

Marco Forlivesi, Mastri, Bartolomeo, in *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. M. Sgarbi, Cham: Springer, 2022, pp. 2104-2110. ISBN 978-3-319-14168-8

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## **Mastri, Bartolomeo**

*Born:* 7 December 1602

*Died:* 11 January 1673

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### **Abstract**

Among the seventeenth-century promoters of Scotism, Bartolomeo Mastri (1602–1673) was conspicuous for the scope of his work, his knowledge of the authors and debates of his time, and for his refined interpretations of the philosophy and theology of John Duns Scotus. These qualities make him a precious source for an accurate understanding of seventeenth-century university thought. They have also made him an important, though not always explicitly mentioned, point of reference for more than a few modern readers of Scotus.

### **Biography**

Bartolomeo Mastri was born in Meldola, near Forlì, Italy, on 7 December 1602 into a family belonging to the town’s minor nobility. We only have general information about his life and studies as a child. In one of his works, he wrote that he came to learn about the doctrine of John Duns Scotus even before he entered the Order of Minor Conventuals. His younger confrère Giovanni Franchini from Modena, who knew Mastri personally, reports that at the time of his investiture, Mastri had already concluded his studies on grammar, rhetoric, and poetry.

Mastri entered the Order of Minor Conventuals in about 1616. The following year he was transferred to the Order's *studium* in Bologna, where he attended all the courses on philosophy and some of those on theology. From 1621 to 1623 he was in the Order's *studium* in Naples. Here he studied theology under the guidance of his confrère Giuseppe La Napola (or Napoli) Jr. from Trapani; it was from La Napola that he acquired the systematic view of Scotism and the rudiments of the style he was to adopt in his own works. In November 1623, he was appointed Master of Studies (i.e., lector of logic) in Parma and in October of the following year Master of Studies in Bologna. In 1625, he was assigned as a student to the Collegio di S. Bonaventura in Rome. Here he struck up a lasting friendship with his confrère Bonaventura Belluto from Catania, with whom he was to share both his career and his published works for the next 13 years. Mastri and Belluto graduated from the Collegio di S. Bonaventura in 1628, with doctorate degrees and the plan to write a systematic course on Scotist philosophy.

From 1628 to 1631, Mastri and Belluto were regents of the Order's *studium* in the convent of St. Francis in Cesena, where they taught physics and metaphysics. From 1631 to 1638, they were regents of the Order's *studium* in Perugia, where they taught theology. In 1638, they were appointed regents at the Collegio di S. Antonio, in Padua, after a bitter clash for the control of these chairs between the highest authorities of the Order and two other members of the Order, Matteo Frée from Veglia (today Krk) and Francesco Maria Vaccari from San Giovanni in Persiceto, supported by some of the Veneto Senate. Mastri and Belluto kept these posts until 1641, when each returned to the convent of his hometown. After a few months, Mastri became private theologian to Cardinal Luigi Capponi in Ravenna. In 1645, Capponi left Ravenna to settle definitively in Rome, and Mastri returned to Meldola. In 1646, he ran the risk of being exiled from his hometown following a political clash he had become involved in, but the storm passed that year. In 1647, he was elected minister provincial for the province of Bologna. From 1650, the year that marked the end of his mandate, to 1659, he

was – as he himself writes in the preface to one of his later works – “almost a second Diogenes” in Meldola.

His frustrated longing for offices and honors was partly satisfied after Giacomo Fabretti from Ravenna, a friend of many years, was elected minister general of the Order at the end of May 1659. During Fabretti's generalate, Mastri often spent time in Rome. In the same year, he succeeded in personally offering the pope, Alexander VII, his most recent volume. In the second half of 1662, during a prolonged absence on the part of Fabretti, who was visiting the central European convents of the Order, Mastri became the minister general's vicar for Italy and the nearby islands for several months. In 1665, he did not succeed in having himself elected as the Order's minister general: Andrea Bini from Spello edged his way in between Mastri, supported by the fathers from Ravenna, and Lelio Spada, supported by the fathers from Faenza, and became the winning candidate. Bitter about the lost election, Mastri returned to Meldola. Here he worked on the completion of his last work and on the restructuring of the convent. He died in Meldola on 11 January 1673.

## Works

Mastri was the author of four works. The first, in order of publication, was a *cursus* on Scotist philosophy articulated into logic, physics, anthropology, and metaphysics. It was planned and, to a great extent, drawn up together with his colleague, Bonaventura Belluto, from 1628 to 1646. It was published, divided by subject, in seven volumes in 4° from 1637 to 1647 and partly republished from 1644 to 1652 with integrations by Mastri alone. After the death of its authors, it was reprinted several times with the general title of *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer*. A second work, written in collaboration with his confrère and friend Ottaviano Camerani Jr. from Ravenna and directed against Matteo Frée, was published in 1650 in a single volume in 4° entitled *Scotus et scotistae Bellutus et Mastrius expurgati a probrosis querelis ferchianis*. A third work,

formally on theology but rich in philosophical elements, was published in four volumes *in folio* from 1655 to 1664. On the basis of some elements in the text, it is correct to indicate this work by the general title of *Disputationes theologicae in quatuor libros Sententiarum*. The last work published by Mastri is an extensive *Theologia Moralis*, printed in a single *in-folio* volume in 1671.

### Philosophical and Theological Thought

Mastri intended to be a follower of John Duns Scotus and he undoubtedly was, to the extent that he can be held to be one of the most refined champions of *Doctor Subtilis* in the baroque age. Nonetheless, it would be incorrect to take his works as a simple exposition of Scotus' doctrine. Being a Scotist in the seventeenth century did not simply mean repeating and propagating the medieval master's doctrines. First of all, Mastri inherited a whole set of standpoints that were the outcome of three centuries of friction between Latin Aristotelians, nominalists, Scotists, and Thomists. In Mastri's day, there was a long history of the effects of Scotus' theories, and Mastri repeatedly recalls the long series of "interpreters" that had come before him. Moreover, what he proposed was fully immersed in the debate of his time within the context of the university, a debate that actively involved a great number of highly innovative authors, many of whom Jesuits, who cannot be traced back to a single traditional school. Lastly, Mastri was also well informed about the sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century developments in empirical scientific research. He presented and evaluated these developments on the basis of the flimsy physical doctrines which were part of his own tradition and were acceptable to the Roman curia and Catholic theologians, but he also perceived with honesty that they were the results of competencies and instrumental abilities that he did not possess.

Mastri's vast work ranges from logic to metaphysics and from ethics to supernatural theology. On the whole, he created a synthesis of the views

of a minority line of Scotism – a line that dated back at least to Antonio Trombetta – and the positions of Francisco Suárez, elaborating it by means of a careful reading of Scotus' works and an extensive knowledge of the doctrines advanced by university-level thinkers, especially those from the first decades of the seventeenth century.

Following Zaccaria Pasqualigo's developments of a theory formulated by Peter Auriol, Mastri distinguishes between knowledge (be it a concept, a judgment, or a science) as a real state of the cognitive faculties and knowledge as cognitive content. Knowledge in the first sense is a real being (an accident, in the case of a finite cognitive faculty) and therefore can be more or less similar to the real being, or the set of real beings, to which it possibly refers. Truth consists precisely in this similarity. Knowledge in the second sense is what one bears in mind and considers. Actually, knowledge as a cognitive content is not something real: it is a representation, a pure "known," whose entire reality lies in the state of a cognitive faculty and in the extramental basis of this state. Between a state of a cognitive faculty and what consequently appears to it, there is a biunique and necessary connection; thus, the correspondence between knowledge taken as a real state of the cognitive faculties and knowledge taken as cognitive content occurs anyway and is always perfect. Moreover, this correspondence is not a similarity between two (or more) real things. Consequently, it is not what is called "truth" (be it the truth of a concept, of a proposition, or of a science). Due to the fact that a cognitive content is not a real being, no direct comparison can be established between it and the object that is known; conversely, the relationship between cognitive content and the object of which it is supposed to be the representation is mediated by the actual state of the cognitive faculties. Mastri does not consider the detachment of cognitive contents from the things as a simple limitation of the mind; indeed, he also considers it as an expression of the strength of the cognitive faculties, i.e., the mind's power to besiege and capture somehow the real beings it is confronted with.

As far as the nature of concepts (taken as cognitive contents) is concerned, Mastri

distinguishes between predicamental concepts (“finite being” included) and transcendental concepts (first of all, “being” taken as common to God and creatures). Mastri’s distinction is traditional, but his treatment of it is not. According to Mastri, predicamental concepts regard things not radically different from one another and such as can be made up of a potential principle and an active principle. This means that they always concern finite things. Consequently, predicamental concepts are adequate concepts, i.e., they are founded on a distinction endowed with reality independently of the work of the mind, and they can represent things as these things actually are. By contrast, transcendental concepts regard things radically different from one another of which at least one is infinite. This means that they always concern things of which at least one cannot be made up of a potential principle and an active principle. Consequently, transcendental concepts are inadequate concepts, i.e., they are founded on a simple embryonic likeness, which is conceived by the mind in the form of a conceptual content which appears as common to different things exclusively through the work of the intellect itself. In other words, transcendental concepts – and the concepts contracting them – are the objectified expression to the mind of the work performed by the mind itself in order also to grasp something that a finite mind cannot grasp as it is in reality. From a historical point of view, Mastri’s theory of transcendental concepts is an endeavor to identify a subtle middle way between nominalism, Thomism, and the Scotism professed by most of Scotus’ followers, in a field already crowded with attempts at mediation. As regards the formation of the *ratio entis* (i.e., the cognitive content “being”) and its contraction to infinite being and finite being, Mastri, against most Scotists, maintains that the *ratio entis* is formed not by the grasping of a *formalitas* (i.e., something real and possibly common to several individuals; in this case, something real and common to God and creatures), but rather by confusing abstraction; against the nominalists, he maintains that such abstraction takes place not by reasoning reason (i.e., by means of the sole work of the mind), but rather by reasoned reason (i.e., by means of a

work of the mind that is founded in reality); against both the nominalists and the Thomists (even the eclectic ones, like Francisco Suárez), he maintains that the *ratio entis* is contracted not by explicitation, but rather by composition; finally, against most Scotists he maintains that the composition in question is not a real one, but rather a composition of reasoned reason. Indeed neither transcendental being nor the modes contracting it, i.e., infinity and finitude, are representations of something existing as such in reality; nonetheless, the transcendental being, the mode of infinity, that of finitude, and the compositions of the former with the latter are the manifestations to the mind of the work with which the mind itself grasps reality, i.e., the infinite being, the finite being, and their actual likeness and difference. Consequently, being is neither perfectly univocal nor simply analogical. Mastri rejects the Thomistic theory of the analogy of being, i.e., the theory according to which, since the created being has a dependence on the supreme being, the human intelligence grasps that dependence, albeit in a confused way, as soon as it conceives being. According to Mastri, on the other hand, being is an absolute concept that also extends to God but in itself does not include an actual reference to God any more than it includes an actual reference to the creature. Thus, Mastri maintains that being is both univocal and analogical: it is univocal because, taken as distinct from its inferiors, its contractors do not induce any inequality in it; notwithstanding, it is analogical because, even if it is taken in a state of abstraction, it is intrinsically – although only potentially – orientated to being contracted to inferiors that are unequal in perfection and disposed according to a certain order. A final remark has to be made. Mastri distinguishes between extrinsic modes and intrinsic modes. Extrinsic modes are, actually, accidents; intrinsic modes are not accidents, and the distinction between intrinsic modes and what they modify is weaker than the distinction between extrinsic modes and what they modify. Notwithstanding, a clarification concerning intrinsic modes also has to be made. Intrinsic modes have the same nature as what they modify: if they modify something represented by a predicamental concept, they are

endowed with reality independently of the work of the mind; if they modify something represented by a transcendental concept, they are only manifestations to the mind of the work with which the mind grasps the difference between the things that are referred to by that transcendental concept.

In order to appraise Mastri's theory on being, his statements concerning the nature of the reality of real being should also be taken into consideration. Real being does not simply refer to existence and is not the same as actual being; in fact, it is the same as possible being. However, Mastri maintains that the possibility of possible being can be considered from two different points of view: as far as the rationale of possible being is concerned, possible being is possible just because of itself, whereas far as the foundation of possible being is concerned, possible being is possible only because it is grounded in God's science.

A well-known divergence between nominalists, Scotists, and Thomists concerns the nature of freedom. As far as the metaphysical side of this subject is concerned, Mastri – following his master, Giuseppe La Napola Jr. – rejects both Domingo Báñez's Thomistic theory and Luis de Molina's Ockhamist doctrine: the contingency of contingent futures is founded neither on God's almightiness nor on God's sublime knowledge; it is founded on the supereminent freedom of God's will, which virtually holds and renders all possible created acts of free will. As far as the anthropological side of freedom is concerned, Mastri states that it consists of the dominion of the will over one's acts. This dominion exists both with respect to the intellect, which has a merely advisory power, and with respect to the object, which is merely the extrinsic formal cause of the choice. Indeed, the will dominates the very exercise of its act. This, writes Mastri, explains the fundamental reason for rejecting the Thomists' attempt to demonstrate a priori the freedom of the will on the basis of the fact that some objects are such as not to attract it necessarily: no object is such as to attract the will necessarily; hence, freedom can be demonstrated only a posteriori.

As far as the nature of morality is concerned, Mastri writes that moral goodness consists in the conformity between rational nature and the object

of a certain act. A few considerations must be added to this definition, however. First of all, the object in question is one of the extremes of the relation of conformity not for what that object is in reality, but rather for what it is in the mind; secondly, the moral quality of an object is decided not simply by its own nature, but rather with reference (i.e., subordinately) to a rule, that is, a law. By means of this doctrine, Mastri attempts to take into account the multiple moments of moral activity that do not simply mirror real connections. The object whose conformity to the norm must be judged is a cognitive content; moreover, the judgment on the conformity between norm and object is also the work of the mind, which, when judging, has to take into account a plurality of factors and the concrete possibility of making a mistake. Furthermore, Mastri holds that at least some norms – including some divine norms – are arbitrary or conventional. These considerations do not lead Mastri to deny the existence of a connection between obligation, rational nature, and the nature of things; nevertheless, he puts forward a refined conception of the connection in question. Firstly, the metaphysical concept of "end" can be employed to found morality only to the extent to which it becomes a "duty," a step that requires the introduction of the concept of law. Secondly, he transposes the scheme that he uses regarding the distinction between nature and foundation of possible beings to possible moral objects: the rationale of the goodness of objects that are good depends on the objects themselves, but the foundation of that goodness lies in God's law.

As far as supernatural theology is concerned, Mastri denies that, for the *viator*, theology is a science: its principles are not evident to the theologian; thus, it lacks one essential requirement for science. Notwithstanding, he also denies that theology is a form of opinion. Theology, Mastri argues, is explicit faith; but faith is certain and is a constant and reasonable state of man; therefore, theology also possesses the same degree of certainty and reasonableness as faith. To this must be added the fact that theology does not coincide, even partially, with philosophy: even though some theological truths are materially identical to some philosophical truths, the reason for assent

is, in the two cases, formally different. Mastri's theory on the nature of theology clearly opposes the Thomistic one, and indeed we can find the same opposition on a number of other issues. According to Mastri – and to Scotists in general – justification consists of a state of friendship between man and God. According to the Thomists, grace is an accident whose very physical nature makes it capable of uniting man to God. Like all Scotists, Mastri holds such a thesis to be untenable: as a created accident, grace has no connection in its being with God; hence, grace is not able, of itself, to produce any real unifying effect. It follows from this that the reason for the effectiveness of grace lies elsewhere. Grace unites God and man not because of what it is in its being, but rather because of a free divine decision: the decision to accept as a friend he who possesses that quality. Nonetheless, the presence of this quality is both insufficient and, absolutely speaking, unnecessary.

## Impact and Legacy

Although at the present state of research it seems that, outside the Catholic clerical milieu, the work of Mastri and Belluto enjoyed little fame, inside that environment its diffusion was significant and long-lasting. In the 1660s and 1670s, the Sicilian Capuchin Illuminato Oddo declared his allegiance to them. After Mastri's and Belluto's death, their *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer* was reprinted six times, Mastri's *Disputationes theologicae in quatuor libros Sententiarum* was reprinted six times too, and Mastri's *Theologia moralis* even saw seven reprints. As late as 1750, Veremund Guffl, a Bavarian Thomist Benedictine, though rejecting Scotism, presented this school relying on Mastri and Belluto's work. However, one should not believe that Mastri's interpretation of Scotus' thought was accepted without opposition. As stated above, this interpretation was a synthesis of the views of a minority line of Scotism and the positions of Francisco Suárez. Already during his lifetime, Mastri was attacked both by "orthodox" Scotists such as the Conventual Franciscan friars Francesco Pontelonghi, Alessandro Rossi, and

Bonaventure Columbi and by the conceptualist Recollect Franciscan John Punch. After his death, Mastri was once again criticized by the Spanish Observant Franciscan Manuel Pérez de Quiroga, who published his works in the early decades of the eighteenth century, and, in the 30s and 40s of the same century, by the Austrian Reformed Franciscan Crescentius Krisper. Nevertheless, within the Conventual Franciscan Order, Mastri's thought met with increasing approval, reaching the height of its fame in the 1750s.

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