Aquinas and Scotus on God as Object of Beatific Enjoyment
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In scholastic theology, God is not only the efficient and exemplar cause of all things, but also the final cause. This paper will explore Aquinas’ teaching of God as final cause in light of his philosophical anthropology and eschatology, and then it will compare that teaching with that of John Duns Scotus. A perusal of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century commentaries on Book IV, dd. 43-50, of Peter Lombard’s Sentences reveals numerous questions related to God as final cause: the metaphysical conditions of possibility for bodily resurrection, how the blessed and damned will experience God, how separated souls experience God before bodily resurrection, how God’s attributes relate to the Last Judgment, and the difference between beatitude in body and soul. This paper will focus on the last of these topics, namely how Aquinas’ and Scotus’ respective philosophical anthropologies, with the former prioritizing intellect over will and the latter taking the opposite position, affect their theories of the blessedness of the soul. That is, how do human beings experience God as an “object” to be enjoyed? What is the relationship between the divine essence and the Trinitarian Persons in this enjoyment? How are the divine attributes prioritized? What is the relationship between God’s absolute and ordained power, and what can God allow humans to experience naturally and what requires grace? These questions, while certainly “theological,” also are based on metaphysical presuppositions and have metaphysical implications; exploring Aquinas’ and Scotus’ respective positions will require bringing their doctrines of God to bear on eschatology, a topic which is often associated with visio, in light of the doctrinal debates of the fourteenth century, but less so on the category of fruitio.