’, the one divine essence. In this way the second divine person is produced by (means of) the intellect (only). If we look at the same dynamics from the side of the persons, we must say that the second divine *person* receives his entire being, including the divine essence, from the first person. This means that this *person* cannot know or will until ‘after’ receiving the divine essence.¹⁴ The same applies to the third divine person. In one sense it is even true of the first divine person, the Father. For, although this person does not receive the divine essence, he does come ‘after’ the divine essence. The reason for this is that

13. For an example and confirmation of this reading, see the analysis of the procession of the Holy Spirit in *Duns Scotus on Divine Love*, ch. 6 (a close-reading of *Lectura* I 10: ‘whether the Spirit is produced by an act of will’).

14. For *this* priority-claim, see Cross’ clear exposition, esp. p. 212. I write ‘after’ with apostrophes (like ‘becoming’, ‘during’, ‘first’) in order to refer to a prior/posterior not in the chronology, but in the constitution of things.

the Father is not just using the divine powers for producing the other persons, but in a specific way he is also the product of these powers. Scotus makes this clear by saying that God is not Father first and then generating the Son (as Cross agrees, p. 207). This means (against Cross) that God is simply first God ‘*becoming*’ Father *by* generating the Son. It is *in the act* of generation that both Father and Son originate mutually: the Father as originator and the Son as originated.¹⁵ There is a profound truth in the word of Wordsworth: ‘the child is the father of the man’. According to Scotus, it is in a sense true that in God *deity* generates.¹⁶ The Father *is* the divine essence *generating* perfect self-knowledge. In other, more traditional words: as a person the Father is a purely relational reality—like the other divine persons.¹⁷

[10] Of course, my divergence from Cross at this point should be substantiated by a close reading of Scotus-texts. Here is a sample. Cross says that ‘the divine essence, prior to its exemplification in even one person, cannot generate’ (p.156).¹⁸ However, in the text Cross is commenting on here, Scotus says (my italics): ‘in the *first* instant of nature in which [the deity] is understood, *before* it is understood in a person, *it* will generate’. Here the agency is primarily located in the essence. This concurs with Scotus’ assessment of an insight of Augustine and Anselm, quoted by Cross. In support of these ‘Saints’ it must be held, Scotus says, that the essence by itself defines itself as the foundation of the first relation.¹⁹ Understood in this way, the divine essence is a subject—subject taken in the characterisation offered by Cross as ‘something that exists *per se* and is a sufficient cause of some action’ (p. 156). In fact, the divine essence must be the primary subject; the divine persons might be called secondary subjects, for they have their ‘subjectivity’, their subsistence and agency, from the essence.²⁰

[11] According to Scotus, generating is necessary in God. In order to prevent the generation of another God, Cross comments, ‘it follows that the divine essence

15. For another confirmation for this view, see. p. 205, where the Scotus-quotation says that a person cannot be the endterm of *generating*. So, I would add, neither can a person be the *fundamentum* (‘start-term’) for generating.

16. This seems to run against Lateranum IV: *deitas non generat*. However, the council meant, with Lombard against Joachim of Fiore: the divine essence does not generate itself nor another *deus*. This is accepted by Scotus.

17. To my mind, the shift in Scotus’ thought from an absolute to a relational view of *persona*, as observed by Cross (e.g. p. 201), has a lot to do with his increasing grasp of the nature of divine processions as mental acts. Strictly speaking, a relational view of the divine persons only implies that their most proper property (‘*proprium*’) is relational. So if we ask for the constitution of the divine persons (as Cross does in ch. 17), Scotus can still maintain that they are absolutes in the sense that each divine person is the very same divine essence ‘specified’ by one causal internal relation.

18. On p. 187 Cross quotes a Scotus-text saying that the first person is considered to be a suppositum ‘before’ he acts (*Ordinatio* I 28.3, n. 52). Cross does not notice, however, that this is a *quod non*-argument, not reflecting Scotus’ position (which is introduced by the *contra*-argument).

19. *Ordinatio* I 28.3, n. 82, referred to, but not quoted by Cross on p. 156, n. 9: *standum est quod essentia ex se praecise determinat in se ut in fundamento primam relationem*’.

20. Cf. Cross speaking of ‘proximate and ultimate subject’, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, p. 320.

must be exemplified by a divine person prior (logically speaking) to any internal generation' (p. 156). I would say: it follows that the divine essence cannot generate externally, but only internally. In the Scotus-text quoted by Cross to sustain his comment²¹, Scotus says that the divine essence, which is in itself an absolute, by generating defines itself as a *relative* suppositum—'as we claim'. *Pagani*, Scotus adds, claim that the divine essence is generating *as an absolute*. This addition is telling. According to Duns, both Christian and 'Pagan' thinking assume that the divine essence or nature is necessarily generating. Their fundamental difference is that Christians say that this *generating* constitutes (only) a relative suppositum, whereas non-Christians say it constitutes an absolute suppositum. If the divine essence would generate as an absolute, that is, if the first divine person were an absolute, it would produce (an) absolute(s). In that case either there would be more than one God, or creation would be necessary, or both. These consequences are not just unacceptable to Christians, but in fact impossible in themselves. As Cross shows, Scotus forcefully argues that *ad extra* God *can only* cause or act contingently.²²

^[12] So, according to Duns, the first divine person is the divine essence generating internally; as such it is a completely relational necessary subject (suppositum). The divine essence itself is an absolute which can produce *as an absolute* as well, but only by producing *ad extra* and contingently.²³ Again, it seems appropriate that, despite historical terminological reasons, this absolute can be called a subject. In fact, in modern times it has become the very prerogative of 'a subject' (and 'a person' for that matter) to be exactly this: 'an *absolute* causing *freely*'—something Ancient philosophy wasn't able or prepared to think. So Christian faith has opened our mind for the fact that there is not, and cannot be, an absolute first being producing as an absolute. This does not mean that there is no necessary production; there is, but only inside God, the one Creator of all things. The relational character of the divine persons is warrant for that.

4 Individuality and 'commonality'

^[13] In the example of close-reading just offered once more we witness the drive in Scotus' theo-logical enterprise.²⁴ He tends to see the one divine essence endowed with perfect mental powers – in one word: God – as the primary agent,

21. *Ordinatio* I 28.3, n. 84, quoted in Cross' translation on p. 156, n. 8.

22. See e.g. Cross, p. 131. In fact, for *pagani* there hardly is a distinction between *ad extra* and *ad intra*, there is only a fluent transition. On p. 321 Cross says, in contrast to the Scotus-text he quotes, that connecting the two activities of necessary processions and contingent creation 'in some way seems to break down' their distinction.

23. From my reading it must be very interesting to see how Scotus understands the traditional rule *actiones sunt suppositorum* (cf. Cross, p. 187, n. 15). In the doctrine of God he may not be able to accept it any more.

24. Another example is his analysis of the *spiratio* of the Holy Spirit, where Scotus argues that the Father and the Son are not two 'Spirators', but only one, because there is only one will 'spiring' (Cross, p. 221f). For the same reason Scotus can claim that the divine persons, when acting with respect to the non-divine, are one agent.

constituted by necessary 'acts' with respect to itself and free acts with respect to everything other than itself (himself).²⁵ When we turn to the study of individuality *in divinis* – a specialism of Cross – we will be able to find a third confirmation of this tendency. Historically, in the doctrine of God this study was pursued at some distance from that of the divine mental powers. Here we may find the main reason why Cross does not present Scotus' doctrine of God as tightly knit as the *doctor subtilis* would.²⁶

[14] Like most predecessors, Scotus does not introduce the concepts of individuality and (in) communicability by recurring to the divine mental powers. He introduces them in their own right, by claiming that the infinite divine essence must be perfectly communicable, since 'every pure perfection is communicable' *Quodlibet* 5,13, see p. 157).²⁷ Since not only the divine essence, but also its communication is a perfection, it cannot fail to happen in God. Not until now do the divine intellect and will come into play, for they are the only two powers that can perform the task of this communication. Clearly, in this context of discussion the mental powers are not the motivating force for the communication of the divine essence. Nevertheless, to my mind they too do necessitate that communication, for it is unthinkable that God does not know or love *himself*. As I have already pointed out, I think that the perfect communication of the numerically one and individual divine essence is in fact explained, by Scotus, in terms of its being known and loved. If it is explained only in terms of its (in)communicability itself, as Cross tends to do, we run into difficulties which may diffuse our understanding.

[15] In line with 13th century Trinitarian theology in general, Scotus defends both the 'commonality' (Cross) and the individuality of the divine essence (see ch. 13). Scotus is highly original, however, in stating that for this combination the particular divine attribute of infinity is most explanatory. For on the one hand, as I have just mentioned, what is infinite must be perfectly communicable. On the other hand, as Cross nicely explains (ch. 5), what is infinite can only be one, since it cannot be composed nor augmented nor divided, and therefore must be indivisible (*in-divid-ualis*) as well. For a divine person things must be more complicated. According to Duns, a divine person is both infinite and perfect in virtue of the divine essence, whereas his other constituent, his personal property is neither infinite nor perfect. Personal properties are not infinite because they limit each other (for instance, the Father as Father is not the Son and therefore, unlike the divine essence, cannot be all-comprising nor 'the only one'). Personal properties are not perfect because they are incommunicable, and incommunica-

25. Trinitarian theology usually refers to a divine persona as a 'he', whereas the divine essence is referred to as an 'it'. Augustine was not at ease with this, from Scotus we can learn why.

26. That is, if Scotus had presented his view in a more systematic and a less *quaestio*-bound way – as in fact all his modern interpreters more or less do.

27. Cross cannot quite understand the *rationale* of this principle (p. 247), and I agree. Nor can I understand why its reverse, incommunicability, is a *not* a perfection. For this weak spot in Scotus' view, cf. below, esp. final section.

blity, although it seems necessary for anything to exist (p. 156), is not a perfection (p. 202). A divine person, then, is indivisible because of the divine essence and incommunicable because of a personal property.

[16] Sounding these Scotian insights Cross rightly remarks (p. 162) that Scotus ‘does not believe that the divine persons are individuals at all’. Scotus could never endorse a kind of Social Trinitarianism (see p. 219, 224).²⁸ But does Cross detect a social ring to Scotus’ Trinitarianism after all? What does he mean by saying that the divine essence is ‘shared’ by three persons, or in Cross’ translation, that the divine essence is an ‘immanent universal’ ‘exemplified’ in (just) three persons (see e.g. p. 167)? Here, in his grasp of the nature of divine individuality, Cross seems to have a reason to hold back where Scotus presses on. Cross writes that the divine essence ‘is infinite, and pure actuality, and thus not the sort of thing that can be contracted by a *haecceity*’ (p. 179). This sentence is meant as a commentary on a Scotus-passage (*Ordinatio* I.5.2, quoted on p. 178). However, in this passage Duns in fact refers to a contraction by a relation (of origin). In other passages, as can be read elsewhere in Cross’ book (p. 167), Scotus explicitly states that the divine essence is *de se haec*. So for Scotus, the divine essence is not only characterised by individuality in the sense of indivisibility, but also in the sense of *haecceity* (‘thisness’, I translate this term by ‘individual’; Scotus’ *individualis*, when it is meant in the sense of inseparability, I would translate by ‘indivisible’). In fact, the *haecceity* of the divine essence is stronger than that of a human being (it is ‘*de se haec*’).²⁹

[17] So for Duns, the divine essence is not just indivisible, but individual. For him, this individuality of the divine essence is compatible with the communicability of the divine essence and its communication realised by the divine processions. This becomes very plausible when we realise, as I have shown, that by this communication the divine essence itself is ‘produced in *esse intelligibile* and in *esse volitive*’.³⁰

[18] There is another kind of individuality by which the divine essence is characterised: incommunicability. For not only a divine person, but also the divine essence itself is incommunicable, though only in one important respect. We have already seen that as an absolute it cannot be communicated to other absolute(s). Other absolutes, which are constituted by definable properties (‘quiddities’) and *haecceity*, can only be non-divine and created. Communication of the divine essence is only possible by way of relative supposita. This leads us to still another individuating feature of the divine essence closely related to incommu-

28. The index in Cross’ book is pretty extensive, yet important terms are missing, like ‘Social trinitarianism’, or ‘independence’, ‘subsistence’.

29. These degrees of individuality can already be found in Richard of St. Victor, see my ‘Richard de Saint-Victor et la quête de l’individualité essentielle: La sagesse de *daniélité*’, in B. M. Bedos-Rezak and D. Iogna-Prat (eds), *L’individu au Moyen Age*, Paris: Aubier, 2005, 123–144. Cf. below, n. 34. Cross: ‘Scotus builds on the foundations laid by Richard, and he does so in a very metaphysically sophisticated way, as we would expect’ (p. 159).

30. For these Scotian terms, cf. Cross, p. 64ff.

nicability: its independence. By this I do not mean that it is not brought into existence (which is also true), but that it is subsisting. Something is subsistent, Duns says, if it cannot inhere in something else (like an attribute), if it cannot be a part in a composition and if it is incommunicable. This means, as Cross rightly remarks, that the divine essence has ‘weak subsistence’ since it is subsistent in the first two senses, but not in the third: it still allows for one kind of communicability (*ad intra*) which must be excluded for the persons. They are incommunicable in every respect.³¹ So there is a subsistence and an incommunicability in a strong and in a weak sense; when I indicate the latter by an *, I can summarize Scotus’ view as follows: the divine essence is indivisible, individual, incommunicable* and independent in the sense of subsistent*.

5 Person, human and divine

[19] It is clarifying to compare this finding on divine individuality with Scotus’ analysis of the anthropological concept of person as developed in a Christological context (to which Cross has devoted his earlier major Scotus-study). In that context Duns says that the indivisible and individual (*haec*) human nature is not a person—just like in Trinitarian theology. The individual human nature is a person if it exists independently, for only then is it incommunicable.³² The reason for this is that – like the individual divine nature – the individual human nature is in itself communicable; for it can be common to more than one person, namely, a human person (in the case of normal human beings) and a divine person (in the case of incarnation). In the first case the individual human nature exists independently, in the second case dependently. So a human person is an absolute, an individual human nature existing independently. If we turn to God, the closest parallel to the human person seems to be the divine essence rather than a divine person, for the divine essence too is an absolute, an individual nature existing independently.³³ The only difference seems to be that strict incommunicability is ascribed to both the human person and the divine person, whereas it is denied of the divine essence. However, strict incommunicability in God is constituted *only* by relations *internal* to the divine essence—a dimension which in fact is not explored in humans. A human being too might somehow have internal relations caused by the activity of the two basic mental powers! This idea is supported by the fact that in human beings individuality and self-communication – the kind Scotus has in mind for God – are perfectly compatible. For when I know myself, it is me, the same individual, generating self-knowledge; it is me mentally

31. The persons derive their ‘weak subsistence’ from the divine essence, as Cross shows (p. 182), in agreement with Scotus’ general insight that the essence has ‘a weak priority’ in the constitution of the persons (p. 176ff).

32. See *Lectura* III 1. The ‘Research Group John Duns Scotus’ is preparing a publication on this distinction.

33. A confirmation of this parallel: in the Trinity a person subsists in virtue of the divine essence (see p. 197), whereas in humans, conversely, the individual human nature subsists in virtue of its personhood.

embracing myself. In this respect humans may very well be ‘made in God’s image’.

^[20] In my understanding, here we run into an equivocity in the concept of person due to the peculiar history of this term. I am not completely sure Cross fully realises this equivocity. After having said that for Scotus human and divine persons have something real (and not just something conceptual) in common, Cross comments: ‘After all, persons are in some sense constituted by their haecceities or (in the case of divine persons) their mutual relations’³⁴—without any indication that he may be comparing apples with Pears, or rather: apples with Constituents of an Apple. When we approach Trinitarian theology from anthropology and Christology following the lead of Scotus’ analysis, it seems (most) appropriate to call the divine essence a suppositum or person. In that case we have to find another term for the divine Three. Duns remained faithful to the official ecclesiastical use of the terms introduced by Tertullian, although he is very much aware of their non-univocity (see p. 162). In order to define ‘person’ in Trinitarian theology Scotus needs an extra qualification, of a different kind, on top of ‘an individual independently existing nature’. As we have seen, this qualification is a relation of the essence to itself, a production constituting a relative suppositum internal to an absolute acting as one free agent.

^[21] It is a pity that Cross does not reflect on the traditional term *persona* in comparison to our term *person*.³⁵ The modern understanding of ‘person’ may be pinned down as ‘an individual acting freely’. When Cross writes: ‘Oddly, Scotus devotes rather little space to showing that the divine products turn out to be persons’ (p. 153, cf. 158), this amazement may be due to the fact that *we* tend to read ‘persona’ as (the modern) ‘person’ which Scotus, thinking about God from his background, never had in mind. In modern terminology I would summarize Scotus’ position by saying: God is one person. This one perfect person must have three persona’s: this person knowing himself and everything else, this person loving himself and every lovable thing he chooses to create, and this person being the source of his knowledge and love. In his own context Scotus’ analysis is able to sustain, in an impressive way, that the three divine persons cannot be identified as the three powers of divine memory, intellect and will.³⁶ Each person is defined by the entire divine essence and a personal property. This personal property is defined by the relation to the other persons, which in turn is explained by the internal relations of the mental powers. Duns does recognize the triadic nature of the one and only perfect Mind, but he does not think that this triad *is* the Trinity. It must be a kind of ‘trinity’ within the Trinity constitutive for the Trinity, because

34. *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, p. 177.

35. I have tried to do that consistently in my *Communicating the Most High: A Systematic Analysis of Person and Trinity in Richard of St. Victor*, Paris/Turnhout: Brepols Publishers 1996.

36. Scotus develops this view by rejecting that of Henry of Ghent who elaborates on the main enterprise of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (book VIII–XIV). Scotus fully acknowledges its shortcoming, like Augustine himself (book XV), yet envisages a way to turn Augustine’s embarrassment into an advantage.

each divine person has this triad in virtue of the divine essence, whereas each divine person is not the Trinity except together with the other divine persons. Scotus expands the concept of a mental ('psychological') trinity into the concept of a perfectly communicable divine essence, communicated by the divine mental powers.³⁷

37. This new concept has undeniably Franciscan roots. It may be seen as an adaptation of Bonaventure's view that the divine essence cannot fail to communicate itself entirely. He explains this communication, which does not break the bond of God's *individualitas*, by God's generosity (*bonum diffusivum sui*), Duns by his infinity.