



Scotus on the Will



Overview

John Duns Scotus

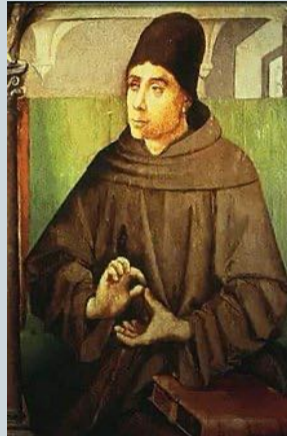
Freedom

Happiness

Implications

John Duns Scotus (1266?–1308)

- Scotus = Scot (but, cf. John Scotus Eriugena!)
- OFM
- Studied in Oxford, then Paris, from which he gets expelled for political reasons
- Oxford, Paris, Cologne; influenced by Henry.
- Nickname: *doctor subtilis*, the “Subtle Doctor”
- Famous doctrines: synchronic contingency; univocity of being



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Reminder: Freedom in Aquinas

- the will is an intellectual appetite and *not* a sensory appetite
- intellectual appetite is aimed at objects as presented by the intellect; while sense appetite at objects presented by the senses.
- sense provides only particulars → the sense appetite is not free
- the intellect deals with universals → the intellectual appetite *is* free (since the universal includes many particulars).
- So, the will is not free with respect to its universal object (happiness), but it *is* free with respect to its particular object (*this* or *that* happiness).

Scotus: this won't do: if the will is not free with respect to the universal object, then it won't be free with respect to its particular object either – we'd lose all the freedom.

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Scotus on the Will

Reminders:

- **Anselm**: 2 inclinations of the will — will for happiness / will for justice
- **Henry**: will as self-mover; the intellect is only an advisor

Scotus: this is basically right.

- the will is the only rational faculty humans have! (Rational powers are distinguished from natural powers by their capacity to select either of 2 contraries, but the intellect cannot but assent if there is enough evidence.)
- the will is a self-mover: it can determine itself, and be an efficient cause of its own volition.
- 2 inclinations:
 - ① natural will: a tendency of the will to seek happiness
 - ② free will: an act of self-determination; will for justice (*affectio iustitiae*)

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- does freedom presuppose this? – intuitively, yes.
- Aristotle: yes (perhaps. . .), but whatever is happening *now*, is necessary.
- the intellectual appetite per Aquinas can maybe free successively, but not synchronously
- **Scotus**: it's synchronic contingency that we need for real freedom! – motivation: uncertainty in the time of action; choice whether or not to act at all.

Synchronic Contingency

- intellectual appetite cannot guarantee freedom needed for morality
- *At the very moment* I will x , I also need to be able to will y . If the will had no power over the opposite in the very instant, then nothing would be contingent. (This is also true about the divine will, which grounds all contingency.)
- this is a break-through when it comes to thinking about modality! Modality becomes detached from temporality; the present can be contingent.

Scotus on modality

“I do not call contingent everything that is not eternal; I refer to something the opposite is possible even at the very moment it occurs.”

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The Will for Happiness

Do we seek happiness necessarily?

- Aquinas and Henry: yes (in general, but not in particular)
- Scotus: no
 - will as nature vs. will as free appetite

“There is a two-fold appetite or ‘will’: one, namely, that is natural; another that is free” (183).

- will as nature: does seek happiness necessarily, as every nature does
- will as free: no; it can always will or nill, and there is no necessarily elicited act. (We can’t desire unhappiness, but we can always not-desire happiness, and vice versa.)

The will is so free that not even God could force it! (Since that would imply a contradiction.)

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Aquinas:

- natural inclination toward happiness, which then determines the content of morality
- the moral laws are derived from this – cf. Aristotle; the point of morality is to be happy (*eudaimonistic* ethics).
- will as intellectual appetite for happiness
- our choices are good (and make sense) only if they are aimed at the ultimate end.

Scotus:

- rejects the idea of will as a merely intellectual appetite
- morality is not tied to human flourishing!
- we need **libertarian freedom** for morality; moral laws are not bound up with human happiness.
- divine command theory – God could have created a different world, and could have given the same world different moral commands.

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Concepts of Freedom

- **Augustine**: free will is a power for opposites.
- **Damascus**: free will is the ability to choose the good (no-coercion + sourcehood).
- **Anselm (OFC)**: free choice is the power to preserve rectitude of will for the sake of rectitude itself.
- **Al-Ghazali**: free will is what can discriminate and choose between altogether similar things.
- **Aquinas**: free will is rational deliberation about the best means to a desired end.
- **Henry**: the will is free because it moves itself.
- **Scotus**: the will is free because it can will otherwise *even when it wills*.

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