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NOTES ON SCOTIST AESTHETICS IN LIGHT OF GILBERT NARCISSE'S *LES RAISONS DE DIEU*

Pour Scot, l'océan de perfections formellement distinctes dans la simplicité
absolue de l'Infini subsistant n'est autre chose que la Beauté sans limites.

Edgar de Bruyne

Gilbert Narcisse's *Les Raisons de Dieu* is one of the more substantial theological works of recent memory, especially among those drawing primarily upon medieval sources.¹ Inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar's appeal to the "unsurpassable fittingness" of New Testament arguments for Christ's divinity, the Dominican theologian has written a comprehensive theological aesthetics built upon the unlikely foundation of Thomas Aquinas's understanding of *convenientia*. Starting with Aquinas's remark that "all things agree in being" (*omnia in esse conveniunt*),² Narcisse offers fresh interpretations of the standard Thomist *dicta* about grace and nature, which he encapsulates in the motto *esse capax convenientiae*.³ Because the aesthetic harmony of which all being is capable has God as its cause, the analogy that obtains between God and creation is a kind of *convenientia*; indeed, that the Word should become flesh to redeem humankind is *convenientissimum*, and all *convenientiae* in history are harmonized in a cosmic *exitus-reditus* that is "super-determined" by the advent and second coming of Christ.⁴ A veritable cascade of

¹ Gilbert Narcisse, O.P., *Les Raisons de Dieu: Argument de convenance et Esthétique théologique selon saint Thomas d'Aquin et Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1997); idem, "Rationalité théologique et argument de convenance," *Jean Capreolus et son temps 1380-1444*, Guy Bedouelle, Romanus Cessario, and Kevin White, eds. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 131-38.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, c. 42: *Sed omnia in esse conveniunt. Oportet igitur esse unum tantum, quod rerum omnium principium, quod est Deus* (quoted by Narcisse, *Les Raisons de Dieu*, 175).

³ Narcisse does admit that this expression cannot be found in Aquinas's writings. Cf. *ibid.*, 179, n. 334.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

particular *convenientiae* flows from God's "nuanced composition" of efficient, exemplary, and final causality.⁵ "The fittingness of a means," Narcisse says, "reaches its maximum in a rich plurality of realities that concur in the same end. Now in the Incarnation, God's work reaches a wonderful maximum density."⁶ and The "encompassing character of Christocentric exemplarity" (*le caractère englobant de l'exemplarité, centre sur le Christ*) consequently unifies the metaphysics of the transcendentals with a "speculative-aesthetic" theology sensitive to the particularity of persons and events, to the contingency of the world, and—most importantly—to the practice of Christian theology.⁷

Unfortunately *Les Raisons de Dieu*, which is otherwise a model of philological, philosophical, and theological research, is marred by all-too-predictable polemic against John Duns Scotus. Narcisse accuses Scotus of an "essentialist reduction" (*la réduction essentielle*) that prevents any further study of the ontological foundations of *convenientia*.⁸ Scotism, the Dominican theologian warns his readers, ensures that reflections on fittingness will never return to the "truly theological level" they had attained in the writings of Thomas Aquinas.⁹ Truth be told, such charges must grate upon the ears of any theologian who possesses a passing familiarity with the writings of the Subtle Doctor, whose marked emphasis on final causality imbues his theology and metaphysics with a strong-

⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷ Ibid., 530: "Pareille compréhension de l'humanité du Christ détermine aussi le caractère *universel* de l'exemplarité. Elle est bien sûr ontologiquement universelle mais surtout christologiquement universelle. Désormais, toute ressemblance, c'est-à-dire purement et simplement toutes les vocations humaines et même celles, éventuellement, du cosmos, ont leur principe dans cette exemplarité morale et exemplaire." Cf. Ibid., 183, 524.

⁸ Ibid., 163: "Cette position ... ne permet plus de rechercher un quelconque fondement ontologique à ce que nous avons découvert en théologie par le désignation du concept de 'convenance'."

⁹ Ibid., 164: "Le scotisme, en faisant de l'être infini et de l'être fini des modes intrinsèques de l'être, condamne la convenance à ne jamais rejoindre le niveau vraiment théologique...." Gilson used similar language in a letter to Marie-Dominique Chenu on February 5, 1942, cited by Francesca Aran Murphy, *Art and Intellect in the Philosophy of Étienne Gilson* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 193.

ly aesthetic character. Indeed, this very emphasis might well convince the impartial judge to associate the motto *esse capax convenientiae* not with Aquinas, but rather with Scotus, for many of the Subtle Doctor's distinctive theses make use of explicitly aesthetic arguments in a way that the standard Thomist *dicta* do not. With this in mind, I would like to offer a few notes towards a constructive Scotist aesthetics based upon the Subtle Doctor's own varied uses of *convenientia*, with special attention given to three topics: 1) the notion of *integritas convenientiae* in Scotus's aesthetics; 2) its relationship to the formal distinction in unifying the "science of the transcendentals"; and 3) the Subtle Doctor's arguments *ex convenientia*. As I hope to show, Duns Scotus has all the resources necessary to construct a "practico-aesthetic" metaphysics of the transcendentals governed by the "encompassing character of Christocentric exemplarity."

I. INTEGRITAS CONVENIENTIAE: BEAUTY AND FITTINGNESS

The general parameters of Scotus's understanding of beauty are well-known, having been outlined in classic surveys by Edgar de Bruyne and Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, as well as more specialized treatments by Francis J. Kovach, Mary Beth Ingham, Hans-Joachim Werner, and Gérard Sondag.¹⁰ For John Duns Scotus, God is beauty itself, even the supreme

¹⁰ Edgar de Bruyne, *Études d'Esthétique médiévale*, 3 vols. (Bruges: Rijksuniversiteit te Gent, 1946); Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2 vols. (The Hague and Paris, 1970); Francis J. Kovach, "Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus," *Deus et Homo ad mentem I. Duns Scoti* (Rome: Societas Internationalis Scotistica, 1972), 445-59; Mary Elizabeth Ingham, "Duns Scotus' Moral Reasoning and the Artistic Paradigm," *Via Scoti: Methodologica ad mentem Joannis Duns Scoti*, 2 vols. (Rome: Edizioni Antonianum, 1995), 825-37; Hans-Joachim Werner, "Die Erfassung des Schönen in seiner personalen und ethischen Bedeutung bei Duns Scotus," L. Honnefelder, R. Wood, M. Dreyer, eds., *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 535-50; and Gérard Sondag, "The Conditional Definition of Beauty by Scotus," *Medioevo* 30 (2005), 191-206. To these, we might add the larger speculations of Vicente Muñiz Rodríguez, "La Esthetica segun Escoto," Camille Bérubé, ed., *Homo et Mundus* (Rome: Societas Internationalis Scotistica, 1984), 191-208 and the admittedly exotic treatment of Christopher Devlin, "Scotus and Hopkins," *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 338-51.

beauty, and God's beauty is the source and goal of all creaturely beauty, which participates in His beauty through the species that they receive from Him.¹¹ Scotus thus sees beauty in both the natural and supernatural orders as well as in the corporeal and spiritual orders; not only does he see beauty in bodies considered in themselves, he sees beauty in the resurrected bodies of the saints,¹² in morally good acts,¹³ and in the soul that acts under the influence of divine grace.¹⁴ Scotus also sees beauty in the ordered progress of Scripture,¹⁵ in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation,¹⁶ in music,¹⁷ and in

¹¹ *Collatio XIII*, n. 7: *Minor patet per Augustinum 6 de Trin. quaerit an actus sit perfectior, et applicat ad ipsum pulchrum, id est Deum, qui est pulcher.... J. Duns Scotus. Opera Omnia*, ed. Wadding (reprint Georg Olms Hildesheim, 1968), III, 378b.

¹² *Ordinatio IV*, d. 49, q. 15, n. 1 (Olms X, 606): *Corpora gloriosa erunt colorata, per August. 22. de civit. Dei, cap. 19. Pulchritudo corporis est partium congruentia cum quadam coloris suavitate; sed pulchritudo convenit corporibus gloriosis.*

¹³ *Reportatio I-A*, d. 1, p. 2, q. 2, n. 60 (WB 104): *Delectatio non est actus elicited, sed decor et pulchritudo actus, sicut decor se habet ad iuvenem. Ordinatio IV*, d. 49, q. 4, n. 6 (Olms X, 382): *Perfectio superveniens operationi, sicut pulchritudo iuveni. Cf. Quodlibet*, q. 21, n. 7 (Olms XII, 539): *Bona fortuna dicitur respectu eorum, quae in nobis sunt, ut quando aliquis intendit unum per se, et aliud evenit. Alio modo respectu eorum, quae non sunt in nostra potestate, ut quod aliquis sit nobilis, et pulcher, dives nascatur, etc.* For the *Reportatio I-A*, I am using the text prepared by Allan B. Wolter and Oleg V. Bychkov, *John Duns Scotus: The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture: Reportatio I-A*, 2 vols. (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2004, 2008), further abbreviated as WB. I am grateful to Oleg for sharing his critical Latin text and draft translations of distinctions 25-34 that will comprise the second volume of this wonderful edition.

¹⁴ *Reportatio I-A*, d. 17, p. 1, q. 2, n. 67 (WB 479-80): *Aliud exemplum est de pulchritudine secundum Augustinum, VIII De Trinitate, cap. 10. Iustitia namque magna animi pulchritudo qua scilicet distinguitur iustus a peccatore. Sicut in Veteri Testamento distinguitur sapiens ab insipiente, sic in Novo per gratiam distinguitur iustus a peccatore. Sic iustitia est quaedam pulchritudo et similitudo deiformis, sed omnis similitudo et pulchritudo est ratio diligibilitatis in qualibet re.*

¹⁵ *Ordinatio I*, prolog., p. 2, q. un., n. 121 (Vatican I, 86): *Quod ordinatus Scripturae progressus ostendit eius decorem.*

¹⁶ *Ordinatio IV*, d. 6, q. 10, n. 9 (Olms VIII, 356): *Est ibi [in sacramento] relatio nova sive absolutio aliquo novo, nisi fingas in quolibet alio poni aliquod absolutum correspondens characteri, utpote ornatum quendam. Sed si ille ornatus est forma supernaturalis, erit indelebilis, eo modo quo character est indelibilis.*

¹⁷ *Lectura I*, d. 17, p. 1, q. un., n. 95 (Vatican XVII, 211): *Sonus harmonicus in cithara immutat auditum, delectationem causando; et si fiant*

the universe in general.¹⁸ The embarrassing wealth of such comments in Scotus has led Mary Elizabeth Ingham to argue that Scotus generally prefers artistic metaphors over medical ones for his discussions of moral excellence, a judgment with which I concur.¹⁹

For Scotus, then, beauty is a formal perfection of being that delights the person who perceives it and that “perfects” his senses.²⁰ Indeed, the more beautiful an object is, the more desirable and delectable it is.²¹ Beauty, however, is not an absolute quality in the beautiful body but the sum of all those things that are fitting in bodies, such as magnitude, shape, and color, as well as the sum of all the relations among themselves and among the body and themselves.²² This definition,

caedem notae, alio tamen modo ordinatae — ut si cordae percutiantur alio ordine — non causabit delectationem nec sonum delectabilem....; sed quod sit delectabilis, hoc non est a sono ut sonus est, sed ut harmonicus et sic ordinatus. Cf. Ordinatio I, d. 17, p. 1, q. 2, a. 27, n. 152 (Vatican V, 212). Scotus also traces musical beauty to the Holy Trinity with the false etymology of persona found in Boethius in Reportatio I-A, d. 25, q. 1, n. 9 (WB 47): ‘persona’ dicitur a ‘personando’, id est perfecta et expressa voce aliquid honorabile sonando.

¹⁸ *Ordinatio II, d. 3, p. 1, q. 7, n. 251 (Vatican VII, 513-14): In toto universo, licet principaliter ordo attendatur secundum distinctionem specierum, in quibus est imparitas, pertinens ad ordinem, — tamen, quia secundum Augustinum, De civitate libro XIX, cap. 13 «ordo est parium impariumque, unicuique sua loca tribuens, congrua dispositio», — ab illo agente qui principaliter intendit ordinem universi (sicut principale bonum, intrinsecum sibi), non tantum intenditur ista imparitas, quae est ‘unum requisitum’ ad ordinem (scilicet specierum), sed etiam paritas individuorum (scilicet in eadem specie), quae est ‘aliud concurrens’ ad ordinem.*

¹⁹ Mary Elizabeth Ingham, op. cit., 826.

²⁰ *Ordinatio IV, d. 49, q. 15, n. 1 (Olms X, 605): Ista harmonia corporis est delectabilis, nam pulchritudo naturae incipit ab intra, e converso pulchritudo artis est tantum extra. Ibid., n. 2 (Olms X, 606): Magis delectatur sensus visus hominis in pulchro colore corporis humani, quam in corpore luminoso; unde plus delectatur naturaliter in videndo faciem humanam bene coloratam. Ordinatio III, d. 15, q. un., n. 38 (Vatican IX, 492-93): ‘Hoc absolutum’, ut visus, inclinatur ad aliquod visibile ut perfectivum extrinsecum (puta ad album perfectum, sive pulchrum).*

²¹ *Ordinatio I, d. 1, p. 2, n. 133 (Vatican II, 89-90): Magis enim necessario pulcherrimum visum delectat appetitum visivum quam minus pulchrum, et si ille appetitus posset se ferre in illud visum actu elicitum, magis necessario se ferret vel ferretur in pulchrius visum quam in minus pulchrum.*

²² *Ordinatio I, d. 17, p. 1, q. 1-2, n. 62 (Vatican V, 163-64): Pulchritudo non est aliqua qualitas absoluta in corpore pulchro, sed est aggregatio omnium convenientium tali corpori (puta magnitudinis, figurae et coloris), et*

which Edgar de Bruyne did not hesitate to call a “new interpretation of Beauty,” is generally Augustinian and more particularly Franciscan in character.²³ As both Francis Kovach and Gérard Sondag have pointed out, Scotus’s definition shows remarkable similarity to the Stoic understanding of beauty as a *convenientia partium inter se et ad totum* found in Alexander of Hales.²⁴ For our purposes, it is noteworthy

aggregatio etiam omnium respectuum (qui sunt istorum ad corpus et ad se invicem), ita bonitas moralis actus est quasi quidam decor illius actus, includens aggregationem debitae proportionis ad omnia ad quae habet proportionari (puta ad potentiam, ad obiectum, ad finem, ad tempus, ad locum et ad modum), et hoc specialiter, ut ista dicantur a ratione recta debere convenire actui. As Scotus’s own quotations bear out, his treatment of beauty is generally indebted to Augustine’s *bona facies hominis*: “Good is the man’s face which has regular features, a cheerful expression, and a glowing color.” Cf. *Ordinatio* II, d. 40, q. un., n. 7 (Vatican VIII, 468-69): *Sicut in corpore pulchritudo est ex aggregatione omnium convenientium illi corpori et inter se, puta quantitas, coloris, et figurae (sicut vult Augustinus VIII De Trinitate 4: ‘Bona facies,’ etc.), ita bonitas naturalis — non illa quae convertitur cum ente, sed illa quae habet malum oppositum — est perfectio secunda alicuius rei, integra ex omnibus convenientibus sibi et sibi invicem. Et omnibus illis concurrentibus est perfecta bonitas, iuxta illud Dionysii ‘bonum est ex perfecta causa et integra’; omnibus autem deficientibus illis, et natura stante quae nata esset perfici illis, est perfecte mala, quibusdam subtractis, est malitia sed non perfecta — sicut de puchritudine et turpitudine in corpore.*

²³ Edgar de Bruyne, op. cit., vol. 3, 347.

²⁴ Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* I, p. 1, i. 1, tract. 3, q. 3, nn. 103, 162: *Sicut enim pulchritudo corporalium est ex congruentia partium, ita pulchritudo animarum ex convenientia virium et ordinatione potentiarum, et pulchritudo in divinis ex ordine sacro divinarum personarum* (quoted by Sondag, op. cit., 194). For other Franciscan discussions of beauty, see Bonaventure, *I Sent.*, d. 31, p. 2, dub. and resp. 4-5 (*Opera Omnia* I, 550b-551a); *Itinerarium* II, 5 (*Opera Omnia* V, 300b); Roger Marston, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Emanatione Aeterna*, q. 4 (Ad Claras Aquas: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1932), 69-89; idem, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Fide*, qq. 2, 6 (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1957), 65, 141-64; idem, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima Beata*, qq. 3-4 (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1959), 226-62; Alexander of Hales, *Quaestiones Disputatae ‘Antequam Esset Frater,’* q. 64, m. 1 (Quaracchi, Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1960), III, 1287; Ioannis Pecham, *Quodlibet* I, q. 4; III, qq. 5, 10, Girard Etzkorn and Ferdinand Delorme, eds. (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1989), 12, 141-42, 153; Roger Marston, *Quodlibeta Quatuor ad fidem codicum nunc primum edita*, II, q. 5, Girard Etzkorn and Ignatius Brady, eds. (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1994), 153-59; Ioannis Pecham, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, qq. 6-7, Girard J. Etzkorn, Hieronymus Spettmann, and Livarius Oliger, eds. (Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 2002), 525.

that Sondag also points out the relationship between Scotus's definition of beauty and *convenientia*:

Scotus, had a conception of beauty which is precise, simple, and unified, and perhaps represents a progress with respect to the idea he inherited from the tradition and especially from Augustine. At the core of that concept is the notion of *integritas convenientiae*, a notion which originates not in aesthetics but in ethics, and that Scotus transposed from ethics to aesthetics.²⁵

In fact, there is hardly a single question of Scotist metaphysics—the univocity of the concept of being, the formal distinction, *ens* as the natural object of the intellect—that is not saturated with aesthetic considerations of *convenientia*, *proportio*, and *consonantia*. As Narcisse's work amply demonstrates, medieval doctors even couched their most rarified discussions of predication in terms of *convenientia*, and Scotus is no exception to this general rule.²⁶

²⁵ Sondag, op. cit., 191.

²⁶ Aquinas expressly ties *convenientia* to analogy in *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11: *Si non esset aliqua convenientia creaturae ad Deum secundum rem, sua essentia non esset creaturarum similitudo.... Nec omnino univoce, nec pure aequivoce, nomen scientiae de scientia Dei et nostra praedicatur; sed secundum analogiam; quod nihil est aliud dictu quam secundum proportionem. Convenientia enim secundum proportionem potest esse duplex; et secundum hoc duplex attenditur analogiae communitas.... Prima ergo convenientia est proportionis, secunda autem proportionalitatis* (quoted by Narcisse, *Les Raisons de Dieu*, 179). Henry of Ghent, *Summa*, qu. 50-51, describes his peculiar rendering of analogy in terms of a *convenientia imitationis* in explicit contrast to a *convenientia similitudinis*. Cf. Jos Decorte, "Henry of Ghent on Analogy: Critical Reflections on Jean Paulus' Interpretation," *Henry of Ghent: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on the Occasion of the 700th Anniversary of His Death*, W. Vanhamel, ed. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 71-105, at 81. Decorte faults Henri Paulus for failing to notice that Henry of Ghent borrows his notion of *convenientia* from Alexander of Hales, *Summa*, tract. introd., q. 2, m. 3, c. 2. *Convenientia* even appears in Scotus's discussion of the transcendental character of being. Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, p. 1, q. 3, n. 113 (Vatican IV, 205-06): *Ens prius dividitur in infinitum et finitum quam in decem praedicamenta, quia alterum istorum, scilicet 'finitum', est commune ad decem genera; ergo quaecumque conveniunt enti ut indifferens ad finitum et infinitum, vel ut est proprium enti infinito, conveniunt sibi non ut determinatur ad genus sed ut*

The varied aesthetic considerations encapsulated in Scotus's *integritas convenientiae* are governed by Augustine's so-called psychological analogy of the Trinity—a point that has been overlooked in most studies of Scotus's aesthetics. While Sondag and other treatments of Scotist aesthetics have documented Scotus's indebtedness to and transcendence of the tradition he inherited, as well as the formal connections between his scattered remarks on beauty, they generally overlook one text, namely the question on Trinitarian vestiges from *Ordinatio* I, distinction 3, part 2, that explicitly ties his understanding of beauty to the Holy Trinity.²⁷ This text, which follows the general parameters of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, provides a useful summary of the previous theologies of Trinitarian vestiges based on Wisdom 11:21.²⁸ Scotus thus discusses Trinitarian vestiges in terms of the triads unity-species-order, origin-beauty-operation, one-true-good, and measure-number-weight, each of which he assigns by appropriation to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scotus's remark that created species represent the highest beauty,

prius, et per consequens ut est transcendens et est extra omne genus. A striking metaphysical argument *ex convenientia* even appears before Scotus's famous *coloratio Anselmi* in *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, p. 1, q. 1-2, n. 136 (Vatican II, 208): *intellectus, cuius obiectum est ens, nullam invenit repugnantiam intelligendo aliquod infinitum, immo videtur perfectissimum intelligibile. Mirum est autem si nulli intellectui talis contradictio patens fiat circa primum eius obiectum, cum discordia in sono ita faciliter offendat auditum: si enim disconveniens statim ut percipitur offendit, cur nullus intellectus ab intelligibili infinito naturaliter refugit sicut a non conveniente, suum ita primum obiectum destruyente?* Cf. *Reportatio* I-A, d. 3, q. 1, nn. 17-22 (WB 190-91).

²⁷ *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, p. 2, q. un, n. 298 (Vatican III, 181-82): *Haec tria sic sumpta repraesentant, sub ratione similitudinis, tria correspondentia eis in Deo, quia unitas repraesentat summam unitatem primi principii, a quo est origo, — et quoad hoc ait Augustinus ibi: 'In illa Trinitate est summa origo omnium rerum'; species in creatura repraesentat summam pulchritudinem, unde subdit: 'summa pulchritudo' est; ordo seu operatio in creatura repraesentat operationem perfectissimam in Deo, et quoad hoc subdit: 'et beatissima delectatio.'*

²⁸ Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* II.1 (PL 10, 51); Augustine, *De Trinitate* VI, c. 10, n. 12 (PL 42, 932); *idem*, *De Genesi ad litteram* IV, 3, 7 (PL 34, 299). Scholars who follow these texts should be sure to glance at the interpolated text of *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 2, found in the first appendix of the critical edition (Vatican III, 361). For related discussions, see *Reportatio* I-A, d. 1, p. 3, qq. 1-3 (WB 112); d. 17, p. 1, q. 2 (WB 479); d. 30, q. 1, a. 3 (WB 252ff).

which is said of the divine Son by appropriation, is of particular importance for our considerations.²⁹ The parallel passage in *Reportatio* I-A, distinction 3, question 3, makes the Trinitarian analogy more clearly. “Number and unity can be attributed to the Father,” Scotus says, “and beauty (*species*) can be attributed to the Son, since beauty and comeliness (*pulchritudo*) arise from the conjunction of many fitting things (*ex coniunctione multorum convenientium*), as we see in bodies, and beauty cannot be as fittingly attributed to the Father, since the Son is primarily the beauty (*decor*) of the Father. Order signifies goodness by way of the limited creature’s analogy (*per modum proportionis*) to the Holy Spirit, to whom the goodness and proportion (*commensuratio*) of any well-ordered thing is attributed.”³⁰

If nothing else, these passages should demonstrate that Scotus employs a full range of aesthetic concepts (*species*, *pulchritudo*, *decor*, *convenientia*, *proportio*, *commensuratio*) in a “truly theological” manner. Conversely, these passages forestall any attempt to discuss Scotist aesthetics solely in the metaphysical or phenomenological terms of the modern aesthetician; at the very least, the modern aesthetician who hopes to understand Scotus while ignoring the Trinitar-

²⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 2, q. un., n. 300 (Vatican III, 183): *Numerus sive species, et pondus sive ordo, exponatur sicut in prima expositione vel assignatione....* The editors of the Vatican edition rightly remind us that Scotus is harkening back to his remark in *Ordinatio* I, dist. 3, part 2, n. 298 (Vatican III, 182), that *species* represents the *summa pulchritudo*. I would add that it also recalls n. 288 (Vatican III, 176-77). Incidentally, the text of the *Opus Oxoniense* used by Christopher Devlin makes this connection more explicitly: *Numerus igitur sive species, et pondus seu ordo, in priori vestigii partium assignatione declarata fuerunt; ex quibus constat, in specie creaturarum praelucere vestigium Filii, qui per appropriationem prima species primaque pulchritudo appellatur; per ordinem vero perfectissima Dei operatio intelligitur.* Cf. Christopher Devlin, op. cit., 343-44. Devlin’s quotations of Scotus are taken from the *Scriptum Primum Oxoniense supra libris Sententiarum Quattuor Petri Lombardi* (Venice, 1515), the edition he thinks was most likely used by Hopkins himself.

³⁰ *Reportatio* I-A, d. 3, q. 3, n. 80 (WB 206): *Numerus vel unitas est appropriabilis Patri, species Filio, quia species et pulchritudo est ex coniunctione multorum convenientium ad invicem, ut patet in corporibus, et ita non potest ita convenienter Patri attribui sicut Filio, qui primo est decor Patris. Ordo significat bonitatem per modum proportionis creaturae limitatae ad Spiritum Sanctum cui attribuitur bonitas et commensuratio cuiuslibet rei ordinatae.*

ian context of his own writing risks severely distorting the thought of the Subtle Doctor. In this respect, the contrast Sondag draws between Scotus, on the one hand, and Augustine, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, on the other, is somewhat artificial. I am not inclined to think that Augustine, Bonaventure, and Aquinas have “quidditative” notions of beauty, for the definitions of each—Augustine’s *aequalitas numerosa*, Bonaventure’s *modus, species, ordo*, and Aquinas’s *integritas, consonantia, and claritas*—imply that beauty always involves a *convenientia partium inter se et ad totum* and so cannot be an “absolute” quality.³¹ Kovach is more to the point: what Scotus contributes to the development of aesthetics is a strong emphasis on *proportio* rather than *claritas* as the formal element of beauty. This may well be a difference of emphasis rather than a real point of contention. Indeed, substitute *convenientia* for *consonantia* and Scotus’s definition of bodily beauty seems in remarkable accord with Aquinas’s now-classic definition. What Kovach does not point out, however, is how this emphasis on *proportio* allows Scotus to trace his varied aesthetic considerations back to the Holy Trinity.

Sondag’s own examples bear this contention out. If *pulchritudo, decor, or species* is said of the Son by appropriation, and *ordo* or *proportio* is similarly said of the Holy Spirit, each of Sondag’s examples displays an underlying Trinitarian analogy: the Bible manifests its beauty (*decor*) in its ordered progress (*ordinatus progressus*),³² the beauty of the universe is manifested in the order that obtains between the dissimilarity of species and the similarity of individuals

³¹ In fact, Scotus explicitly invokes the triad often associated with Bonaventure in *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 2, op.cit.

³² *Ordinatio* I, prol., p. 2, q. un., n. 121 (Vatican I, 86). It is worth noting in this connection that the *decor* Scripture manifests in its ordered progress would have been directly related to the order of sound through the singing of the liturgy, a topic of some controversy in France during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Pope John XXII fulminated against the motets of the *Ars antiqua*, condemning as he did breves and minims, *hoqueti*, discants, and the “avalanche of notes” found in the earliest examples of polyphony. The arithmetical division of note values made possible the notation of complex rhythms that would give birth to the *Ars nova musicae* in the generation that followed Scotus. Cf. Michel Huglo and Marcel Pérès, *La rationalisation du temps au XIIIe siècle, Musique et Mentalité*. Collection Rencontre à Royaumont (Editions Créaphis, 1993).

within the species,³³ and the *integritas convenientiae* that imbues the morally good act with beauty includes the entirety of all which is duly proportioned to it.³⁴ In each case, beauty and proportion are intimately related, indeed as intimately as the Son and the Holy Spirit themselves. It should come as no surprise, then, that all such acts, and indeed all corporeal beauty, should be ordered to God as a final cause. “Since a well-ordered choice,” Scotus says, “is one that possesses right circumstances which are in harmony with right reason, it follows that enjoyment is well-ordered if it has circumstances which are in harmony with one’s ultimate end. Thus its object is that object of enjoyment that is appropriate in all its circumstances. That object is God, who is the ultimate end

³³ In this regard, the criticisms of Edgar de Bruyne by Werner and Sondag are somewhat incongruous. While the beauty of the universe does indeed require the dissimilarity of species and the similarity of individuals within the species, it does not follow that there is no connection between the singularity and the beauty of a thing. Order, which Augustine defines as “the fitting arrangement of equal and unequal things, which gives each its proper place,” exists in a wide range of metaphysical spheres, as the full text from *De Civitate Dei* XIX, 13 indicates. (Sondag mistakenly cites this text as IX, 13, where Augustine discusses the place of demons in the universe. He also cites Scotus’s text as *De Principio Individuationis*, which is merely the running head of this question in the Vatican edition. With apologies for nitpicking, this subtle insinuation is highly misleading. This is no separate text, nor is it a small philosophical treatise, but a question in Scotus’s larger theological project about whether it is possible that there be several angels of the same species.)

³⁴ In this respect, the text from *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, p. 1, q. 2, n. 62 (Vatican V. 163-64), *quasi quidam decor illius actus, includens aggregationem debitae proportionis ad omnia ad quae habet proportionari*, can be read profitably in light of the first article of Scotus’s *Quodlibet* 18 (Olms XII, 475-76). Sondag has already called attention to the similarities of these two texts, although I am less inclined to draw the same conclusions. Since beauty and order are coordinated transcendently, one might question his claim that beauty has no *recta ratio*, and is thus “conditional without a law.” Sondag’s judgment depends on unnecessarily rigid notions of rectitude and law. While he is right in the most literal sense—bodies are not souls after all, nor are vestiges images—the harmonious relationship of features provides the right order of beautiful bodies in the way that the coordination of act and circumstances provides the *recta ratio* of moral acts. In other words, if beautiful bodies may be said to possess an *integritas convenientiae*, they possess an analogous rectitude insofar as they are ordered to their proper ends. While the two orders cannot be reduced to one another, the lower remains ordered to the higher, just as all things are ordered to God as their final cause.

and is appropriate in all His circumstances and appropriately proportionate [to all things].”³⁵

II. THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS AND THE FORMAL DISTINCTION

Perhaps an avalanche of Scotist citations is beside the point. For Narcisse, the real reason that Scotus cannot offer a “truly theological” account of *convenientia* is that he does not have a properly Thomistic metaphysics of the *actus essendi*.³⁶ Not surprisingly, Scotus’s supposed denial of the real distinction between essence and existence gives particular offense to the Dominican theologian.³⁷ Attentive readers will have already noted that de Bruyne’s lapidary assessment of

³⁵ *Reportatio* I-A, d. 1, p. 1, q. un. (WB 90): *quia sicut electio ordinata est quae habet circumstantias rectas et consonas rectae rationi, sic fruitio est ordinata quae habet circumstantias consonas ultimo fini. Illud ergo est obiectum suum quod est obiectum fruitionis circumstantionatae; hoc autem est Deus, qui est finis ultimus, et est debito modo proportionatus et circumstantionatus.*

³⁶ It is not without some irony that Narcisse depends heavily upon Gilson, for the Burgundian master was himself rather indecisive about the status of beauty as a transcendental. He consistently contrasted the aesthetic aspects of Bonaventure with Thomas and struggled with the metaphor of God as an artist, partially because of his own excessive emphasis on the role of senses in artistic production, and eventually denied the validity of such language, which he rightly associated with the Franciscans. (cf. Gilson, *Bonaventure*, 158-59.) Perhaps the greatest irony in all this is that Gilson’s genealogy in the second, revised edition of *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952) trades on a particularly vicious essentialist reduction itself. Gilson even denied that he was writing a history of philosophy. (Cf. Murphy, op. cit., 223.) He seems to have forgotten, even willfully denied, the *esse* of his allegedly historical subjects, Scotus and Suárez especially, and rather substituted a series of pale concepts. Indeed, in light of the subtle and variegated terminology of *esse* in Duns Scotus and Henry of Ghent, the modern Gilsonian reduction of *esse* to the *actus essendi* seems drastically univocal, in the decisively pejorative sense in which modern Thomists usually employ the term.

³⁷ I will not rehearse old scholastic arguments about the formal distinction here; suffice it to say, if one defines the real distinction in terms of real composition rather than real separability, then Scotus is not as far from Aquinas as many imagine. The Subtle Doctor did not define the real distinction in the way Aquinas did, and Scotists were generally more concerned with problems given to them by Giles of Rome. Cf. John F. Wippel, “The Relationship Between Essence and Existence in Late-Thirteenth-

Scotist aesthetics that served as the epigraph for this essay highlights the importance of the formal distinction in the Subtle Doctor's account. After all, the metaphysical question that exercises Scotus in the two passages I highlighted above is how Trinitarian vestiges, which depend upon the harmonious relationship of their bodily parts, can represent God, Who has no parts whatsoever.³⁸ Scotus not only has an ingenious answer to this question, his answer lays the groundwork for exactly the sort of theological aesthetics that Narcisse mistakenly believes can only be found in Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Scotus, of course, recognizes a formal distinction in six instances: 1) between transcendentals; 2) between a generic perfection and the specific difference; 3) between the soul and its faculties; 4) between the divine persons and the divine essence; 5) between the individuating difference and the common nature; and 6) between the attributes of God.³⁹ To my mind, precious little has been said about how these six instances relate. In light of Narcisse's concerns, I would like to suggest that they form an ascending scale of harmonious *convenientiae*.

Like his predecessors, Scotus taught that God alone is the efficient, exemplary, and final cause of our being;⁴⁰ that God alone is the infinite coincidence of the transcendentals; and

Century Thought," *Philosophies of Existence, Ancient and Medieval*, P. Morewedge, ed. (New York, 1982), 133-64.

³⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 2, n. 301 (Vatican III, 183-84): *Sed quomodo tunc accipitur ratio vestigii, in divinis, quae sit similitudo partis, cum in divinis non sit pars?* Kovach, op. cit., 455, rightly points out that Scotus has a distinctive treatment of Trinitarian vestiges. One might compare him to Augustine, *De Trinitate* VI, c. 10, n. 12, and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 93, aa. 1-2. Also note the parallel passages in *Reportatio* I-A, d. 3, q. 7, nn. 202-16 (WB 244-48).

³⁹ The foundational study remains Allan B. Wolter, "The Formal Distinction," *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*, Marilyn McCord Adams, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 227-41.

⁴⁰ *De Primo Principio*, c. 3 (Wolter, 42ff); *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, p. 1, q. 1-2, nn 41-156 (Vatican II, 149-221); *Quodlibet* 8, n. 3 (Olms XII, p. 204), n. 24 (Olms XII, 217); *Reportatio* I-A, d. 2, p. 1, qq. 1-3, nn. 1-86 (WB 115-40). Wolter also notes the possible parallel between efficient, exemplary, and final causality and the three types of theology: in itself (*theologia in se*), through God's special action (*theologia per specialem actionem Dei*), and through natural reason and action (*theologia per rationem naturalem et actionem naturalem*). Cf. *Reportatio* I-A, prol, q. 3, n. 233 (WB 82).

that created beings are true, good, and beautiful only to the extent that they participate in God's own being, truth, goodness, and beauty.⁴¹ Unlike his predecessors, however, Scotus defined metaphysics as the "science of the transcendentals" (*transcendens scientia*), a definition not without some importance for theological aesthetics.⁴² For an aesthetics *ad mentem Scoti*, one could well say that metaphysics treats *pulchrum in quantum pulchrum* just as it treats *ens in quantum ens*.⁴³ Precisely because a formal distinction obtains between the transcendentals, beauty cannot be reduced to a merely noetic entity as it often is in modern Thomists; rather, it is a genuine formal perfection.⁴⁴ In fact, the Dionysian notion of "unitive containment" necessitates a formal distinction between transcendental perfections, and such a distinction implies the co-existence, even co-inherence, of diverse formal perfections in

⁴¹ *Reportatio* I-A, prol., q. 1, a. 3, n. 55 (WB 18); d. 17, p. 1, q. 1, n. 41 (WB 471). Cf. *Ordinatio* IV, d. 48, q. 1, n. 3 (Olms X, 306).

⁴² *Quaestiones subtilissimae super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, prol., n. 18: *Et hanc scientiam vocamus metaphysicam, quae dicitur a 'meta', quod est 'trans', et 'ycos', 'scientia', quasi transcendens scientia, quia est de transcendentibus*. Cf. Allan B. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1946).

⁴³ See Kovach, *op. cit.*, 448-49, for a brief summary of this debate among twentieth-century Scotists. I myself am inclined to think that too much has been made of Scotus's apparent reluctance to list beauty among the transcendentals. When Scotus, comparing the beauty of a body with the goodness of an act, says, *bonitas naturalis, non illa quae convertitur cum ente, sed illa quae habet oppositum malum*, he is merely discussing the *perfectiones secundae entis*, namely, acts, which can be lost or gained without a substantial change in the being under question. If Scotus may distinguish between *bonum* as transcendental and *bonum* as *bonitas naturalis* or *perfectiones secundae entis*, I see no reason why a Scotist cannot do the same for *pulchrum*, understood either as a *bonum honestum* or a *bonum delectabile*. After all, Scotus does not offer a conclusive list, but rather says simply *unitas, bonitas, et huiusmodi*. Cf. *Reportatio* I-A, d. 8, q. 5, n. 148 (WB 375).

⁴⁴ Gilson argued that the transcendentals are superfluous for being as being. As being contains them unitively, the transcendentals are not concerned with being as such but merely being as known. Cf. E. Gilson, *Constantes philosophiques de l'être* (Paris, 1983), 117. Jan Aetsen rightly points out that, although Gilson uses the same Dionysian language as the Subtle Doctor, Scotus would have rejected this conclusion. Cf. Jan Aetsen, "Being and One: The Doctrine of the Convertible Transcendentals in Duns Scotus," *Franciscan Studies* (1998), 47-64, at 63-64.

simple substances. God, as super-essential being, contains all perfections infinitely and eminently. He is *verum esse, totum esse*, indeed *verum pulchrum, totum pulchrum*. But creatures also contain the perfections appropriate to their natures in an analogous fashion, so that these perfections, which are unitively contained in their own essences, mirror God's own limitless perfection.

Once we recognize the importance of the formal distinction for the "science of the transcendentals" in this first instance, we can see how it unifies the various orders of reality into an aesthetic whole. In the second instance, for example, we can recognize bodily and spiritual beauty as distinct formal perfections, precisely because a formal distinction obtains between the generic perfection and the specific difference in any given substance. So just as physical beauty is the harmonious sum of the plurality of forms and formalities suitable to a specific being, spiritual beauty is the harmonious sum of the concrete choices made in conformity with right reason. As the sum of perfections in the material and spiritual orders, human beauty thus offers both an image and a likeness of the beauty of the Word.⁴⁵ Thus the first instance of the formal distinction serves as the bridge between the second and the third instances, at least insofar as we are considering rational natures, which is related to the fourth instance by way of a rich aesthetic rendering of the so-called psychological analogy of the Trinity.⁴⁶ Just as the formal distinction between the faculties and soul in men and women mirrors the formal distinction of the persons from the divine essence, so too the formal co-inherence of a plurality of beautiful forms mirrors the formal co-inherence of perfections in

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the psychological analogy in terms of the pure perfections, see *Reportatio* I-A, prol., q. 1, nn. 91-92 (WB 34-35). Not surprisingly, Scotus bases his argument on Anselm, *Monologion* c. 15 (PL 158, 163).

⁴⁶ *Reportatio* I-A, d. 3, q. 7, n. 205 (WB 245): *Sed in nobis est notitia et amor quae sunt proportionata et correspondentia notitiae infinitae in Deo et amori infinito. Quidquid igitur in nobis habet fecunditatem a se, et utramque fecunditatem a se, scilicet notitiae et amoris, proportionatam et correspondentem ad notitiam producentem et ad amorem spirantem in divinis, et necessario repraesentat primam personam in divinis.... Sic igitur habemus hic tria in nobis quae sunt ut unum aliqua unitate, et non invenio aliqua tria in nobis ita perfecte repraesentantia trinitatem et unitatem.*

the divine essence, since our souls present us with images of the Trinity insofar as they are exercised in acts of intellect and will.⁴⁷ In this regard, the *integritas convenientiae* of the soul governed by charity gives us the clearest image of the Trinity. Such a conclusion also has felicitous aesthetic ramifications, for it implies that knowledge is as much about the creation of forms as their passive communication; rather than being merely informed or actualized, the intellect actively creates a representation of the known object, which is a partial efficient cause rather than a formal cause *per se*. This *esse repraesentatum*, as a singular representation of the singular, is not merely a phantasm, an image whose intentionality is reduced to its resemblance to its original, but a formal similitude that allows the singular to represent the universal.⁴⁸

This leads to the fifth instance of the formal distinction, between the individuating difference and the common nature. I think Scotus intuited a profound artistic paradox here, a paradox both ancient and modern, that a particularly profound artistic representation of an individual has the ability to manifest the depths of the universal. The pre-eminent example of this, of course, is Christ Himself. As the Word, Christ is the *decor Patris*; He represents the Father perfectly

⁴⁷ *Reportatio* 1-A, d. 3, q. 7, n. 215 (WB 247-48): *Unde anima... repraesentat Trinitatem in quantum essentia est habens in se aliquam unitatem et habet in se aliqua producta ordine quodam quae sunt in se distincta, et tale potest repraesentare*. He offers an illustration in the next paragraph: *Et ideo dico quod mens distincte repraesentat unam personam, scilicet Patrem, et non personam alterius, in quantum accipitur proprie mens ut a se fecunda*.

⁴⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 3, q. 1, n. 360 (Vatican III, 218). Scotus's view in this matter has been criticized by yet another talented Dominican theologian, Emmanuel Perrier, in "Duns Scotus Facing Reality: Between Absolute Contingency and Unquestionable Consistency," *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 619-43. Unfortunately, Perrier is tone deaf to the aesthetic ramifications of Scotus's epistemology, largely because he depends upon two unreliable sources: André de Muralt, *Lenjeu de la philosophie médiévale* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991) and Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1999). Boulnois's penchant for overstatement ("*Lexemplarisme est mort*") does not help matters, especially in light of the Subtle Doctor's rather extensive use of the allegedly departed doctrine. Rumors of its demise—along with its sibling final causality—have been greatly exaggerated.

in the free play of the Holy Spirit. As man, as a singular existing human nature, He represents God with the greatest formal perfection of which a human nature is capable. Just as the formal distinction between Christ's faculties and His human soul perfectly expresses the formal distinction of the persons from the divine essence, so the formal coinherence of all beautiful forms in Christ's unbroken human nature, his *natura atoma*, expresses the infinite harmonious coinherence of formally non-identical attributes in the simplicity of the divine essence—the sixth instance of the formal distinction.⁴⁹ In sum, Christ for Scotus is an active artistic representation of both God and humankind, and so the Subtle Doctor does not hesitate to call God an artist or to note that He creates the world “artfully.”⁵⁰ God the Father is the divine artist, whose perfectly fecund knowledge eternally generates God the Son, his very self-expression, in Whom perfect beauty and perfect art coincide.⁵¹ The Son is the Father's art just as he is the Father's wisdom and the Father's light. He is God from God, light from light, true God from true God. He is art from art, and one art with the Father.⁵² The Son does not spring from the Father unthinkingly, as fire from fire, or passively, as our

⁴⁹ *Quodlibet* 5, n. 25 (Olms XII, 136): *Essentia quae secundum Damascenum est pelagus propter comprehensionem omnium perfectionum divinarum.*

⁵⁰ *Ordinatio* III, d. 8, q. un., n. 6 (Vatican IX, 295): *Deus produxit creaturas in quantum artifex, hoc est in quantum habet relationem rationis, quia scientia sua est ars in quantum causat in se ideas per actum rationis.* Ibid., n. 315 (Vatican IX, 315-16): *Ille habitus absolutus — qui dicitur esse ‘ars’ — inest ipsi Deo.* *Lectura* I, d. 27, q. 3, n. 67 (Vatican XVII, 361): *Tota Trinitas dicitur artifex et artificialiter producit.*

⁵¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 27, q. 3, n. 98 (Vatican VI, 104): *Pater formaliter creat, et hoc ut artifex.* Cf. *Reportatio* I-A, d. 27, p. 2, q. 2, n. 114 (WB 170); d. 32, q. 2, nn. 37-38 (WB 304-06); *Quodlibet*, q. 8, n. 1 (Olms XII, 204), n. 25 (Olms XII, 218).

⁵² *Reportatio* I-A, prol., q. 1, n. 89 (WB 33): *Respondeo: sic est ars sicut sapientia Patris. Qualiter autem intelligendum sit quod sit sapientia Patris Augustinus exponit VII De Trinitate, cap. 10. ‘Ita dicitur Filius sapientia Patris quomodo dicitur lumen patris, id est quemadmodum lumen de lumine et utrumque unum lumen, sic sapientia de sapientia et utraque una sapientia intelligatur.’ Non est ergo ‘ars Patris plena rationum,’ quasi istae rationes distinctae non sunt in intelligentia Patris ut Patris, sed ista competunt Filio per appropriationem propter hoc quod ex vi productionis suae est notitia declarativa eorum quae habitualiter continentur in memoria paterna.* Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, c. 1, n. 2.

understanding is generated by external objects, but rather as His free, sovereign expression.⁵³ As Scotus notes, “the Word is the Father’s art, full of every living idea.”⁵⁴

Scotus’s formal distinction is a triumph of extreme realism in the history of philosophy and theology. The Subtle Doctor resolves the ancient Platonic problem of the *methexis* of the forms with a profound Christian metaphysics of the infinite that preserves the reality of beauty in the mind of God, the mind of man, and the world around us. In this respect, the multitude of beautiful forms that we perceive in one being are neither arbitrary nor artificial, because they inhere together distinctly, as it were, and are so preserved in their radiance, intelligibility, and peaceful co-inherence in God’s own light. Moreover, if a rich plurality of distinctly beautiful forms inheres in every beautiful substance, the order of substances in creation itself speaks of the beauty of God, the first and final cause of their own beauty. But as the humanity of Christ is pre-eminent in the order of substances, and so it lacks no formal perfection whatsoever, in Him all *convenientiae* reach a wonderful maximum density indeed.

III. CHRIST AND *CONVENIENTIA*

We have seen that Scotus’s understanding of beauty is governed by the notion of *integritas convenientiae*; moreover, we have seen how these various *convenientiae* are united by the formal distinction in Scotus’s “science of the transcen-

⁵³ *Reportatio* 1-A, d. 6, q. 2, n. 19 (WB 298): *Si productio Filii esset mere naturalis sicut productio ignis ab igne, scilicet calefactio, et si genito vel producto iam Filio, complaceret Patri eius generatio iam posita, numquam tamen diceretur Pater volens generare Filium nisi concomitanter et voluntate complacente, sicut nec ignis disceretur volens generare alium ignem.* Cf. *Reportatio* 1-A, d. 2, p. 1, qq. 1-3, n. 32 (WB 124): *Vel ergo propter finem quem cognoscit, vel in quem a cognoscente dirigitur. Non secundo modo, quia primum efficiens non potest ab alio dirigi vel ordinari. Ergo propter finem quem cognoscit. Sed agens per cognitionem ordinat effectum in finem cognitum, sed hoc non est aliud quam effectum exemplari.*

⁵⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate* VI, c. 10., n. 11 (PL 42, 931): *Verbum est ars Patris plena omni ratione viventium.* Cf. *Reportatio* I-A, prol., q. 1, n. 72, 24. Also see Scotus’s partial quotation of *De Trinitate* IX, c. 6, n. 9, in *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 4, n. 202 (Vatican III, 124): *Artem infallibiliter pulchram [italium figuram], super aciem mentis, simplici intelligentia capientes.*

dentials.” If our discussion of the formal distinction proceeded as an ascending scale of *convenientiae*, a brief discussion of the importance of arguments *ex convenientia* in Scotus’s theology will allow us to reverse the flow, as it were, and see *convenientia* as a descending scale from heaven to earth, from God to creatures. The Subtle Doctor’s own treatment of the “fittingness of means” implies a greatly nuanced composition of efficient, exemplary, and final causality, such that the aesthetic harmony of which all being is capable finds its place in the greater harmony of Christ, the Alpha and Omega of both the natural and the supernatural orders.

Generally speaking, arguments *ex convenientia* stand midway between arguments *ex ratione* and arguments *ex auctoritate*.⁵⁵ The fittingness of the position one attempts to establish by such arguments is decided by an appeal to the relationship between sacred mysteries or, in some cases, to one of God’s attributes, usually perfection or omnipotence. As such, they depend on the means a free agent takes to obtain certain ends, and the resulting argument often displays a particular elegance or aesthetic logic. For example, Pope Pius XII cited one of Francisco Suárez’s arguments *ex convenientia* when he defined the dogma of the Virgin’s Assumption into heaven: “Keeping in mind the standards of propriety,” he wrote, “and when there is no contradiction or repugnance on the part of Scripture, the mysteries of grace which God has wrought in the Virgin must be measured, not by ordinary laws, but by the divine omnipotence.”⁵⁶

Scotus, of course, uses a similar argument in his famous treatment of the Immaculate Conception when he argues that it is fitting that a most perfect redeemer redeem someone in the most perfect way. The Subtle Doctor establishes the Virgin’s redemption through preservation by appealing neither to a Scriptural or Patristic authority, nor to natural reason, but rather to the perfection of the Holy Trinity’s actions *ad*

⁵⁵ Narcisse, *Les Raisons*, 145.

⁵⁶ Suárez, *De Mysteriis Vitae Christi*, q. 27, a. 2, d. 3, sect. 5 (*Opera Omnia* [Vivès, 1860], XIX, 44b): *Ex quibus etiam veluti inductione quadam concluditur, mysteria gratiae, quae Deus in Virgine operatus est, non esse ordinariis legibus metienda, sed divina omnipotentia, supposita rei decencia, absque nulla Scripturarum contradictione aut repugnantia.*

extra. Surely Father Narcisse will concede that Scotus's *po-tuit; de-cuit; ergo fecit*—arguably the most famous argument *ex convenientia*—attains a “truly theological” level? Even the great Garrigou-Lagrange was not so churlish as to deny this obvious fact. In any event, when Scotus makes arguments *ex convenientia*, he assumes that we should always conceive God acting as a master craftsman or artist according to the aesthetic axiom *primum in intentione est ultimum in executione*. In this the Subtle Doctor is not so different from his contemporaries, except perhaps in the gusto with which he applies the axiom. The Subtle Doctor's insistence that what is first in the order of intentionality is final in the order of execution is the red thread running through his widely divergent metaphysical and theological speculations. It is also the key to unifying them into a practico-aesthetic theology firmly rooted in the encompassing character of Christocentric exemplarity.

Indeed, there is no clearer model of an argument *ex convenientia* than Scotus's famous argument for the motive of the Incarnation. While Scotus was not the first theologian to argue that the Word would have become incarnate even if men and women had not sinned—such was part of the *memorabilia* of the Oxford Franciscans—he was the first to address it as a question of *convenientia* in the actual historical order. In its simplest form, Scotus's argument is as follows: God is love. He exhausts the very idea of love and loves Himself infinitely. It is unfitting, however, that an infinitely perfect love not have others to love. Insofar as he creates rational beings who are capable of returning His love, God wishes to be loved supremely. For God to be loved supremely, with the very love that He has for Himself, human nature must be elevated to the hypostatic union. Consequently, if God's love is most perfect, it is supremely fitting that the Word become Incarnate even if men and women had not fallen.⁵⁷ Students

⁵⁷ Following a general Scotist tradition from Ephrem Longpré and Allan Wolter, I have presented two of Scotus's arguments together: *Ordinatio* III, d. 7, q. 3 and *Ordinatio* III (suppl), d. 19 [Assisi com. 137, fol. 161vb]. Both of these texts are conveniently given in Latin and English translation by Wolter in Damian McElrath, ed., *Franciscan Christology* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1980), 146-55.

of Trinitarian theology will undoubtedly recognize that the Marian Doctor has transposed one of the “necessary reasons” that Richard of St. Victor used to establish the Trinity of persons into an argument *ex convenientia* for the creation of rational beings.⁵⁸ In this, too, Scotus is not entirely unlike Aquinas, who also feels that it would be unfitting for a rational Creator to create a world without rational beings to contemplate Him. The Subtle Doctor does not hesitate to add, however, that God does not merely create rational beings, but rather rational beings that might return His love. In this respect, Scotus’s approach highlights the Augustinian analogy between the Trinitarian processions and the faculties of the human soul more readily than Aquinas’s does, but Scotus’s argument is more than a voluntaristic recasting of an intellectualist commonplace. Rather, Scotus’s argument is an explicitly Trinitarian account of the relationship between the Incarnation and creation expressed in terms of aesthetic *convenientia*. Because God loves in a most perfect manner, it is fitting that He will men and women in the very order in which they conform to His love’s first intention. In other words, since God’s own infinite essence is the first and adequate object of the divine intelligence and will, it is supremely fitting that the primary intention of the Holy Trinity *ad extra* be the Incarnation itself. Or, to state the argument negatively: it is most unfitting that the Word come into the world as a mere occasion, or for an end that surpasses Him.

At least in this one instance, we can detect a subtle difference in the ways the two great theologians make their Christological arguments *ex convenientia*. Aquinas and Scotus both believe the Incarnation to be *convenientissimum*: Aquinas thinks the Incarnation of the Word supremely fitting as a remedy for sin, but Scotus thinks the Incarnation to be supremely fitting for created being in general. So, too,

⁵⁸ *Reportatio* I-A, prol., q. 2, n. 201 (WB 71). In light of some of the criticisms leveled against Anselm and Richard of St. Victor by the Dominican theologian Gilles Emery, I should note that Scotus does not believe that either man is guilty of offering “purely rational” demonstrations of the mystery of the Trinity. *Non enim omne necessarium*, Scotus notes, *est evidens necessarium ex obiecto*. Cf. Gilles Emery, *Trinity, Church, and Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 6-7; idem, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 2003), 16-23.

Aquinas felt that he had to make an argument *ex convenientia* because he was discussing a hypothetical order, namely, a world in which man had not fallen; in contrast, Scotus thinks that evil, being a mere *privatio boni*, cannot determine God's intention *ad extra*, which necessarily remains the same regardless of *any* contingent order, our own included. In this regard, *convenientia* for Scotus is not a notion to which one resorts when the Scriptural *auctoritas* is inconclusive, but rather an encompassing aesthetic sensibility, even a particular theological "style." Scotus's insistence that God always acts in a maximally perfect way—that He acts with a maximally rational and maximally ordered will—allows one to consider fittingness on a *truly* theological level, as a dynamic and nuanced composition of efficient, exemplary, and final causality that is altogether free of Neo-Platonic schemes of necessity. From a Scotist perspective, then, the Thomist account of *convenientia* offered by Father Narcisse does not grant the motto *esse capax convenientiae* its fullest meaning. It fails to present the Incarnation as *convenientissimum* and consequently cannot penetrate the deepest mystery contained in Aquinas's wonderfully rich sentence, *omnia in esse conveniunt*.

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