

# John Duns Scotus' account of virtues

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**Abstract:** With the reception of the entire text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the 1250's., virtues are considered as qualities of life constitutive of human fulfillment and happiness. Therefore, the emphasis of Duns Scotus on the freedom within the will as primary moral element, as the seat of the moral virtues, raises a lot of questions such as: what place this leaves for virtue? How can the conception of virtue as a second nature be reconciled with the freedom of the will? What is then their role in moral life? Briefly, how does Scotus justify an objective basis for moral goodness, given his insistence upon the primacy of the will?

In reality, it is within the cultural milieu and methodological crisis of the late thirteenth century, concretely in response to the heterodox theses of 1277, that Scotus wants to insist upon the divine freedom. Hence, his primary intention is not to develop an ethical theory, but rather a causal explanation of divine and human freedom. This explanation leads to the distinction of free vs. natural and to the preference for efficient causality. Accordingly, right reason, within the articulation of a free causality, is considered as norm or measure for moral goodness, that means the virtues are no longer seen as constituting moral behavior and leading to the ultimate goal of happiness.

Scotus' account of virtue may create an intriguing opportunity for reflection upon the human activity, offer a perspective grounding the moral order on love, and promote the education of the conscience, of the right reason in matters of morality of the agent, in order to do something "worth doing or enjoying", something that is significant to the person said to be free.

**Key Terms:** Will, virtue, happiness, moral goodness, right reason, the

efficient causality, free, natural, *affectio commodi*, *affectio justitiae*.

The analysis of MacIntyre in his book, *After Virtue*<sup>1</sup>, about the contemporary moral fragmentation in light of a loss of virtue, gives rise to an increased and interesting discussion of the nature of virtue, of its role in moral living.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the discussion of virtue rather remounts to an earlier age, particularly with the reception of the entire text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the 1250's. In this medieval context where virtues function as qualities of life constitutive of human fulfillment and happiness, the emphasis of Duns Scotus on the divine will, on the freedom within the will as primary moral element, as the seat of the moral virtues<sup>3</sup>, raises a lot of questions, such as: what place this leaves for virtue? How can the conception of virtue as a second nature be reconciled with the freedom of the will? What is then their role in moral life? To put it in another way, how does Scotus justify an objective basis for moral goodness, given his insistence upon the primacy of the will? In reality, Scotus' theory has been called voluntarism<sup>4</sup> or "divine command theory"<sup>5</sup> as if the moral law depends simply and solely on the divine will.

To appreciate and evaluate fully the significance of Scotus' perspective, and to avoid any "unjust accusation" against him, as remarks Copleston,<sup>6</sup> I think

1/ one should keep in mind Heidegger's inducible remark on the characteristic of the medieval man: "Medieval philosophy conceptualizes what medieval man experiences, and medieval experience is anchored in a "transcendent and primordial relationship of the soul to God" (FS 2 409). That is to say, isolating any medieval's thought from the religious experience by which it was spawned should be the best way to misunderstand

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<sup>1</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> See Mary B. Ingham CSJ., *The Harmony of Goodness*, (Quincy IL.: Franciscan Press, 1996), 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Ord.* III, suppl., dist. 33.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Anthony Quinton, "British Philosophy", in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. I, (New York/ London: MacMillan, 1967), 373.

<sup>5</sup> John E. Hare, *God and Morality. A philosophical History*, (Oxford: Willey-Blackwell, 2009), 105.

<sup>6</sup> In his introductory account of Scotus' ethics, Copleston wrote: " my aim is to show that the accusation which has been brought against him [Scotus] of teaching the purely arbitrary character of the moral law, as though it depended simply and solely on the divine will, is, in the main, an unjust accusation" Copleston, *A history of philosophy*, vol. II. (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960), 545.

it.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Scotus, it is helpful to remember that before becoming a philosopher, he was a Franciscan whose experience on God is based on that of St. Francis: “My God and All”,<sup>8</sup> and that he was always ready to defend the rights of God and His Church as well.<sup>9</sup> This desire to faithfully love and serve God has been concretized at the time of the Condemnation of 1227: In order to protect divine freedom and to eliminate any possible necessity on the part of God in acting externally, and in response to the heterodox theses<sup>10</sup>, Scotus attempts not only to defend the will as free from determination by natural causality and as capable of self-determination, but also to define the role of natural causality within the sphere of human actions. Following the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition, he maintains that the perfection of the human person consists in the act of right and ordered loving, that sin is not an error of judgment, but its place is in the will as disordered desire.

2/ the following background elements should be noted and made clear: The

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<sup>7</sup> John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas. An essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 44.

<sup>8</sup> Fioretti, cap. II, *Chronica XXIV generalium in Anal. Franc.*, III, 36 *Actus beati Francisci*, ed. Sabatier (Paris, 1902), cap. I. The three attributes of God St. Francis proclaims are: *Altissime, omnipotens, bone Deus*. Cf. footnote 105 of my doctoral thesis “*John Duns Scotus' theo-anthropological Vision of Freedom*”.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. In June 1303, Scotus accepted the exile from Paris for his failure to support the French King Philip IV the Fair attempting to depose the Pope Boniface VIII. For his defence of papal supremacy, he was given later the epithet “*Hercules Papistarum*” (Hercules of the Papists) cf. *Histoire religieuse de la nation française* (Paris, 1922, p.274) cf. E. Longpre, “Pour le Saint Siege et contre le gallicanism”, in *France franciscaine* 11 (1928), 145. Friedrich Heer calls him “légiste de Dieu” F. Heer, *L'univers du Moyen Age*, (Paris: Fayard, 1970), 285.

<sup>10</sup> Ingham strongly defends this position: “Based upon the results of this study, I cannot help but draw the conclusion that this is in direct relationship to the philosophical context in which Scotus formulated his thought. Against a current of philosophical determinism which sought to deprive the divine will of its freedom to create, Scotus articulates a theory in which efficient causality holds central place, thus ensuring a perspective in which divine freedom can be defended.” Mary Elizabeth Ingham, “*Ethics and Freedom. An Historical-Critical Investigation of Scotist Ethical Thought*.” (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 164; see also 62-67. In addition, according to Wolter, the following presuppositions underlie Scotus' ethical system: his metaphysical notion of God; his conviction that God must have free will; God's love for his infinitely perfect nature is both voluntary and steadfast, hence in a special sense, necessary; how this dual aspect of his will affects his relationship to creatures, with whom he always deals according to right reason and some ordained and methodical way (*ordinate/ ordinatissime*); in what sense God could be said to have revealed his will naturally to creatures, particularly to moral law. Cf. Allan Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the will and morality*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1997), 5.

differences between the Greek world and Christian world, respectively represented by Aristotle and Scotus; the moral goodness and right reason; the efficient causality, and the relation between the will and the virtues.

## I. The differences between the Greek world and Christian world

Although it was in the Greek antiquity that the ideals and theories of virtues emerged, however the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle has been making its author representative of virtue theory, especially since William of Moerbeke completed the translation of the entire work from the original Greek between 1260 and 1280. In this classical text, the virtues, both moral and intellectual, are immediately related to the realization of the ultimate goal; there exists a mutual relationship between happiness (*eudaimonia*) and virtue (*arête*) which form the core of the Stagirite's theory. However, in the context of medieval period, when confronting with the Christian view, the Aristotelian scheme reveals some key differences. According to Hare,

in Aristotle's scheme, there is a God (or gods), but there is no distinction between natural and supernatural...In Aristotle's system, God is natural in every way except that God does not grow or move or change. In the Christian picture, there are two realms, heaven and earth...God acts towards us.<sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere, he still makes this remark:

The idea of God of the Greeks is the idea of God attracting us, like a magnet, so that we desire to become more like God...In the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the central notion is that of God commanding us...The Greeks favor *the good* in their account of the relation of morality and religion, and the Judeo-Christian account favors *the right*, or obligation."<sup>12</sup>

In such a natural framework, the Philosopher (Aristotle) has adequately accounted

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<sup>11</sup> Hare, *op. cit.* 76-7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

for the nature of human fulfillment,<sup>13</sup> defended the power of natural reason to know its ultimate<sup>14</sup> and those means necessary to attain it. Consequently, no revelation is needed for human perfection, and virtues are natural and necessary means whereby such fulfillment is reached,

Against this naturalistic vision of human perfection, Scotus, along with the theologians, in one hand, defends divine freedom and liberality, on the other hand, philosophically sustains the need for revelation for the human person to reach his natural destiny with supernatural help.<sup>15</sup> In other words, human nature would be better known by means of revelation. And that is what philosophers are failing in identifying the higher perfection of a rational nature.

Because God is not the Unmoved Mover as Aristotle held, but rather unconditional love as Scripture teaches, a far more effective philosophical effort would begin with love rather than knowledge, and consequently with the will rather than the intellect....Accordingly, human fulfillment would be understood as the perfection of ordered loving, founded upon the natural human desire to love the highest good above all and for itself alone.”<sup>16</sup>

Besides these differences between Aristotle's scheme and the Christian scheme, as for Scotus, his discussion of the science of praxis reverses that of Aristotle. Indeed, the latter presents ethics within a larger order of natural necessity, that means it is

a science of the contingent whose truth was defined by its object, a contingent state of affairs, framed within a larger order of natural necessity. By contrast,

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<sup>13</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 6-9 describes the life of speculation and contemplation as a life completely capable of fulfilling the human desire to know.

<sup>14</sup> *De Anima* III; cf. The controversy between philosophers and theologians in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, centered on the idea of human perfection or happiness and upon the need of revelation. See Mary Beth Ingham, “Duns Scotus, Morality and Happiness: A Reply to Thomas Williams”, in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 74 (2000), 173-195.

<sup>15</sup> “But I go further when I say that there is another, higher form of speculation that can be received naturally. Consequently, nature in this regard is honored even more than if one were to claim that the highest possible perfection it could receive is that which is naturally attainable.” Wolter, “Duns Scotus on the Necessity of Revealed Knowledge.” *Franciscan Studies* II, 3-4 (1951), 265.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Beth Ingham and Mechthild Dreyer, *The philosophical vision of John Duns Scotus*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 125.

Scotus understands the larger frame to be contingency, not necessity....This larger frame of contingency influences the way Scotus seeks to ground moral science on logical necessity of first principles, and upon the divine will in contingently creating this sort of world with natures of these sorts and relationships of the kind that we find.<sup>17</sup>

Not only Scotus' affirmation of the radical contingency of divine action reflects his denying of the natural necessity by which means are directed toward pre-determined ends, in both *Lectura* and *Ordinatio Prologues*, his presentation of the contours of a practical science<sup>18</sup>, based on Aristotle's discussion in Book VI, ch.2 (1139a22-25) of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, shows his focus on the will and rational choice. Because for him, the will, essentially identified with freedom and being the only rational faculty man possesses, is the locus for the discussion of moral science, both as the source and the perfections of ethics.<sup>19</sup>

## II. Moral goodness and right reason

In the distinction 17 of the *Ordinatio* I, Scotus tries to give a definition of moral goodness<sup>20</sup> by comparing it to corporeal beauty. As a beautiful body is a combination of all aspects (that pertain to all that is agreeable to such a body and are in harmony with one another,) so the moral goodness of an act is a harmonious interrelationship of many items (the faculty of the will, the object it seeks, the conditions under which it does so, as the time, the place, the manner...)<sup>21</sup> which give the act a certain beauty or décor; however,

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 129.

<sup>18</sup> See Wolter, *op. cit.* 33-4.

<sup>19</sup> For a reading in details, see Ingham and Meyer, *ibid.* 127-132.

<sup>20</sup> Here the moral goodness is that goodness inherent in an act of choice which, by virtue of its human character, is termed moral. Therefore, without freedom, human action could never be termed moral. It must proceed from a rational power, having not only the consciousness of its own act, but also control over it. And moral goodness is the background against which the role of virtue is best understood.

<sup>21</sup> *Op. Oxon.*, I, d. 17, q. 3, n.2. For Scotus, the moral act is the result of due proportion between the potency (the will which must be free), the object (which must be good in itself), and the end (which must tend toward God in place, time, and manner).

among these conditions, the right reason is the most important, since, regardless of the object, the act is good or not in so far as it is in harmony with right reason or not.

...for whatever be the object, and howsoever the act has to do with it, if it is not performed according to right reason (for instance, if right reason did not actually dictate its performance), then the act is not good. The moral goodness of the act, then, consists mainly in its conformity with right reason – dictating fully just how all the circumstances that surround the act should be.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of the Aristotelian categories, Scotus refers to it as an accident, not something absolute like quantity or quality, but rather as a relation. In this way, Scotus represents moral goodness as the integrity of all conditions and circumstances, under the direction of right reason which functions as measure for the goodness of the act. He justifies here an objective, rational basis for moral goodness and for his moral theory as well, in light of the important role played by the will: since the good act is not as means to a good end (the life of virtue), but rather as the conformity of all aspects to the demands (*dictamen*) of right reason, its synthesizing statement: “an act is good because it conforms to right reason”, obviously affirms the legality of *recta ratio* (*orthos logos*): acts are measured by maxims or norms. *Recta ratio* objectively guarantees the moral goodness of an act; it replaces objective good or moral finality. It plays then an extremely important role within the realm of moral goodness.<sup>23</sup> Three passages help clarify Scotus' presentation of *recta ratio* as norm or objective measure (...*tanquam mensuratum mensurae*):

...so that we can say that for all [acts] that the suitability of the act to right reason is that by which the act is good...(Ord. I, 17, n.62, 164.4-6)

...it is necessary for the moral goodness of the moral act that the complete dictate of right reason precede it, to which dictate it conforms as measured to

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<sup>22</sup> Ord. I, dist. 17, n. 62, 164. 6-11.

<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas also supports the view that right reason is the basis on which to judge good human action: “...et actus humanis, qui dicitur moralis, habet speciem ab objecto relato ad principium actuum humanorum, quod est ratio.” *ST*, I-II, 18, art. 8 in corp.

measure (n. 92, 184. 14-17)

...for the right [correct] dictate precedes prudence in an unqualified manner...(n. 93, 184. 20- 185.1)

In these passages, Scotus points out a legal perspective within it he presents an important point in his moral theory, namely the workings of prudence and the nature of moral goodness.

All moral activity seems to begin with the “dictamen” or the dictates, which precede the full development of right reason. The norm is prior to activity: both the development of prudence and moral goodness is “measured” by these dictamen...What is clear is that the activity of right reason in this text relates more directly to the dictamen or canons of behavior than a goal or teleological perspective.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to remember Scotus' distinction of the three types of moral goodness, each corresponding to a manner in which the act is ordered.

I say that...in addition to this [*note*: ontological goodness] there is a threefold moral goodness according to its grade. The first of these is generic goodness; the second goodness could be called virtuous or circumstantial goodness; the third, meritorious or gratuitous goodness or goodness as ordered to a reward by reason of the divine acceptance.<sup>25</sup>

In *Reportatio II*, 40, *unica*, this triple goodness of the act is defined as natural, moral and gratuitous. “...the second in the act is moral, and it is called such whence it is blameworthy or praiseworthy; this however is from a free efficient cause” (*haec autem est a causa efficiente libere*). “Moral” replaces “virtuous” and refers to the imputability<sup>26</sup> of an act to a free agent. The moral act is then considered as the effect of a free efficient

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<sup>24</sup> Ingham, *Ethics and Freedom*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> *Ord.* II, 7 *unica*.

<sup>26</sup> Concerning the dimension of imputability and thus the aspect of power, see *Quodlibet Question* 18; cf. Ingham, *ibid.* 157-162.



cause. Thus, while the norm measures the objective moral goodness, the power of the agent defines the responsibility (*imputabilitas*) of the act to the agent. "From all this it is clear that an act is not imputable and formally good in a moral sense for the same reason. It has moral goodness because it conforms to a rule or norm as it should. It is imputable because it lies in the free power of the agent."<sup>27</sup> And Ingham concludes that

Thus, there is not just one manner in which the goodness of an act may be considered, but several depending upon the given perspective. Virtuous or moral goodness refers to the will, to circumstances which surround the act and to the conformity of the choice to right reason...It is a function of human reason and will, defined generally in terms of the harmony of all circumstances to the dictates of right reason.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, virtuous or moral goodness refers to the will, to circumstances which surround the act and to the conformity of the choice to right reason. In this way, the emphasis moves then *from* the end which unites all these circumstances *to* right reason which judges them appropriate. In other words, it is the shift in emphasis from ultimate goal to rational freedom. The increased importance of right reason as norm or measure for human goodness, results directly from a preference for efficient causality, and accordingly, the will, considered as an active potency is the principal efficient cause of the act.<sup>29</sup>

### III. The efficient causality

The efficient causality holds then a central place in Scotus' theory. In fact, what makes Scotus preoccupied is to defend a type of causality which is free, ensuring him a perspective in which the divine freedom can be defended.

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<sup>27</sup> *Quodlibet* 18. n.10, 242a-b.

<sup>28</sup> Ingham, *ibid.* 152-3: "Scotus defines then the moral goodness neither within a context of the means toward happiness, in the manner of Aristotle nor of beatitude, as in the case of Aquinas."

<sup>29</sup> *Quodlibet* 18. n. 9: For Scotus, the will alone possesses the indifference or indeterminacy with regard to contradictories in which freedom properly consists.

In distinguishing the natural from the free, the Franciscan is obliged to reduce the importance of final causality, for it appears to necessitate moral goodness and to remove self-determination from the will. Once objective finality is removed, objective rationality takes its place as guarantee of the goodness of moral action. The rational becomes the law against which all actions are judged.<sup>30</sup>

Scotus restricts then final causation (causation by purpose or end) to causation by an intelligent agent.

An agent can be highly intelligent in judging what promotes its happiness, choosing and acting accordingly. However, to be morally responsible, he needs a potency called will, which can act against the natural desire for its own well being.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, contrary to the opinion of many, it is not the finality that he rejects, but what he rejects is the necessity which accompanies it: moral finality would no longer be linked to mechanistic determinism. Instead, he emphasizes the intention of the agent because the intention of the agent shapes the end and gives it its final meaning. For example, the form of a house in the mind of a builder is the efficient cause of the house that he builds. The place of the end is absorbed by the object and placed within the will as part of its intentionality. To express it in another way, the final cause of an effect is the end or purpose (the *telos*) that an intelligent agent adopts in producing that effect. This final cause is described then as operating efficiently within the mind of the agent, and consequently, as said above, this description influences the presentation of moral goodness: the rational becomes the law against which all actions are judged. This leads to an important remark that one cannot discern the nature of an action in itself, or that a statement of the physical act is not sufficient to establish the morality of the act, but rather that one must consider the act in relation to the intention to understand it

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<sup>30</sup> Ingham, *ibid.* 167.

<sup>31</sup> *Ord III* d. 17; II, d. 6, q. 2.

fully.<sup>32</sup> That is to say the moral question for Scotus focuses on the question of motivation. Scotus himself provides the example of almsgiving: the act of giving money to a homeless person could be performed from different motives, for example from the natural or unconscious habitual disposition of giving generously, or from a desire to make the person feel inferior, even from the pleasure to unburden one's own bulging pocket of coins. The same act done from free choice would be morally good or virtuous, because it is done under the control of the agent's will, according to rational reflection.<sup>33</sup> Shannon summarizes the point meaningfully: "given the turn to efficient causality, objective morality is constituted not by the act's defining the intention, but *in the intention's defining the act*."<sup>34</sup>

In other words, the objective moral finality is relegated to a secondary level of importance, and voluntary intention<sup>35</sup> is emphasized when Scotus defines moral goodness in terms of right reason as norm for morally good behavior, and operation of the rational will within the act of choice.<sup>36</sup> The end or object of the act appears within the will as the reason or intention. Like that, the end is the most important factor determining the moral value of an act.<sup>37</sup> Ingham resumes excellently this position of Scotus:

The intentionality of the will is finalized by the good. The good, which as external reality is termed final cause, operates as an internal efficient causality... Thus, he does not deny final causality, but explains it in terms of efficient causality within the intention of the agent.<sup>38</sup>

The fact that the perspective of finality receives little attention is not a function of an ethical option, but the result of a methodological choice for efficient causality from

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Quodlibet*, q. 18; *Ord.* III, suppl. Dist. 38, a. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ord.* II, 7, nn. 28-30.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas A. Shannon, *The ethical theory of John Duns Scotus. A dialogue with Medieval and Modern Thought*, (Quincy, IL.: Franciscan Press, Quincy University, 1995), 127.

<sup>35</sup> Ingham notes that "the importance for moral goodness is not a Scotist innovation, but can be found in Bonaventure, who states that an act's goodness depends totally upon the right intention by which it is linked to the end." See *Sent.* II, 40, art. 1, q.2, n. 2 cf. Ingham *op. cit.* 174, note 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Questions on the Metaphysics* IX, q. 15.

<sup>37</sup> *Quodlibet* q. 18, n.6; *Ord.* 2, d. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Ingham, *op. cit.* 161. 174.

Scotus' point of view: the emphasis upon the subjective aspect of the agent.

This person-centered perspective grounds and directs Scotus' moral discussion. Happiness, like health, is not a state to be achieved, nor a static goal of an absolute perfection. The person is the moral subject: both as end and source for moral activity. Moral development involves development of the person, one who is able to respond rationally and freely, morally and creatively, to the demands of a given situation.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, Scotus maintains that moral living includes free and natural components which lie in the constitution of the will<sup>40</sup> and in the human orientation toward goodness. We are motivated by what is just (in Latin *honestum*) and not only by what is good for us. He refers here to the distinction of the two affections of the will: *affectio commodi*, *affectio iustitiae*<sup>41</sup>. The former is a natural tendency of the will towards its own good, to desire what is advantageous to oneself; this tendency is the connection of the free will to its goal, but does not affect moral choice whereas the latter, being a pure, selfless love, that means to love something according to its intrinsic worth, specifies the free will. A moral agent therefore should have an inclination for justice in order to control the natural appetite for what he believes most advantageous to himself:

This inclination for justice, which is the primary moderator of the inclination for the advantageous – inasmuch as it is not necessary that the will actually seeks that to which the inclination for advantageous tends, and inasmuch as it is not necessary that the will seeks this above all else (namely, to the extent

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<sup>39</sup> Ingham and Dreyer, *The philosophical vision*, 200; see also 240.

<sup>40</sup> "Scotus' notion of the will is a combination of what Aristotle said about rational and nonrational "potencies" and what Anselm said about freedom. The will is distinct from nature precisely because it is a power that can act at any given moment and under any set of external circumstances in more than one way, whereas natural powers or potencies, given all preconditions for acting, are determined by their very nature to act in the way they do, then all natural powers, including the intellect itself, are basically "nonrational" whereas the will alone is capable of effecting at any given moment more than one sort of volition or nolition." (Wolter, *Scotus and Ockham* (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2003), 174..

<sup>41</sup> *Ord. III*, 26, unica, n. 17, Vives XV, 340b; *Ord. II*, d. 6, q. 2, Vives XII, 355b; *Rep. II*, 6, q. 2, n. 9; *Ord. II*, d. 6, q. 2, Vives XII, 353b.

the inclination for the advantageous disposes it)- this inclination for justice, I say, is the freedom innate to the will, because it is the primary moderator of the inclination for the advantageous.<sup>42</sup>

This “first checkrein” opens the possibility of not pursuing what is most to our advantage and makes Scotus call the affection for justice “the liberty innate to the will”, “the ultimate specific difference of a free appetite”<sup>43</sup> It is then the rational activity of the will, and not natural inclinations, which constitutes moral excellence (*arête*)

#### IV. The will and the virtues

The reception of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the 13<sup>th</sup> century raises a vivid moral discussion among the medieval schoolmen. Concretely speaking, the key ethical concepts in the *Ethics* like virtue (*arête*), happiness (*eudaimonia*) as well as their mutual relationship undergo a renewed understanding within the context of an implication into a Christian moral philosophy. And through the discussions, the notion of practical habit, the natural capacity of human persons to acquire moral character through the exercise of moral reasoning and action is largely focused by the scholars.

Like the other medievals,<sup>44</sup> Scotus considers virtue as a disposition (*habitus*) produced by repetition and inclines one to perform similar acts repeatedly.

Therefore since the will is not more determined of itself toward one than is the intellect, a certain facility inclining to similar acts can be generated in it by its acts frequently elicited and this I call virtue.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ord.* II, d. 6, q.2.

<sup>43</sup> *Reportatio* 2, dist. 6. q.2 n.9: its presence is what turns an appetite into a free appetite. E. Hare remarks that “because of the absence of the affection of justice in Aristotle's account, he is committed to the view that everything we do is for the sake of our own happiness (even if we do not represent this to ourselves.” John E. Hare, *op. cit.* 92.

<sup>44</sup> St. Thomas also defines virtue as *habitus*: “Unde virtus humana non importat ordinem ad esse, sed magis ad agere. Et ideo de ratione virtutis humanae est quod sit habitus operativus.” *ST* I-II, 55, art. 2 in corp.

<sup>45</sup> *Ord.* III, 33, unica, n.5, Vives XV, 442b.

Nevertheless, since his discussion of virtue is integrated within his larger consideration of the will, and that his emphasis on the freedom within the will as primary moral element,<sup>46</sup> the virtues represent for him as essentially natural dispositions toward good actions which never replace free choice. As habitus toward a mechanic repetition of similar acts, virtue fosters automatic behavior. Like any mechanical action, once generated, it repeats itself, and it thus follows the laws of natural, necessary causality. That is to say, there is the natural element in each habitus.<sup>47</sup> Besides, generated by a good act, virtue repeats the good act, but the direction must come from right reason, formed by the dictamen. That means virtue is determined by and in connection with right reason,<sup>48</sup> and conformable to its dictates<sup>49</sup> Stated otherwise, virtue cannot be a sufficient and necessary condition for the moral goodness of an act, on the contrary, an act is morally good because it conforms to all that the agent's right reason dictates. Like that, Scotus separates the notion of virtue as natural inclination from the act of choice which is the source of moral virtue.

Although virtue neither “makes one's act good,”<sup>50</sup> nor is it a necessary condition for moral choice,- as it is for Aristotle and St. Thomas-, it is an important element in moral activity, because the natural inclination toward the good is a fundamental aspect of the will, and that the virtuous dispositions do influence the manner in which a person acts. Someone acting with virtue, all other things being equal, is able to act more perfectly than somebody without one. The action is then more perfect if it comes from a virtuous habit in addition to the act of the will.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, both freedom and natural inclination are equally related to the perfect moral act, however, their importance for the moral act is not equal: The will is the principal cause of the act, and the habit is only a cooperating

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<sup>46</sup> “The free dimension is obviously the superior order, since free choice in the will defines the moral realm as voluntary and therefore rational. All virtues belong to the will and are subject to the will's freedom.” Ingham, *op.cit.* 194-5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ord.* IV, 46, q. 1, n. 8, Vives XX, 425b “et ad illum actum in se inclinatur habitus aliquis ex natura habitus.”

<sup>48</sup> *Collationes* I, n.11, Vives v, 137b. “...since virtue is an elective habit determined by right reason.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ord.* I, d. 17. pars.1, q. 2, n. 64, 165.20-166.3: “inclinatur ad actum qui sit conformis rectae rationi..”

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, qq.1-2, n. 100; 3, suppl. d. 33; moral virtue, a form of *habitus*, adds nothing substantially to the good act, other than the aspect of its conformity to right reason cf. *ibid.* n. 65, 167.2-3.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Ingham, *The Harmony of Goodness*, 84-86.

cause: "I hold the habitus to be partial cause regarding the act" and unnecessary for its completion "[that] it be second and not first cause, but that potency be first cause and absolute" <sup>52</sup>

Consequently, although the primary place in morality belongs to the will, it still needs to be supplemented by virtues to make the action more perfect. It is the relationship of habitus to act, of natural causality to free causality, of "efficient co-causality"<sup>53</sup>: virtue and act of will being two efficient causes of the same effect.

However, it [the potency] works less perfectly without the habitus than with it (and this granted equal effort on the part of the potency) as when two causes concur toward one effect, one alone cannot by itself [cause] the effect as perfectly as the two can together. And in this way is saved [the position] whereby the act is more intense coming from the potency and habitus than from the potency alone: not indeed because the potency as the cause of the substance of the act, and habitus as cause of its intensity (as if two causes corresponded to two effects), but because two concurring causes can produce a more perfect effect than either one alone, --which effect however in itself a whole and a "per se one" is from two causes, but in diverse relations to the things causing.<sup>54</sup>

Stated otherwise, the act of the will is the primary cause, which could be sufficient by itself, and virtue is a secondary cause making the action more perfect.

## Conclusion

Scholars unanimously recognize that Scotus' fundamental preoccupation is the freedom of the will. For him, the will is essentially free and directed toward justice. In

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<sup>52</sup> "Concedo, propter istas rationes, quod tenendo habitum esse causam partialem respectu actus....esset causa secunda et non prima, sed ipsa potentia esset causa prima et absolute..."*Ord.* I, d. 17, pars 1, q.2, n. 40, 154. 9-10.12.

<sup>53</sup> *Additiones* II, 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ord. I*, d.17, pars I, q.2, n.40, 154. 12-23.

reality, within the cultural milieu and methodological crisis of the late thirteenth century, concretely in response to the heterodox theses of 1277, Scotus wants to insist upon the divine freedom. To protect the divine freedom is fundamental to his theory. In other words, primarily, he does not intend to develop an ethical theory, but rather a causal explanation of divine and human freedom.<sup>55</sup> “It is his desire to protect divine freedom that results in the distinction of free vs. natural and the preference for efficient causality.”<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, it is within the articulation of a free causality that right reason, considered as norm or measure for moral goodness, should be understood.<sup>57</sup> Since the rational freedom is now considered as criterion for moral goodness, the virtues are hence no longer seen as constituting moral behavior and leading to the ultimate goal of happiness.

In sum, Scotus' thought on the primacy of the will and freedom, especially the notion of rational will, definitively influences his account of virtue. Like that, he may

a. create an intriguing opportunity for reflection upon the human activity which is a complex combination and interaction of the free and the natural components, upon the dialectic between the human and divine – grace and nature as well,<sup>58</sup> and offer a “voluntarist”<sup>59</sup> perspective grounding the moral order on love, because for Scotus, “the highest activity is love, the highest faculty is the will and the highest object is God.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Scotus preoccupies to develop not an ethical theory of freedom, but a causal one, to separate free from natural causality. This is the main conclusion of Ingham in her “*Ethics and Freedom*, 244. 258.

<sup>56</sup> Ingham, *op. cit.* 241.

<sup>57</sup> It is the reason why Hare himself writes that: “it is easy to conclude from this [ *Ord.* I, dis. 17, 62] and similar passages that Scotus is saying that divine command is not necessary for the moral goodness of an act, since our reason is sufficient, and therefore that Scotus is not a divine command theorist at all.” John E. Hare, *op. cit.* 103. He also notes at the footnote 49 of the same page that : “This is Richard Cross’s conclusion in *Duns Scotus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 90”.

<sup>58</sup> Ingham suggests here a very important question for contemporary scholars, namely how is philosophical ethics autonomous from theological influences? Cf. *Op.cit.* 256-57.

<sup>59</sup> “To determine the priority or the primacy of one of these faculties of the soul, namely, intellect and will, we must determine by which faculty created being comes to possess Infinite Being. According to the way one solves that problem, he is classified as an intellectualist or a voluntarist.” Pierre Rousselot, S.J., *The intellectualism of St. Thomas*, Trans. James E. O’Mahomy, O.F.M. Cap (New York: Sheed & Ward: 1935), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ingham, *The philosophical vision*, 126.



b. offer, within the current socio-political and cultural context, where has been occurring a “moral fragmentation in light of a loss of virtues,” and where the rationality and the liberality as well are promoting at the expense of the traditional virtues, a relevant orientation for moral behavior: the education of the intention, of the right reason in matters of morality of the agent, in order to do something “worth doing or enjoying”, something that is significant to the person said to be free: “When rational self-control is developed, the ability for self-determination reveals freedom for values and for the integrity of commitment.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ingham, *The Harmony of Goodness*, 45.

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## 董思高的德行觀點

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**內容摘要：**在 1250 年左右，受到整個「尼可瑪古倫理學」的影響，德行被認為是構成人類生活充實和幸福的元素。因此，當董思高強調把自由意志當作是首要的道德因素時——因為對思高來講，意志是倫理德行的所在——在這裡引起了很多問題，比如：如果這樣的話，德行還佔有什麼空間呢？德行是第二本性的觀念該如何與自由意志結合在一起呢？而它在倫理生活中又扮演怎樣的角色呢？簡單來說，由於思高堅持意志的優先性，他怎樣為倫理善提供一個客觀基礎的證明？

事實上，十三世紀晚期正處在文化脈絡與方法論的危機之內，具體來說，這是為了回應 1277 年異端的論題，而思高卻堅持要求神聖的自由。因此，他主要的目的不是為了發展一個道德理論，而是為神和人的自由因果做一個解釋。這個解釋造成了一種自由與自然相對的區別，並且引出一個對動力因果關係的優先性。

因此，正當的理性在自由的因果關係之內相連接，這被認為是倫理善的基礎或規範，也意味著德行已不再被視為是構成倫理行為和到達幸福的終極目標。

思高對於德行的說法，可能激起一個人類反思的動機，提供一個以愛作為道德秩序基礎的洞察，促進良知的教育 尤其正當的理性

在道德方面中的教育，這些就是為了履行「值得做的或高興做的事情」，這也是對一個自由的人真有意義。

**關鍵詞：**意志、德行、幸福、倫理善、正當的理性、動因、自由、自然、為利益的情感、為正義的情感