

Johannes Duns Scotus. *Questionen zur Metaphysik des Aristoteles, Buch 1. Lateinisch – Deutsch.* Edition, translation and introduction by Joachim Söder (HBPhMA). Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 2024. 400 p. ISBN: 9783451396229. Hardback: 65€

Reviewed by ALFONSO QUARTUCCI
University of Toronto
alfonso.quartucci@utoronto.ca

Scholarly work on Scotus in the last decades has made it clear that the *Questions on the Metaphysics* occupy a central place in Scotus' overall production and provide a privileged access to his metaphysical views. Aristotle's text gives Scotus the opportunity to raise a number of doctrinal questions, whose discussion is carried out against the background not only of Aristotle, but also of the subsequent philosophical tradition. Many of these discussions may, at first sight, appear as inconclusive and at times even inconsistent; one of the greatest merits of scholarship – first of all, of the critical edition – has been to trace back these puzzling features of the text to the way in which the text was composed and then handed down to us. First of all, the *Questions* were composed by Scotus over a long period of time; second, even within a single *quaestio* some passages ('*extra*'/'*additio*') should be considered as later additions by Scotus, which were eventually transmitted together with the original text.¹ The acknowledgement of these facts opens the doors to closer analyses of the *Questions*, which turn out to be a unique source of information on the development of Scotus' metaphysics. A new contribution to the study of the *Questions* has lately been given by Joachim Söder, who provided a new German translation of the prologue and of the questions on the first book of the *Metaphysics*.

The volume prepared by Söder consists of three parts: an introduction, a parallel Latin-German text of Scotus' work, and an appendix. I will first briefly describe these three parts in turn, before putting forward some further considerations.

The introduction serves a twofold purpose: its first sections provide a general introduction to the *Questions* and their author, while its second half clarifies specifically the features of the volume at hand, in particular of the Latin-German text and of the appendix. As for the first purpose, Söder starts by providing a very brief picture of relevant developments in the history of metaphysics, against the background of which Scotus' contribution should be appreciated. He continues with outlining Scotus' biography – which is also the occasion to mention some of his major works, especially his commentaries on the *Sentences*.² Finally, the *Questions* themselves are briefly introduced: their origin and their

¹ See Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis, Libri I–V*, edited by R. Andrews, G. Etzkorn, G. Gál, R. Green, F. Kelley, G. Marcil, T. Noone and R. Wood (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1997), Introduction, xlii–xlvi.

² As for the mention of the *Reportatio Examinata* at p. 14, the interested reader can now consult Stephen D. Dumont, "John Duns Scotus's *Reportatio Parisiensis Examinata*: a Mystery Solved",

relationship with the *Notabilia*, the background against which Scotus develops his conception of metaphysics, and – most importantly – some matters related to the composition and the transmission of the text (the distinction between ‘basic text’, passages marked as ‘*extra*’/‘*additio*’, and ‘*textus interpolati*’/‘*adnotationes interpolatae*’; the chronology of the composition of the ‘basic text’ of different books; the current state of research about the possibility of providing a *stemma codicum* for the extant manuscripts).³ The relevance of the distinction between ‘basic text’ and ‘*additiones*’ for detecting Scotus’ doctrinal development is then concretely exemplified with the discussion of the subject of metaphysics in *Questions* I, 1, in which Scotus defends different positions in basic text and additions, respectively.

The rest of the introduction provides some clarifications on Latin text, translation, and appendix. First of all, the Latin text printed in the volume is largely the one printed in the 1997 critical edition and, just like in the edition, the distinction between ‘basic text’, ‘*extra*’, and ‘interpolated texts’ is conveniently visible. However, the text printed by J. Söder parts from the one of the critical edition in two respects. First, the subtitles which are introduced by the editors in the critical edition – and mark a *divisio textus* internal to the single *quaestiones* – are consciously omitted by Söder, in order not to impose on the reader a determinate understanding of the structure of the text, especially in the case of a chronologically stratified work as the *Questions* are. Second, as far as Scotus’ text itself is concerned, Söder proposes and prints 17 emendations to the text of the critical edition. In a section of the appendix, these emendations are listed in a table alongside the readings of the critical edition they replace, before being justified explicitly.⁴

A German translation, which is also the core and primary motivation of the volume, accompanies the Latin text. Providing a translation is in general not an easy task, and the highly technical nature of the *Questions* and Scotus’ writing more generally add their own difficulties. In the introduction, Söder states that the translation would attempt, on one hand, to convey the Latin text as precisely as possible; on the other, to make the text “understandable” (which entails, among other things, providing an interpretation for obscure and ambiguous passages). I found this attempt quite successful: the translation does indeed follow faithfully and translate rigorously the Latin text, while at the same time striving for readability (e.g. avoiding to reproduce literally convoluted sentences when a reasonable plainer alternative is available; slightly expanding some passages between square brackets; making at times explicit the reference of personal pronouns; etc.).

Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales 85/2 (2018): 377-438.

³ See Dominique Poirel’s introduction to the Latin text in Jean Duns Scot, *Questions sur la Métaphysique. Volume I. Livres I à III*, introduction, traduction et notes par Olivier Boulnois et Dan Arbib, avec une introduction au texte latin par Dominique Poirel (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2017), 19-26.

⁴ The first of these justifications actually concerns a reading of the critical edition which is preserved in Söder’s volume (and is defended against a reading printed in the Vivès edition), rather than an emendation. For three of the 17 emendations Söder expressly follows Jean Duns Scot, *Questions sur la Métaphysique. Volume I. Livres I à III*.

The translation is accompanied by a large quantity of footnotes which serve various purposes, for example:

- clarification of technical vocabulary, either Scotus' own or belonging to the philosophical tradition (especially Aristotelian);
- references to other texts, either by Scotus or by a number of other authors; these texts are often reported in translation (translations are by Söder himself); some of these references are already given in the critical edition, while several others are not;
- remarks on the translation, especially when the Latin text presents difficulties and the translator could not opt for the grammatically most intuitive interpretation of the text;⁵
- the translation of interpolated texts/annotations is also provided in footnotes.

Footnotes are typically kept short; some of them are further expanded in a section of the appendix, where more detailed clarifications or longer quotations are provided (when this is the case, the relevant footnote points forward to the appendix explicitly).

The appendix is closed by a bibliography including primary and secondary sources, as well as by an index of proper names mentioned in Scotus' text.

With its introduction, the Latin-German text, and the appendix, the new book edited by Söder will be valuable, I believe, both for future research on the *Questions* (and on Scotus more generally) and for a larger – especially German-speaking – philosophical audience.

The latter will definitely benefit from a reliable new translation – to my knowledge, the first integral translation into German of *Questions*, prologue and book 1 – of one of the most important philosophical works by Scotus, made more accessible by the large number of footnotes clarifying technical vocabulary and doctrinal points. The introduction is in this respect very helpful, in so far as it allows the non-specialist reader to get acquainted with Scotus and his work, as well as with the complicated composition of the *Questions*. The general outline of the problem of the status of metaphysics and of its subject is also helpful, in spite of the little space which could be devoted to this in the introduction (in particular, Scotus' immediate interlocutors – first of all, Avicenna, Averroes, and Aquinas – are only briefly mentioned, which might make it difficult to appreciate Scotus' originality with respect to his predecessors).⁶

⁵ See for example p. 296 n. 613.

⁶ There are different attitudes in scholarship as far as the exact nature of Scotus' innovations is concerned. Söder's introduction follows part of existent scholarship in stressing the discontinuity of Scotus' metaphysics with respect to previous authors. For an analysis that underscores the continuity, in certain respects, of Scotus' approach with 13th-century authors, the reader can consult Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought. From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to*

As for the scholarly community, the emendations on the Latin text, the translation itself, and the number of sources reported in the footnotes will be of particular interest.

The emendations proposed in the volume are, I would say, of two kinds. In some cases, the reading of the edition is strictly speaking preserved, but the punctuation or the formatting is slightly changed in order to account for a different interpretation of the text (different understanding of an argument;⁷ identification of quotations;⁸ different understanding of the reference of a given word).⁹ In other cases, Söder opts for a variant reading, which is either found in the manuscript tradition or the result of a conjecture. All proposed emendations with their justifications certainly deserve attention – and at least some of them, I believe, would be easily accepted by the scholarly community as unproblematically correct. As for the choice of variant readings, it has already been remarked that the final aim of the research on the *Questions* should consist in critical choices which are consistent with a *stemma codicum*, and that this remains as yet a major *desideratum*.¹⁰ A preliminary reflection on variant readings – just like the one provided by Söder’s justifications of his emendations – can nonetheless be useful in preparation for a more complete assessment of the manuscript tradition and the identification of criteria to follow for future critical choices.

A translation can also in general be considered an important scholarly contribution, insofar as the translator is required to offer an understanding of the text in its details. This is all the more true when dealing with a difficult text as Scotus’ *Questions* – where a number of passages admit of more than one grammatical construction, and single words or expressions can be interpreted in more than one way. The interpretative options offered in this new translation, together with the large number of indications of sources and parallel texts, should undoubtedly be consulted by anyone carrying out a closer study of passages of Scotus’ *Questions*.

It is to be hoped that J. Söder’s project to provide a translation of the following books of the *Questions* will soon result in a complete German translation of Scotus’ work.

Francisco Suárez (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

⁷ See for example the emendation at p. 338,13 (ed. Söder).

⁸ See for example p. 54,18; p. 352,14-15; p. 354,1-2 (ed. Söder).

⁹ For example, at 76,15 (ed. Söder) Söder prints “physica” – physics meant as a science – instead of “Physica” – Aristotle’s work.

¹⁰ See Giorgio Pini, “Critical Study. Duns Scotus’s Metaphysics: The Critical Edition of his *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis*”, *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 65/2 (1998): 362-365; see also the remarks by Söder in the introduction of the volume under review (p. 18). The critical edition does not provide a *stemma*; no edition seems to have made so far editorial choices based on a *stemma*, in spite of the fact that the volumes containing the French translation provide provisional *stemma* for single sections of the text. Cf. Tobias Hoffmann, “*Questions sur la métaphysique* by Jean Duns Scot (review)”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 60/3 (2022): 503-505.