

*Duns Scotus*. By Richard Cross. Great Medieval Thinkers Series. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 250 + xxi pages.

John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) has long been recognized as one of the most important and innovative figures in the history of medieval philosophy. He is, perhaps, best known today for his contributions to metaphysics—most notably, the problem of universals and individuation—but he has also made significant contributions to epistemology, ethics, and philosophical theology. Despite the enormous importance of Scotus and his work, the English-speaking world has yet to produce anything like a systematic introduction to his overall philosophical achievement. The current volume by Richard Cross is therefore a welcome addition, inasmuch as it takes some steps toward rectifying this state of affairs. In this volume, Cross offers us a systematic introduction to one important area of Scotus's thought, namely, his theology, covering the main aspects of his views in natural as well as revealed theology.

The eleven chapters comprising this short volume (which is only about 150 pages, excluding endnotes, bibliography, and indices) may be divided into three main parts. The first part (chaps. 2-5) deals with issues having to do with the nature and existence of God, and includes a discussion of Scotus's views about religious language (chap. 2) and the Trinity (chap. 5). The second part (chaps. 6-8) covers theologically significant aspects of Scotus's theory of human beings, including immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body (chap. 6), freedom, ethics, and sin (chap. 7), and predestination, merit, and grace (chap. 8). The third and final part (chaps. 9-11) focuses on Christ and the Sacraments, and contains a brief discussion of Scotus's views about Mary (chap. 10) and the Eucharist (chap. 11). In addition, the volume also contains a short introduction to Scotus's life, works, and theological vision (chap. 1), as well as a brief appendix treating several Scotistic doctrines (such as the formal distinction) not explicitly taken up in the text itself.

Cross's book is the first in Oxford's new Great Medieval Thinkers series—a series designed to introduce the thought of important medieval philosophers and theologians to specialists and non-specialists alike. Although Cross suggests that the volume is written with eye toward the “more specialist theologian or philosopher” (p. xi), with very few exceptions it will in fact be accessible to anyone with a general philosophical background. Cross has a flair for giving succinct and elegant summaries of difficult material, and typically goes out of his way to explain technical philosophical and theological vocabulary (see, e.g., the discussion of concurrence [p. 56], and the discussion of the doctrine of Trinity and associated heresies [p. 61]). There are, however, certain places where Cross's discussion is likely to prove difficult for those not already familiar with Scotus's metaphysics. The chapter on the Trinity (chap. 5), for example, presupposes prior acquaintance with Scotus's views about universals and individuation—and even with the relevant background or acquaintance some of what is said in this chapter (e.g., about the repeatability and divisibility of essences) is likely to seem puzzling. The discussion of the Trinity is further complicated by the fact that Cross is never very forthcoming about what real (as opposed to formal) identity amounts to for Scotus. It seems clear, for example, from various things he says, that real identity cannot be interpreted to mean what we would nowadays call *numerical identity* (cf., e.g., pp. 42-3, 69). Nonetheless, Cross often speaks of real identity in ways that would suggest this interpretation (cf. pp. 43, 50-51, 52, and 70). Finally, there are also a few places in the book where Cross's discussion presupposes too much theology to be fully intelligible to a general philosophical audience (see, e.g., the discussion of merit and grace in chap. 8). These examples, however, are exceptions to the rule. Most of the chapters are perfectly accessible and will provide a good introduction for anyone wanting to know more about Scotus's theological views.

Perhaps the most impressive feature of the volume is the extent to which it succeeds, in such a narrow compass, at giving us a sense of the depth and range of Scotus's theological reflections. The volume contains surprisingly rich treatments of the topics it covers, and adopts

the pedagogically useful strategy of introducing and clarifying Scotus's views by contrasting them with the better-known views of his predecessor, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274). As it turns out, Cross almost always prefers the views of Scotus to those of Aquinas, but he is by no means reluctant to criticize the former. No doubt readers familiar with the views of these two figures will feel, at various, points that Cross has been unfair or arrived at his conclusions too hastily (cf., e.g., the discussion of Aquinas's views about analogy [pp. 35, 45], freedom [pp. 84-5], and the Incarnation [pp. 114-115], as well as the discussion of Scotus's views about God's knowledge of temporal truths [p. 55], free agency [p. 86], and separated accidents [p. 142]). To some extent, however, this is to be expected, especially from a treatment that aims to be introductory in nature. I suspect, moreover, that most readers will appreciate Cross's willingness to make his biases explicit and to engage in critical discussion, even in a book this short.

Cross sets a high standard for the other volumes in the Great Medieval Thinkers series. If his volume is any indication of what we may expect from the others, the series itself will provide a useful service to the profession.

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