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PEETERS
Johannes Duns Scotus

With The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus\textsuperscript{54}, Vos fills a significant gap in recent Scotus studies: it is simultaneously a doctrinal overview of the philosophy of Scotus; an extensive historical account of a century of scholarship on Scotus; and an attempt to argue that Scotism is the summit of Western Christian thought (and accordingly is a valuable and still viable philosophical synthesis). The depth of execution of these three projects is reflected in the work's length (654 pp.), and means that the work is a more intensive enterprise than the recent introductory doctrinal studies of Honnefelder, Cross, Bouluois, Sondag, or Ingham and Dreyer\textsuperscript{55}. An accompanying volume on the theology of Scotus is at an advanced stage of composition and will complete Vos' argument that Scotus' thought deserves to be revived for consideration by contemporary philosophers.

The current volume covers Scotus' life and works (pp. 1-102), the critical editions (pp. 103-148), the philosophy of Scotus (pp. 149-508), and concludes by recounting modern secondary literature on Scotus and presenting arguments for the continuing validity of his philosophy (pp. 508-616). As such, the volume amounts to at least two books (if not three) in one. This is quite an astonishing achievement. It bears comparison with Harris' Duns Scotus with respect to its scale and comprehensiveness\textsuperscript{55}.

A general assessment of the various sections of the book can be offered as follows. First, the material on the critical editions and the historiography of modern Scotus scholarship (pp. 103-149, 511-572) is comparable in thoroughness and value to Inglis' more general historiography on medieval philosophy\textsuperscript{54}, and is without peyr among recent literature in its depth and degree of elaboration. This alone would make the book worthwhile. Second, Vos' defence of the continuing validity of Scotus' thought (passim, concluding pp. 573-616) is certainly the most robust, encompassing, and systematic of recent attempts to re-evaluate and advocate the philosophical worth of 'Scotism'. Yet with this being said, I have to acknowledge some reservations about it because the defence depends on a thematic exposition of Scotus' philosophy in terms of 'synchronic contingency' (see below). Third, the heart of the book is the 350-page doctrinal overview. This consists of chapters on logic (pp. 151-195); ars obligatorias (pp. 196-222); conceptual devices (e.g. instantia and 'structural analysis', real/rational relations, the formal distinction – pp. 223-263); ontology (contingency, essence/existence, universals, univocity, transcendentals – pp. 264-301); epistemology (pp. 302-333); proof-theory (pp. 334-361); physics (pp. 362-396); individuality, individuals and freedom (pp. 397-430); ethics (pp. 431-464) and the philosophical theory of God (pp. 465-508). Within each topic, Vos tends to discuss the relevant texts in their chronological order. As a result, one gets both a doctrinal conspectus, and also a good sense of the development of Scotus' thought as it unfolds across different texts. The sections on conceptual devices, epistemology, freedom, ethics, and the philosophical theory of God are treated thoroughly and effectively. The section on proof-theory is extremely important and deserves a wide circulation – it is the strongest part of the book\textsuperscript{55}. The section on physics is valuable but is derived from Cross\textsuperscript{56}. The only recalcitrant difficulties are that the material on logic is patchy and the chapter on ars obligatorias is opaque, badly structured, and fails to make its point. These small problems notwithstanding, the book must be judged to be largely successful in its doctrinal parts, excellent in its historiographical parts, and courageous in its properly philosophical parts. It is a valuable and significant addition to recent Scotus scholarship.

In what follows, I selectively consider parts of the work that are either of considerable interest or appear to me to be problematic – in particular, lacunae in Vos' treatments of the chronology of Scotus, his general thesis that synchronic contingency is the key to Scotus'...
philosophy, and finally difficulties having to do with the *ars obligatoria*. These difficulties do not detract from the overall value of the book. It is unreasonable to expect any book treating such a wide range of topics with such a depth of analysis to be equally good in all of its parts. One should note that some issues considered here are still being debated in the literature (e.g. *ars obligatoria*), not least because of our incomplete picture of Scotus’ sources and their influence. In the case of Vos’ thesis that synchronic contingency is the key to explaining the unity of Scotus’ work, the scholarly consensus is more favorable to Vos: no alternative overarching thesis or doctrine has been as carefully defended, developed, and expounded in the secondary literature. Accordingly, as a last line of defense, Vos (and the ‘synchronic contingency’ school) can reasonably demand that their critics develop some rival hypothesis, instead of taking a merely critical stance.

If we begin with Vos’ study of the life and works of Scotus, we can say, in sum, that it is comprehensive in scope but has some significant omissions of detail and a lack of consideration for the secondary literature. These omissions tend to stem from a selective usage of the secondary literature of the last 15 years (in particular, the treatment of William J. Courtenay’s and Stephen D. Dumont’s scholarship is insufficient). For example, Vos ignores Dumont’s reconstruction of the *logica Scottii* and that Pini posits a commentary on the *Prior Analytics*. Vos notes that Scotus did not go to Paris until 1301 (pp. 23, 58), and does not address the arguments for an early residence in Paris, or Courtenay’s counterarguments against Vos’ dating hypotheses in the literature on this issue. Vos’ argument for the timing of the move to Paris (pp. 61-63) assumes that Scotus received the *Ordinatio* proceeding in strict sequential order (from one distinction to the following without any ‘jumping around’ between distinctions). This assumption of a sequential editing procedure is unfounded, seems not to accord with common sense, and is incompatible with Dumont’s well-argued thesis that *Ord. Bk. 1, Dist. 5* was edited as late as 1305 to incorporate arguments against Richard of Conington’s criticisms of Scotus’ (earlier) *Collatio q. 27*.


61. S. DUMONT, ‘*William of Ware, Richard of Conington and the Collationes Oroniensis of John Duns Scotus*’, in: L. HENNIFELDER – R. WOOD – M. DREW (eds.), *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics* (STCMA 53), Kain 1996 (hereafter HENNIFELDER et al., *John Duns Scotus*), pp. 59-86. Vos considers and rejects Dumont’s conclusion that Scotus disputed at Oxford in 1305 or 1306 on pp. 51, but Vos’ counterarguments would need to be more extensively defended to be completely convincing.


63. There is one catalogue reference to a manuscript that contained a biblical commentary by Scotus, but unfortunately it seems that the corresponding work was destroyed in a fire in 1945. In codex I.111 of the Franciscan Friary at Würzburg (early 15th cent.), the following works are attributed to Scotus: an exposition of the Gospel of John, *Q. Mtr. Q. De anima*, *Sentences* commentaries, a logical text, the *quodlibetes*, and *De perfectione universi*. The *De perfectione universi* is problematic, but the other works are authentic. Indeed, this MS attribution is used to support the authenticity of the *Q. Mtr.* by its critical editors; accordingly, why not likewise for a commentary on John? See IOANNIS DUNI SCOTTI *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis. Libri I-V*, ed. R. ANDREWS – G. ETZIONI – G. GAL – R. GREEN – F. KELLEY – G. MARSH – T. NOONE – R. WOOD, St. Bonaventure 1997, p. xiiii.

64. S. DUMONT, ‘*Did Duns Scotus Change his Mind on the Will?*’, in: J.A. AERTSEN – C. EMERY, Jr. – A. SPEER (eds.), *After the Condemnation of 1277*. The University of Paris in the Last Quarters of the Thirteenth Century (Miscellanea Medievales 28), Berlin / New York 2000, pp. 719-794. A further point, but not properly a criticism of Vos’ work: Vos accepts the Communion Scotist arguments for identifying Rep. 1C as the Cambridge *Sentences* lectures, and further Vos uses this as evidence to support assigning Scotus’ place of exile in 1303-1304 in Cambridge (pp. 77-81, 130-140). While reasonable for its time
Vos' overarching thesis is that Scotus is the high point of Christian scholastic thought because his conception of synchronic contingency is the 'breakthrough', the final and complete rejection of ancient necessitarianism in favour of a philosophy that gives a theoretical account of the contingency of creation that is properly consistent with its having been created by the freely loving God of Christianity. This thesis is introduced intermittently throughout the work, with the major and most intensive treatments occurring in the text's final 100 pages. This dispersed arrangement requires that one read most of the book before its central themes and purpose are treated in depth at the end.

Vos argues that synchronic contingency is the heart of Scotus' philosophy and the theoretical ground required to fully explicate Christianity (p. 571). The central fact to be explained is how the nature of the potentiality possessed by objects allows those objects to be in states other than what they are. Synchronic contingency is an account of how objects have the genuine possibility right now to be in an opposite or contrary state from their state right now. By contrast, a diachronic analysis of modal potential proceeds by holding that a thing's potential to be in a state that is the opposite or contrary of its present state is merely its ability to change into that alternative state at a different point in time. Thus, on a diachronic analysis, a thing's possible alternative states can only be understood as possibilities for a change of state at a later time. The synchronic theorist maintains that there is a tacit necessitarianism to the diachronic analysis, in that it commits one to the view that a thing in some determinate state could not be otherwise than how it presently is; things have a certain 'fixity' or determinate state — they 'are what they are' and could not be otherwise than that.

According to Vos, Scotus' conception of synchronic contingency originates from, and is the conceptual pinnacle of Christian thought.

Vos rehearses Scotus' familiar philosophical account of the Christian conception of a necessarily existing omnipotent-creator-God. Such a God implies the complete contingency of creation (pp. 499-501), and it is indeed on the basis of assuming a contingent order of creation that Scotus establishes the existence of God (pp. 470-471). First, God might have chosen not to create, and hence anything he does create is contingent. Further, God can create everything directly. The intermediate, secondary causes of creation are thus also contingent. God's acting contingently and freely and having perfect necessary being are compatible (pp. 521ff.); indeed, Scotus goes to some trouble to locate the source of contingency, not in God's nature or intellect, but in his will (pp. 499-501). As a result of God's free creation, all created things are contingent, even if they are incorruptible, immutable, or outside time.

Vos claims that this Christian view of divine freedom is given its best analysis by Scotus in his account of the contingency of creation. In so far as Vos' account of Scotus on contingency is considered merely as a contribution to the scholarship of the history of ideas (i.e. putting aside Vos' positive evaluation of Scotus' positions), Vos' thesis is similar to those of S. Knuuttila and C. Normore. Vos' view consists of (1) rejecting 'possibilist' readings of Scotus as inaccurate, and (2) a historical thesis that the Scotist theory of contingency was a 'breakthrough' in the history of ideas, because it was the first to allow the in favour of a Christian philosophy, the new theories of will and of reality, all originate from the heart of the Christian notion of God. Dans Scotus' doctrine of God may be seen as the panoply and the crowning of the whole of his theology, but the underlying notion of God is the fruit of a way of thought that originates from the existential realities of preexistence, spirituality, and the life of the sacraments (emphases in original). 67. Scotus argues, for example, that once one posits a necessarily existing creator, creation must be contingent because there can only be one necessarily existing being (pp. 480-481). It is also the case that the Scotist argument for such a God is based on assuming the same contingent 'actualism' — that is, that everyday reality is contingent. See pp. 484-485, 488-489.

68. This picture of free creation is set by Vos in strong contrast to the ancient necessitarian philosophy — see pp. 494-496.

69. Vos examines various accounts of Scotus' theory of contingency presented in the secondary literature. He agrees with those (such as Normore and Woiters) who have argued against the thesis of 'possibilist' readings of Scotus, i.e. against the thesis (posited by Simo Knuuttila) that Scotus was a possible-worlds theorist, or that Scotus held that opposites are simultaneously able to be true in the same object (he does not specify who actually held this latter thesis about Scotus).
necessitarianism of ancient thought to be overcome by medieval thinkers in a complete and unambivalent manner, and (3) giving a narrative about synchronic contingency as the guarantor of human freedom.

Knauittila’s account of the emergence of modality parallels Normore’s (except for disagreements over refinements). Knauittila’s thesis, as recounted by Vos, is that thinkers prior to Scotus were sensitive to the principle of plenitude in theology because it restricted the absolute power and freedom of God, yet they were not so guarded about the same problems caused by the diachronic theory of modality (pp. 293-294). The point is that theorists prior to Scotus were necessitarians; they were indeed aware of the need to preserve the freedom and power of God to accord with Christian theology, but they did not have a theoretical explanation of the concepts of possibility and actuality that would allow them to offer a complete theoretical alternative to the diachronic theory, and thus permit them to discard the vestiges of ancient thought that needed to be discarded (p. 295). Scotus’ breakthrough is to enunciate this new theory of modality which allows the complete overturning of ancient patterns of thought.

Because Scotus’ elaboration of synchronic contingency is precisely the development that allowed Western Christian theology to emancipate itself from the patterns of ancient thought, details of Scotus’ theory of synchronic contingency become important. Vos explains the details as follows. In Vos’ view, contingency can be understood synchronically or diachronically. Diachronically, the state of a thing at t₀ is necessary relative to t₀, yet at t₁ it could be in a contrary or contradictory state and it is thus trans-temporally contingent. Synchronically, a created thing is in one determinate state, and simultaneously has the unrealised possibility of being in some alternative state. According to Vos, the framework of synchronic contingency implies that no component (e.g. pure form) of a created thing allows it to have a necessary and non-contingent existence (for example, in contrast to the Avicennian or Aristotelian theories of incorruptible substances – pp. 515-521). Vos also constructs his own argument for the conclusion that necessitarianism is inconsistent. He also argues that synchronic contingency can be inferred from diachronic contingency (pp. 602-603). To elaborate these arguments here would occupy too much space; but I should mention that I found these arguments to be rewarding instances of a medievalist genuinely ‘philosophising with his subject’, that is, a case of philosophy being directly nourished by scholarship in the history of ideas.

Yet Vos’ account of Scotus on Christian philosophy, modality, and synchronic contingency is beset by some problems, a few of which I will now consider. The first difficulty concerns the starting point for explaining synchronic contingency. Perhaps a more appropriate starting point for a ‘breakthrough’ doctrine in Scotus is his account of the unconditioned divine freedom and the priority of will to intellect. These God-focused doctrines (e.g. divine freedom and divine will) have the advantage of being conceptually prior to the synchronic contingency of created things. Cross has suggested (but never thoroughly developed) a better order of exposition of Scotus’ system. This alternative would set out the God-oriented doctrines and then set forth synchronic contingency as a creation-oriented implication (e.g. for the human/angelic will) of those God-oriented doctrines, instead of starting (as does Vos) with synchronic contingency.

It is also not clear that the philosophy of synchronous contingency is the heart of Scotus’ works, which are far more theological in character than the philosophical nature of synchronous contingency seems to imply. A theological treatment of synchronous contingency would start from the unconditioned divine will (in the manner of Cross’ alternative, suggested above). It could then proceed by way of Scotus’ distinction between necessary theology (which is accessible to natural reasoning – i.e. ‘philosophical’) and contingent theology (i.e. theological truths that are a result of the divine will, e.g. the creation, the incarnation, the resurrection; these are not accessible to natural reasoning).

70. The refutation of necessitarianism is understood to encompass more than ancient Aristotelian necessity: “Most ancient and modern philosophical systems join the necessitarian club – from Parmenides to Peirce and Hawkins. If we can refute the logical kernel of the necessitarian position, the philosophical field of force differs substantially from what most systems claim.” (p. 598).
71. Cross makes this point against Vos: CROSS, Data Scoti, p. 155, n. 6.
72. A further (minor) omission regarding the context of synchronous contingency is that Vos does not really examine the theory of synchronous contingency with respect to preserving angelic freedom and the first ‘instantaneous’ decision of the fallen angels to reject the divine order.
Perhaps one could defend Vos’ approach against the theological approach set forth by Cross (and sketched above) on the grounds that Vos’ account of synchronic contingency is the proper starting point for a philosophical approach to Scourus. Indeed, Vos does characterise Christian philosophy as concerned with necessary theology (i.e. roughly those theological truths concerning the nature of God or his intellect provable by natural reason). This Christian philosophy would encompass, for example, the traditional attributes of classical theism. Yet it seems odd that the focus of a book on ‘the philosophy of John Duns Scotus’ presents a doctrine that is distinguished exactly because it is argued to be the doctrine that makes Scourus the pinnacle of Christian thought. (At minimum, one might think that Vos’ view is confused – the best and true philosophy seems, at least as a matter of historical fact, to have emerged from (and therefore in theory to be dependent on) a source other than philosophy, viz. Christian theology, owing to that source its origin and motivation, and, arguably, its presuppositions. Therefore, it seems that the account of synchronic contingency is not properly a philosophy, but a theology). Furthermore, Vos ends the book with a list of principles and imperatives that could be the underpinning for a revival of a “philosophia Christiana” (pp. 612-613). These imperatives incur the same difficulties faced by any proposed Christian philosophy that makes use of a philosophical reconstruction of a medieval thinker (one thinks, for example, of the history of Neo-Thomism).

Vos is also unclear on whether Scourus is the summit of systematic treatments of Christian contingency-philosophy or rather its first proper exponent. He alternates between both views (e.g. he concedes Dumont’s thesis73 on Olivi as a precursor to Scourus [p. 43], but downplays Dumont’s conclusions [pp. 236 and 262]). Understandably, Vos does not set out the other thirteenth-century medieval thinkers’ theories of possibilities in detail, although it would have made the contrast with Scourus as the ‘breakthrough’ theorist clearer. But Vos gives barely any detail on any of the theories of modality developed by Scourus’ thirteenth-century predecessors. At one point Vos mentions that Henry of Ghent has a theory of possibility that was an alternative to ancient philosophical necessitarianism, but does not elaborate on this, except to mention that Scourus held that Henry’s theory could not be demonstrated by natural reason (p. 526). He also overlooks Neil Lewis’ detailed comparison of Grosseteste and Scourus on theories of modality74. Vos’ book should also be complemented by recent detailed historical studies on Dominican theories of contingency such as Hester Gelber’s75.

Neither does Vos engage at all with MacDonald’s serious criticisms of the Vos-Knuutilla characterization of Scourus’ view of modality76. MacDonald argues inter alia that the conception of synchronic possibility championed by Vos is ambiguous between a logical and a real (or ontological) possibility. The logical sense is not strong enough to be the metaphysical breakthrough required to substantiate Vos’ advocacy of Scourus as the candidate for a Christian philosophy. The synchronic potential required for the ‘breakthrough’ needs to be a real or metaphysical possibility. Yet MacDonald argues that surely there is a sort of ‘fixity’ to things in a present, determinate state. To put it concretely, something that exists now in state A simply cannot be in another state. Indeed, Scourus’ theory tacitly conceives this concrete fact, in as much as it retains the concept of succession to analyse the real potential for an opposite state within created things. It merely substitutes an analysis of succession in terms of instantia naturae (well translated by Vos as ‘structural moments’) in place of diachronic succession across time. MacDonald holds that Scourus and the other medievals are grappling with this problem of the seeming ‘fixity’ of present things, so according to MacDonald the historical situation is


not clear enough to justify the narrative of some initial (semi-necessitarian and paganism-tainted) diachronic theory which is then displaced by Scotus’ (truly Christian) synchronic contingency. Because of these difficulties, MacDonald charges that Scotus’ doctrine of synchronic contingency (taken as a doctrine about potential as simultaneous or momentary, and not potential for change across time) neither justifies nor explains his account of contingency. In order for Vos’ view of Scotus as the champion of synchronic contingency to be more convincing, Vos’ book would need to respond explicitly to these kinds of criticism.

The section on *ars obligatoria* is the most confusing part of the book (pp. 196-222). This is unfortunate because it is the first point in the book where synchronic contingency is explained. The medieval disputational practice of *ars obligatoria* was a structured exercise wherein an ‘opponent’ attempted to defend a first proposition, while a respondent offered new premises, and the ‘opponent’ had to accept or reject these progressively; the respondent tries to catch the opponent in contradiction. This disputation process has two points of connection with synchronic contingency. First, Scotus quotes a rule from William of Sherwood’s *Obligations* as a possible refutation of his theory of synchronic contingency. Second, Vos uses a text from William’s *Obligations* as the paradigm of diachronic contingency, and the structure of his chapter gives the impression that William’s text is crucial to Scotus’ modal theorising. While Vos devotes most of the chapter to proving the historical thesis that William of Sherwood wrote the *Obligations*, and explaining the practice of the *ars obligatoria* (pp. 196-218), the two points of connection to synchronic contingency are problematic.

The *ars obligatoria* is Vos’ point of reference for explaining synchronic contingency. The editor of the work on the rules of the *ars obligatoria* by William of Sherwood, Romuald Green, offers an interpretation of William’s rule, and argues that Scotus misinterpreted it.

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77. Vos also occasionally mentions the *ars obligatoria* later in the book with regard to Scotus’ arguments against pagan necessitarianism; e.g. pp. 528-529.


one instant assumed to be the case in which the dispute proceeds. So William proposes a rule to be employed during the ars obligatoria which allows that the assumption that the dispute proceeds in an instant (the tempus obligationalis) to be abandoned in order for a proposition to change its ceded truth value without contradiction. This abandonment is done by the opponent formally releasing the respondent from assuming the initial tempus obligationalis. Such a concession also allows him to abandon the assumption that the disputation occurs in a given single instant in which the respondent had to frame his replies to the opponent. Reading William's rule in this way tends to favour the synchronic contingency account of why Scoto would invoke the rule, and makes the rule an apparently plausible source of a diachronic-contingency account. Yet as I note below, it is based on a possible misreading of William's rule, and also overlooks the fact that in William's text the rule allowing one to change the tempus obligationalis is only one way William presents to solve the problem of the change of contingent truths in the ars obligatoria.

The first difficulty with Vos' reading of the ars obligatoria concerns Vos' view that William's rule contradicts Scoto's account of synchronic contingency, as it seems to be motivated by the assumption that a proposition cannot be true in one moment but also have the potential to be false in the same moment. Hence Scoto goes to work to refute it or render it redundant. Vos uses Scoto's treatment of the rule to explain Scoto's development of his account of synchronic contingency. Yet Vos might have considered Green's view that Sherwood's rule only asserts that if a state of affairs does not obtain at an instant, it cannot be posited that it does obtain at that same instant. That is, the rule is merely a version of the principle of non-contradiction as applied to ars obligatoria disputation, and, effectively, an attempt to recognize MacDonald's 'fictitious of the present' in the context of disputation. Green notes that logicians in ars obligatoria exercises assert the truth of the posticum in order to start the exercise; they do not assert its mere possibility. Therefore, argues Green, the rule has no implications for determining whether a thing can be in some determinate state while simultaneously having the real potency to be in a contradictory or opposite state of affairs from its real state (e.g., to be red, and have the potency to be not-red). Therefore Scoto's attempt to refute or overturn the rule is actually based on a misreading of it.

A second problem with Vos' exposition of the ars obligatoria is that it is inadequate. Vos only devotes three paragraphs to explaining the diachronic analysis here (p. 206); indeed, these paragraphs are incomprehensible taken alone. He refers to an explanation of William's text he provided elsewhere. This earlier essay makes better sense of diachronic contingency, and it is a requisite for comprehending the ars obligatoria part of the book. Yet this earlier essay also has some difficulties even if we take it into consideration along with the book, so I will spend a moment considering it here.

The problem in the case of William of Sherwood's text is how sentences like 'album esse nigrum est possibile' can be posited in a disputation. The difficulty created by Vos' use of William's text as a historical source is (arguably) that William does not actually propose a theory of cashing out modalities. Instead, he only offers different ways of passing a 'modal' sentence for the purposes of dealing with it in a structured obligations-disputation. We can paraphrase William's argument as follows. The sample sentence 'Album esse nigrum est possibile' is not admissible taken in a compound sense, because contradictions are not admissible in disputation. Yet it can be taken in a divided sense if analysed properly; it can be recast in tensed terms as 'what was white is black', or 'what is black will be white'.

Vos cites precisely this text of Sherwood in his 1998 article. Yet this is only one possible analysis given by William. William gives an

81. See Gelzer, It Could Have Been Otherwise, pp. 139-143. Like Vos, Gelzer also follows the literature on the ars obligatoria and Scoto in assuming that this is the only way in which contradiction in the instant of disputation can be dealt with. Therefore, like Vos' account, her survey of the ars obligatoria tends to favour the synchronic contingency account, and the ars obligatoria as the source of Scoto's synchronic contingency.

82. Green, Obligationes, Vol. 1, p. 65.
83. A. Vos, 'Moments of the Ar Obligatoria according to John Duns', in: Franciscan Studies 56 (1998), pp. 383-419; the relevant pages are 398-401.
84. Green, Obligationes, Vol. 2, p. 5: 'Et posticum dicere quod in hac, album esse nigrum est possibile, quod possibile amplius esse nigrum ad aliquod tempus futurum, et ea album stat pro eo quod nunc est album, quod quidem in futuro tempore potest esse nigrum. Unde si illud futurum accipiamus tamquam praecessit, etsi album respectu eius propter pecuniam; sic autem accipiamus cum ponimus. Ponimus enim pro tempore pro quo est possibile et propriae per haec verba ponimus esse nigrum in esse praeterito albo, et est ipsum posticum non: album esse nigrum, sicut quod fiat album esse nigrum'.
85. Vos, 'Moments of the Ar Obligatoria according to John Duns', pp. 399-400.
alternative way to analyze modal statements made in disputations in terms of disambiguating the subject of the apparently contradictory predicates to apply respectively to two different things, and hence avoiding contradiction. The point here is that William's putative modal analysis is just offering different ways of cashing out possibile when they present themselves in disputatio. This more extensive reading of William's text corroborates MacDonald's claim that there is no single and strongly asserted diachronic analysis of contingency, against which Scotus' account of synchronic contingency can be contrasted and championed. Hence to set up a contrast between William and Scotus on theories of possibility does not do justice to William's theoretical position (that is, it is doctrinally inaccurate), and is not as precise as it could be in terms of a thesis about the influence on Scotus' formulation of synchronic contingency. In short, Vos' synchronic-contingency reading of Scotus might be doctrinally adequate, but Vos' explanation of the detail of the transmission of ideas in the decades around Scotus' own time is not as precise as it could be. One wonders whether a minor detail in the text of Scotus' Sentences commentary mentioning an earlier (and comparatively obscure) source has not been taken too hastily as the pivotal source for explaining the doctrinal contents in question.

As I have suggested above, it would have been more fruitful to explain Scotus' theory of synchronic contingency against the theory of someone such as Henry of Ghent, or William of Ware, or other Franciscans around Scotus' time. Were one to develop Vos' thesis about synchronic and diachronic contingency, perhaps other, less explored sources (such as Nicholas of Stratton's 1300-1302 Oxford disputations (MS. Worcester Q. 99) on future contingents) deserve attention as better sources for a standardised view of diachronic contingency that was circulating in Scotus' immediate milieu. It is clear that more research is required on the proximate origins of Scotus' doctrine of synchronous contingency.

Vos' bibliography is complete, and the indexing helpful. However, Vos should feel let down by his Edinburgh proofreaders. There are some unfortunate instances of mistake-ridden or idiosyncratic English throughout the text. Fortunately, these are more in the manner of glitches than crucial failures; they are merely annoying and do not affect the text's intelligibility. A further irritation is that English quotations are sometimes given without the Latin (e.g. pp. 171, 228, 271), or are incorrectly or misleadingly translated. This can inhibit one's ability to assess the argument or exposition. Hopefully a native speaker will edit the next volume more completely and professionally; the quality of Vos' labours deserves no less.

Callan LEDSHAM

Durandus de S. Porciano

In Durandus of St Pourcain, Isabel Iribarren studies some controversial topics of early fourteenth-century Trinitarian theology, mainly focusing on the debate between Durandus and Hervéus Natais. After

89. Some examples: the terms 'factio', 'activit', and 'actualis' are variously used for 'actio' and 'actualis' (p. 170). 'Veris' is rendered as 'more adequately' and not 'more true' or 'more accurate' (p. 173). 'Conceptus autem simpliciter simplex est ille conceptus qui non reducius in alios conceptus poterit.' Conceptus autem non simpliciter simplex est ille qui non est reducius in conceptus poterit... it rendered 'Simple concept being grasped by one act of knowing are twofold, namely, concepts which are irreducibly simple and concepts which are not irreducibly simple' (p. 173). Vos' exposition of different kinds of simple concepts runs together simply simple and simple concepts, thus becoming unsatisfactory: Scotus' subtle distinctions required for the point to be made are elided (p. 174).
80. 'Velens' and 'venelis' are both rendered by 'willis' (p. 223). 'Distrahit' is rendered by 'injuries' (p. 420); categorias as 'loves' and not 'charity' in the context of the theologico-infused virtues (p. 442). Self-subjection to slavery is 'fama', rendered 'irresponsible' and not 'idiotic' or 'stupid' (p. 449). 'illa si potest esse postesse esse a se' is rendered 'it is possible that it exists of itself' (and not: 'if it can be, it can be from of itself') and 'simpliciter' is 'without further ado' instead of 'simply', in the sense of 'without qualification' (p. 475).