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DEUS EST. A SCOTISTIC DISCUSSION OF *DEUS EST*
AS A SELF-EVIDENT PROPOSITION¹

1. Introduction

Medieval philosophers and theologians took much interest in the proposition *Deus est*. They investigated its nature: was it what is traditionally called an immediate proposition, *i.e.* one that could not be proved but is evident on the basis of the terms used. An example is the principle of contradiction. Or was it a mediate proposition, known on the basis of the knowledge of a middle term, *i.e.* only known by proof. An example of such mediate proposition was 'God is eternal', which is only true on the basis of God's immutability.

The proposition *Deus est* could be taken in both ways, though not without qualification. Taken as mediate proposition it was considered as a conclusion of a proof of God's existence. An example: the title of Thomas Aquinas' question 2, article 1, of the first part of his *Summa theologiae* is *De Deo, an sit*. He concludes that *Deus est* is self-evident *secundum se*, because the predicate is the same as the subject, for God is Being. Man in the present state, however, does not have distinct knowledge of God's essence, so the proposition is not self-evident to him, but needs proof. The basis of the proof is what is known to us, so it is a proof from the effects (*i.e.* creatures), not from the cause (*i.e.* God himself). In the well-known article 3 of the same question Thomas presents five proofs for God's existence. In this case *Deus est* is the conclusion of a proof, and therefore it is mediately known.²

Deus est can also be taken as a *propositio per se nota*. Different kinds of such propositions were traditionally distinguished (cf., e.g., Gredt 1929). The *habitus*, or disposition by which these kinds of propositions were known could belong to speculative principles, *i.e.* principles which were the basis of science, and the disposition of practical principles (this disposition is sometimes called *synderesis*, "conscience"). An example of the latter is that good is to be done, and evil to be

avoided. Examples of speculative principles are: 1. The principle of contradiction ('nothing can at the same time with the same respect be and not be, or be such or not-such'); 2. The principle of the excluded third ('there is no middle between being and not-being'); 3. The principle of correspondence or difference ('things that are identical to a third, are mutually the same; things of which one is different from a third from which the other is not different, are mutually different'). 4. The principles *dictum de omni* and *dictum de nullo* ('if something is for all cases affirmed of something else, must be affirmed of everything contained under it, and if something is for all cases denied of something else, must be denied of everything contained under it'). 5. The principle of sufficient reason ('nothing is without sufficient reason'). These principles are formal and can be applied to everything in reality. Another principle seems to apply only partially to reality, e.g. 'the whole is greater than any of its constituent parts'. To establish the truth of these self-evident propositions, there is no need to appeal to external data, such as those of experience, except for a process of abstraction by which a term (subject or predicate) as such is known.

Can the proposition *Deus est* be considered as self-evident for man in the present state? It could be argued that it cannot, because man has no distinct knowledge of the terms used. So only to God, or perhaps the angels and the souls after death, the proposition is self-evident. But then a question arises: does self-evidence necessarily imply distinct knowledge?

As I have pointed to above, Thomas and philosophers in his trail sketch the positions of those who think *Deus est* to be self-evident to man, and they accuse them of 'ontologism' (see, e.g. *Buonpensiere* 1903, pp. 97-99). Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) was one of the most known advocates of this position, that was unacceptable for orthodox christianity. Thomists also put in this category Henry of Ghent, and some heretics condemned by the church (cf. Denzinger 1955, nn. 1659-65).

John Duns Scotus' view also arouses interest. The subtle doctor discusses the problem in his commentary on the *Sentences* I, d. 2, pars 1, q. 2 (vol. II, pp. 126-48), and criticizes Thomas' opinion. As will be pointed out below, he denies the necessary connection between self-evidence and distinct knowledge.

Self-evident propositions still are objects of investigation. Sometimes they are discussed in connection with a priori propositions. I have refrained from using this term as explanation of a *propositio per se nota*, to

avoid confusion. For not all a priori-propositions should be taken, I feel, as self-evident. Many algebraic and arithmetical a priori-propositions (let us assume that there are such) are not self-evident, but need complicated proof. Perhaps one could even go a step further. One could distinguish between self-evident propositions which are true purely on the basis of the terms ('analytical propositions'), and self-evident propositions whose truth is also dependent on contingent states of affairs. What kinds of propositions are meant varies from philosopher to philosopher.

Duns Scotus had many followers. Now, when they did not find Duns' theory on some subject satisfactory, they sometimes wrote separate treatises. E.g., Francis of Mayronnes (died after 1328), probably a direct pupil of Scotus', wrote a tract entitled *Transcendentia* to systematize and elaborate Scotus' position. In the present paper I wish to discuss an anonymous *Tractatus de propositione per se nota*. The tract is handed down to us in ms. Pisa, *Biblioteca del Seminario Arcivescovile Santa Catheriana* 159, ff. 121r-128r.³ I have published this text elsewhere, and for a discussion of the manuscript and literature about it, I refer to that article (Bos 1995). Here I have the opportunity to discuss the contents of the tract in detail and to place it in historical perspective. Though the author discusses the problem of *propositio per se nota* on occasion of Duns Scotus' commentary on the *Sentences* I, d. 2, pars I, q. 2, the tract seems to be an independent compendium. This seems clear from the opening (ll. 5-10) and concluding (ll. 954-57) lines. The author of our tract explicitly calls Duns Scotus 'his master' (l. 9).

The author professes to be, and indeed is, a follower of Duns Scotus. To be a Scotist does not mean to be a slavish follower. The adoption of the formal distinction and an intensionalist semantics are the main characteristics, I feel. In other respects pupils found their own ways.

The main point brought forward by our anonymous author is that his master is very obscure (*obscurissime*, l. 521) on a specific point, viz. the problem whether a mathematician, who does not know the nature of a line as precisely as a metaphysician (for the latter has insight into the nature of things), yet has *propositiones per se note* as parts of his science.⁴ Further, he informs us of a variety of mid-fourteenth-century discussions about self-evident propositions, which may lead to further investigations, I hope. Because all the philosophers to whom it refers wrote their commentaries on the *Sentences* in the first half of the fourteenth century, our tract must have been composed after 1350. I

cannot establish an exact date or a *terminus ante quem*.⁵

In the present contribution I shall discuss the anonymous *Tractatus de propositione per se nota*. My analysis leads to a corroboration, on most points, of Peter Vier's explanation of Duns Scotus' view on the subject (Vier 1951). A new element is that I hope to place Duns Scotus' interpretation more adequately in the development of the *three* versions of his commentaries on the Sentences, viz. the *Lectura*, the *Reportatio* and the *Ordinatio*.⁶ The author defends the thesis that the definition of a self-evident proposition applies to things whether they are described with categorical terms (e.g. material things) or transcendental terms (e.g. God). An examination of the tract enables us, moreover, to gain a better insight in early fourteenth-century discussions of the a priori proposition.

2. Aristotle

First, a few words on Aristotle's view of καθ'αυτό characteristic of propositions (καθ'αυτό is the Greek equivalent of *per se*).

In the background of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* is Plato's theory of recollection. There is seldom an explicit reference to Plato in the *Posterior Analytics*, but in chapter I, 1 he mentions the dilemma of Plato's *Meno*.

Aristotle rejects Plato's theory of ideas because it implies an unnecessary duplication of reality and criticizes Plato's theory of innate knowledge. According to Plato real knowledge is knowledge of ideas, to which the mind has access in virtue of its pre-existence. These ideas are irreducible realities.⁷ Man principally proceeds from what logically and naturally is better known, i.e. from what is known in itself or *per se*. The mind possesses firm knowledge of the ideas, and it acquires knowledge from a kind of induction.

Aristotle examines certain and unqualified knowledge whose object cannot be other than it is. So the object of scientific knowledge is necessary, he says (it is difficult, by the way, to decide whether the term 'necessary' refers to the *object*, or to the *knowledge*). A necessary connection between two properties belonging to a specific state of affairs (πρόγμω) seems to be at stake. This state of affairs is approached by a man of science, e.g. that all equilateral triangles have three

angles of which the sum equals the sum of two right angles.

Scientific proof is presented in syllogistic form and is an explanation of a state of affairs proceeding by way of a middle term from necessary *things*, as Aristotle says. The middle term refers to the cause of the state of affairs.⁸ Now the question arises: from which kind of first things does scientific knowledge proceed? Which kind of first principles form our original knowledge? Aristotle enumerates three characteristics of these principles: a) *κατὰ παντός*; b) *καθ'αυτό*; c) *καθόλου*.

a) *κατὰ παντός* is what Aristotle calls that of which it is not the case that it is present in some things, and absent in others, or is sometimes in something, and sometimes not; this characteristic ensures that an attribute *universally* belongs to a subject;

b) *καθ'αυτό*: this characteristic is relevant to our discussion of a *propositio per se nota*; it requires that a property belongs to a subject in virtue of the *nature* of the subject, e.g. that a line is in a triangle – which is a definition – and that each number is either even or odd – which is a *proprium*, a property flowing from the essence of number; other interpretations of *per se* are an individual concrete thing, and what could be labelled an event; e.g. dying belongs *per se* to being killed;

c) *καθόλου* is the characteristic that requires that the first premiss of the syllogism is about the whole object, *viz.* that a property belongs to the subject in virtue of the whole nature of the subject. This third characteristic is a strong requirement of the scientific character of first principles; it is about what in medieval philosophy is traditionally called the 'first subject' (or: 'first formal object') of a science. To attribute a property to e.g. *equilateral* triangles cannot result in first principles. A property should be said to apply to triangles without qualification.

Therefore, premisses having these characteristics provide an answer to questions about the cause of a state of affairs. The question 'why' is one of the four well-known questions enumerated by Aristotle in the beginning of his *Posterior Analytics* (II, 1 73b6-16). All questions (*viz. quia, si est, an est* and *quid est*) are about the middle term of the syllogism, and therefore all questions about a certain state of affairs are reduced to first principles.

Aristotle does not speak about a self-evident *proposition* in the form of 'S is P', but about a thing which is in the quiddity of something etc. This state of affairs may, of course, be expressed in the form of a proposition. A man of science studies a property of a thing, e.g. *being*

a line in the case of a triangle. Some medieval philosophers interpret what is known *per se* to be a thing, others to be a proposition. Anyway, if something known *per se* is taken as a thing, talking about *per se* properties of individual subjects, e.g. God, is easier.

In Aristotle's view, cognitive powers – be they intellectual or sensitive – are no part of the definition of the *per se* requirement. Neither does he consider the possibility of *per se* propositions of different levels, of which some are more *per se* than others, contrary to the practice, after Aristotle, of some medieval philosophers, as I shall point out below (cf. de Rijk 1990, pp. 232-40).

3. The Middle Ages

As I have said above, medieval philosophers firmly believe in God's existence. God is absolutely in virtue of Himself, or *per se*. The question is whether man in the present state is able to know as *per se* the proposition 'God exists'. Traditionally, as I have said, this is denied. God's existence is a matter of belief or, for many philosophers (especially before the fourteenth century), a matter of proof: it is not known in virtue of itself, or *per se nota*.

4. The anonymous *Tractatus de propositione per se nota*

The author starts by saying that he will discuss the *propositio per se nota* briefly and will give an account of the work of his master, John Duns Scotus. He adduces from another tract, not mentioned by name and not identified by me, a distinction among five kinds of propositions (ll. 13-31). From the list, one can get a better view of the nature of a *propositio per se nota* and its relations to other kinds. The tract starts with the most general kind of proposition (the *propositio in se*), and it ends with one of the most specific, the *propositio per se nota*. 1) The *propositio in se* has the form and nature of a proposition, but its truth is not guaranteed, e.g. *homo est lapis*. 2) The *propositio de se* possesses truth in addition to the attributes of the *propositio in se*, e.g. *homo est albus*. 3) The *propositio secundum se* possesses necessity in addition to the above-mentioned characteristics. To this kind belong not only all *modi*

dicendi per se, but also necessary propositions.⁹ 4) The *propositio per se* is found in any of the four kinds of the *modi dicendi per se*, especially in the first (the definition, e.g. 'man is an animal') and the second (the specification of a property, e.g. 'man is capable of laughing'). 5) The *propositio per se nota*. Our tract is about this kind, and the author defines it in the way Scotus does. The exact definition will follow below. 6) Our author adds a sixth kind of proposition: the *propositio immediata*.¹⁰ This kind has the characteristics of a *propositio per se nota*, but moreover the subject includes the predicate essentially, which is not the case in all *propositiones per se note*. Two subspecies of *propositio immediata* are 6.1) the *propositio immediata immediatione cause*, and 6.2) the *propositio immediata immediatione demonstrationis*. The latter two propositions (which are conclusions) are also called *per se note*, but not in a sense that can be accepted by Duns Scotus and his anonymous follower, for reasons to be explained below.

Next (II. 42-76), the author distinguishes between the *truth*, *necessity* and *evidence* of propositions. These distinctions are ordered according to increasing extent. *Truth* applies to the correspondence between the terms used and the extra-mental reality, or to the union of subject and predicate terms. *Necessity* refers to the union between subject and predicate terms which cannot be dissolved, even by divine power. There is a distinction between *necessitas simpliciter* and *necessitas secundum quid*. The first kind is relevant for our author's text. *Evidence* is analyzed in *evidentia formalis* and *evidentia originalis*. In their definition of a *propositio per se nota* John Duns Scotus and his pupil Francis of Mayronnes have *evidentia originalis* in mind. Every true proposition possesses formal evidence, though not intrinsically, i.e. in virtue of the terms used. It may already be clear from the preceding that, according to our Scotistic author, a *propositio per se nota* does not find its evidence in anything outside it.

Duns Scotus, our author says, gives a strict definition of a *propositio per se nota*, not a general one as Francis of Mayronnes and others do (II. 99-119). Though in many respects a Scotist, Francis also accepts some empirical propositions, such as *nix est alba*, as *per se note*. According to Duns Scotus, our author says, propositions such as *sol est lucidus* are not *per se note*, because God's omnipotence can separate the accident, viz. light, from the substance, viz. the sun. Our author interprets Duns as saying that the senses are unable to see the *perfect*

tion of propositions. According to him, Aristotle already noted that a proposition such *nix est alba* was correct and true, but not *per se nota*.

So the question: are the only truths that are evident in virtue of themselves of the kind of 'a whole (in the sense of 'what contains as much as any of its parts and more than that') is greater than any of its constituent parts', i.e. truths known apart from knowledge of existence, and only in virtue of their terms? Or to put it in fourteenth-century terminology: are only those truths *per se nota* which are known by *abstractive knowledge* (i.e. knowledge that abstracts from existence)? Or do also propositions such as *natura est*, and *nix est alba*, which are known by *intuitive knowledge*, i.e. knowledge that includes existence, of which the terms have a content derived from experience belong to the class of *propositiones per se nota*?

A *propositio per se nota* can be interpreted in three ways, our author says (ll. 198-92). 1) As *per se evidentialis*. This is Scotus' view: a *propositio per se nota* is known for him/her who has knowledge of the terms, be this knowledge distinct or opaque (*confusa*). 2) As *propositio per se nota experimentalis*: a *propositio per se nota temporaliter*, e.g. *nix est alba*, or *lac est dulce*, etc. 3) As *propositio de se assentibilis*. This is the sense in which the principle 'a whole is greater than any of its constituent parts' is known. The third interpretation can be accepted by Duns Scotus, if it is not taken in the sense that the intellect plays an essential role in the knowledge of a *propositio per se nota*. This would result in Thomas Aquinas' interpretation.¹¹

Thus a mathematician knows self-evident propositions, even though he has only opaque knowledge of the terms (in contrast to the metaphysician who knows the same terms distinctly). In this way a mathematician knows the proposition 'a line is length without width' whereas a metaphysician knows the terms distinctly, i.e. knows the nature of a line. As we shall see below, this possibility is accepted by Scotus: in this way mathematics and other sciences have their own *propositiones per se nota*.

Next, our author gives Scotus' definition of a *propositio per se nota*, and explains it in detail: "*propositio per se nota est illa que ex terminis propriis, ut sui sunt, habet evidentem veritatem sue complexionis*" (ll. 207-209).

Per se notum means three things, he says: 1) *non cum alio notum*: this is the third way in which Aristotle interprets *per se*, i.e. as an individual thing, and so each absolute thing, be it a substance, quantity¹²

or quality is *per se notum*; 2) *non per aliud notum*: in this way accidents are *per se nota*, whereas substances are not, because the latter are known only through their accidents; 3) *non notum per aliud ut per causam*: in this way many first principles and other propositions which are self-evident are known *per se* in virtue of the terms. Conclusions cannot be known in this way.

According to our author,¹³ Scotus' strict definition is in agreement with Augustine. Many theologians (our anonymous included) refer to Augustine's *De vera religione* (e.g. XXX, 56), where it is said that the evidence of propositions is knowledge of the eternal rules, i.e. the ideas in God's mind. A *propositio per se nota* does not have a *causa comparticeps*, i.e. an external cause: it is known in virtue of the terms. He explains Scotus' qualification "*ut sui sunt*" by saying that some terms, such as *diffinitum*, *diffinitio* and *passio* are materially the same, but one is logically prior to another. So in a syllogism, the premise *omne animal rationale est risibile* is logically prior to *omnis homo est risibilis* (ll. 282-95).

This brings our author to a discussion (which goes well beyond Scotus' text) of two types of definition: one has a more realistic, almost Platonic flavour, and is called 'broader' (*viz.* a definition by quiddity), while the other, the strict kind, explicitly described as Aristotelian, and called "in use by the masters of arts", is a definition by *genus* and *differentia* (ll. 371-87). This part of the tract leads the author to the refined conclusion that for a proposition to be *per se nota* it is required that its self-evidence should result from the knowledge of the terms, be these terms known distinctly or confusedly, be they categorical or transcendental, be they within a *genus* or outside, and whether *diffinitiones* or *diffinita* are involved. For if *diffinitio* and *diffinitum* were the same, 1) there would result a *petitio principii* in a syllogism, 2) cause and effect would be the same, 3) a syllogistic proof would have two terms instead of three, and 4) the same concept would be both logically prior and logically posterior (ll. 470-91). The existence of the fourth absurdity is his own thesis, the author says. This passage is important, because according to this distinction the proposition *Deus est* is not *per se nota*, for God does not fall under a genus and is, therefore, not an Aristotelian definable in categorical terms.

Then, the author continues, Duns Scotus presents three theses, which summarize the preceding discussion: 1) a *propositio per se nota*

cannot have an external cause; 2) the terms must be distinct; 3) a proposition about an essence that is opaquely known is self-evident when the proposition is only known if the same essence is known distinctly.¹⁴

A discussion follows whether a proposition having terms that are only opaquely known can be self-evident, or, in other words, whether there is evidence when an essence, to which the terms refer, is *not* known distinctly. Here we come across a remarkable but quite understandable passage. Our author says that Duns Scotus is very obscure (*innuit obscurissime*) (ll. 520-61). First, the subtle Doctor concludes that a *propositio* is *per se nota* if its evidence is clear because the *diffinitum* is made explicit by the *diffinitio*. Thus, as has been pointed out, the proposition *homo est risibilis* is not *per se nota*, whereas *animal rationale est risibile*, which is a premise of its truth, is.¹⁵ According to this line of thought a conclusion can not be *per se nota*, but the first principles of the conclusion can. This agrees with the distinction between the *diffinitum* and the *diffinitio*.

It follows that in mathematics there are *propositiones per se note*, such as 'line is length without width', though a mathematician knows the terms of this proposition opaquely and not distinctly. For a mathematician does not know the essence of a line, knowledge that belongs to the province of metaphysics. Mathematical objects such as lines can be studied under different *lights*. Our anonymous author explains the difference rather *psychologically*, I would say, without making its self-evidence in any way dependent on actual knowledge of the intellect, in the way e.g. Thomas Aquinas does.¹⁶ Only truths that are known with abstractive knowledge can be self-evident, a claim that seems to be in agreement with Duns' other semantic views (cf. Bos 1987, pp. 129-30).

This explanation of Duns Scotus by our anonymous author seems to fit Duns Scotus' ideas as far as they are represented in his *Ordinatio*. In the *Lectura* (as far as Duns Scotus can be considered its author) and the *Reportatio*, Duns Scotus explains the differences in the way *propositiones per se note* occur in, e.g., mathematics as opposed to metaphysics in *semantical* terms, viz. primarily through a distinction between terms that are *simplex* and *simpliciter simplex*,¹⁷ though the 'psychological' explanation is not excluded. Peter Vier's explanation of Duns Scotus in fact suits the text of the *Lectura* and the *Reportatio* better than that of the *Ordinatio* (cf. Vier 1951). In the *Ordinatio* Duns Scotus is concerned with the self-evidence of principles used in, e.g.,

mathematics as opposed to metaphysics.

The author next criticizes some contemporary conceptions of self-evident propositions. A *propositio per se nota* cannot be deduced from other propositions in any way (ll. 627-77). This is made clear in a passage in which he discusses the criticism of Peter Auriol by Francis of Mayronnes. Our author thinks that, if Aureoli meant (as, according to his friends, is not the case) that a *propositio per se nota* could occur in a subordinate science, he was wrong.

Some other philosophers think, the author says, that a *propositio per se nota* can be proved by *levi dialectica* (i.e., he explains, in a logical inference in which the premises are very close to the conclusion, so that they are practically equally evident) (ll. 697-701). He refers to an "Adam Toutum", who may be identified with Adam Wodeham, though up to now I have not found the expression *levi dialectica* in Wodeham's works that are available to me. Wodeham says that assent by a geometer to a conclusion such as 'a triangle has three angles of which the sum is equal to the sum of two right angles' is not an *actus rectus*, but an *actus reflexus*, which includes the evident knowledge of the premises, leading to the conclusion.¹⁸ Our author replies that this thesis cannot be defended by asserting the autonomy of sciences. This implies that a science has self-evident propositions of its own, although a scientist may know the terms only opaquely. The same principle cannot be both irreducible and reducible. There is a difference, our author says, in the knowledge of the terms (i.e. distinct vs. opaque).

Our author discusses some other views of a *propositio per se nota*. He excludes the possibility that its truth originates in something outside the proposition. Any evidence originating from outside (*evidentia originalis aliunde*) should be excluded. Duns Scotus had already criticized other philosophers on this score, but the present text arouses interest because it presents a discussion from the early fourteenth century.

It is wrong to say that a *propositio per se nota* is known when it is actually known (ll. 769-82). One should not distinguish between a *propositio per se nota* in itself and a *propositio per se nota* when actually known. This criticism is directed against Henry of Ghent and Harvey Nedellec (Herveus Natalis). The Scotist position is, as has been shown, that only the terms play a role in a proposition's being self-evident.

Further, he rejects the distinction between a *propositio per se nota* in itself and a *propositio per se nota* with respect to us, or to our intel-

lect (ll. 783-87). This interpretation can be found in Thomas Aquinas (*Summa theol.* I, q. 1, in corp.). The conception of a *propositio per se nota quoad nos* implies that the terms of *Deus est* are known properly by a human intellect, which can not be the case.¹⁹ Our author criticises this view by saying that, if a proposition were self-evident in one intellect, it would be so in any other that conceives the terms under the proper aspect (i.e. opaquely or distinctly).

Is there any difference between a *propositio per se nota* as far as known by a wise man and as far as known by a fool? (ll. 805-808) Here Henry of Ghent and Thomas Aquinas, again, and others are attacked. In a text which, according to the modern edition, was deleted (*textus cancellatus*) by Duns Scotus, it is said that such a distinction should not be drawn. The authors who uphold this view refer to Boethius. Our author replies, following Duns Scotus' lead, that Boethius drew a distinction between the *conceptio communis* of terms and a *propositio per se nota*. The first is presupposed in the knowledge of the latter. The first kind is proved, although *sylogismo imperceptibili*. He refers to Scotus' own view as an adequate explanation of Boethius.

According to our author Duns Scotus rejects the idea of a hierarchy among propositions (ll. 856-62). Duns criticises the view of his master William of Ware, he says, who distinguishes between more or less contingent, more or less impossible, necessary, and *per se* propositions. Examples of more or less *contingent* propositions are *homo currit* which is more contingent, and *homo est albus*, which is less so. Examples of more and less *impossible* propositions are *substantia est quantitas* which is more impossible than *homo est asinus*, because in the latter case the terms at least belong to the same genus. Among *necessary* propositions, *Deus est ens* is more necessary than *homo est ens*. The same holds for the *propositio per se nota*. A *propositio per se nota* of the first order applies to terms that are known by experience (e.g. the part/whole principle), while a *propositio per se nota* of the second order, e.g. *Deus est*, has terms which do not derive from experience. As another examples *homo est animal rationale* is more *per se* than *homo est animal*. Duns Scotus rejects such a distinction.

Some philosophers think that a mathematical *propositio per se nota* is of the first order, and a metaphysical *propositio per se nota* of the second. This distinction is subject to the same criticism. This view is in line with Averroes, our author says. Our author adduces examples from

Nicolaus Bonetus, with whose explanation he agrees. It is possible than an intellect should know the proposition 'a triangle has three angles etc.' first according to *opinion* (which is like the night) and later according to *science* (which is like the day). *Notitia opinativa* is about terms in general, *notitia scientifica* is about terms specifically. The proposition does not have the same ratio in the case of different ways of knowing it.

The author comments upon the last solution that Duns Scotus gives to the main problem: is *Deus est a propositio per se nota*? (ll. 863-86) Scotus says that, as far as the term *Deus* refers to an intrinsic mode of God, the proposition is self-evident for God and the angels, but not for men in their present condition, for man cannot grasp the terms distinctly. *Deus est* as far as known from the Bible and as far as known by proof are different propositions, though their terms are the same. So *Deus est* is a *propositio per se nota* for one intellect, and not for another. Our author refers to Aristotle, who intends to say that, although metaphysics, mathematics, and physics use the same terms, they form different propositions, just because of the intellectual light in which they consider them (ll. 895-906).

5. Conclusions

1. The *Tractatus de propositione per se nota*, preserved in the Pisa ms., offers an interesting interpretation of Duns Scotus' text on the problem, especially about the distinction that Duns Scotus draws when terms are known distinctly or opaquely, *i.e.* in mathematics as opposed to metaphysics. If a proposition about something known opaquely is known only when the terms are known distinctly, the former is not self-evident.

2. The text gives insight in the discussion about the *propositio per se nota* in the first half of the fourteenth century.

3. In his interpretation of Duns Scotus the anonymous author acknowledges *propositiones per se note* in, *e.g.*, mathematics. This implies the independence of this science from metaphysics.

4. The definition is applicable also to something that can not be defined in categorial terms, but only in transcendental terms, such as God.

5. There is a difference in the text as in Duns Scotus, between evidence and distinctness. Propositions with terms which are not known distinctly can be evident.

6. The evidence of a *propositio per se nota* is not dependent on actual knowledge, nor can a hierarchy of *propositiones per se note* be accepted.

7. From our analysis of the anonymous commentary it becomes clear that in the *Lectura* and the *Reportatio* Duns Scotus defines the *propositio per se nota* primarily in a semantic way, and later more 'psychologically', by using the notion of different *lights* used by different scientists, without falling into the error, as Scotus and our anonymous author consider it, *i.e.* that of saying that the self-evidence is dependent on the actual knowledge of a proposition.

Notes

¹ I wish to thank my colleague Dr. J. W. McAllister (University of Leiden) for corrections of my English.

² It should be emphasized that medieval proofs of God's existence concern rather epistemological questions, *viz.* in howfar God's existence can be proved through natural means, than establishing God's existence.

³ I will refer to the line numbers of its edition in Bos 1995.

⁴ P.C. Vier (1951, p. 78), who did not know the tract, also notes that Duns Scotus is not unambiguous on this score.

⁵ There are not many studies on the history of the *propositio per se nota* in medieval philosophy. An excellent general survey are Schepers 1971, and Hunning 1989. Geyser has traced, indirectly, the history of the notion (Geyser 1923), and discussed the problem of the *propositio per se nota* in relation to the proofs of God's existence (Geyser 1942). Between 1908 and 1913 S. Belmond published some articles on Duns Scotus' view, which were collected in Belmond 1913. According to him Duns Scotus accepted only *propositiones per se note* of which the terms are *confuse* or opaquely known. Rainulf Schmücker devoted a study (Schmücker 1941) to the way in which Peter Auriol discusses our problem, and pays attention also to Duns Scotus. Contrary to Belmond, Schmücker concludes that Scotus only allowed for propositions with terms known distinctly. Father Peter Vier (1951) discusses Duns Scotus in a somewhat digressive but in the main excellent study. He criticizes the interpretations of both Belmond (1913) and Schmücker (1941). A. Di Noto (1958) wrote a book on the problem, but I was not able to inspect this book.

⁶ For the distinction among these three commentaries, see Ryan & Bonansea (eds.) 1965, p. 21.

⁷ It does not seem to be Plato's intention to reduce the ideas to the Idea of the good. The latter confers value and usefulness to other things, he says in the *Republic*.

⁸ In the example just given, the middle term is 'triangle' (which has three angles etc.).

⁹ The various kinds of necessary propositions are discussed in Duns Scotus' *Quaest. in I et II Periherm.* q. 8, n. 6, p. 459a.

¹⁰ This kind is also mentioned in pseudo-Duns Scotus, *In Post. An.*, I, q. 21, n. 3 (not the subdivisions of the anonymous tract).

¹¹ See text below, p. 420.

¹² Does he accept quantity as something absolute? This seems contrary to fourteenth-century practice.

¹³ It is clear, our author says, that according to Duns Scotus the expressions *ex terminis propriis*, *ex terminis suis* on the one hand, and *qui sunt aliquid eius* and *ut sunt termini eius* on the other hand are synonymous (II. 416-19).

¹⁴ P. Vier (1951) criticizes on the one hand Belmond's interpretation, according to whom Scotus accepts only 'axioms' that are known through terms known opaquely (Belmond 1913), and, on the other hand, Schmücker's thesis, that Scotus hardly allows propositions to be self-evident whose terms are only confusedly known (Schmücker 1941).

¹⁵ See text above, p. 417.

¹⁶ See Duns Scotus' criticism, text below, p. 420.

¹⁷ Cf. Vier 1951, pp. 82 ff., where further references can be found.

¹⁸ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, d. I, q. 3, pp. 238-240. Cf. Adam Wodeham's commentary on the *Sentences* in Gál 1977, pp. 66-102 (esp. p. 100, n. 106).

¹⁹ See also above, the introduction.

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