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John Duns Scotus's Metaphysics of Goodness: Adventures in 13th-Century Metaethics

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John Duns Scotus's Metaphysics of Goodness:

Adventures in 13th-Century Metaethics

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

To the wife of my youth, who with patience and long-suffering endured much so that I might gain a little knowledge. And to God, *fons de bonitatis*. She encouraged me; he sustained me. Both have blessed me.

“O taste and see that the LORD is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!!”

--Psalm 34:8

“You are the boundless good, communicating your rays of goodness so generously, and as the most lovable being of all, every single being in its own way returns to you as its ultimate end.”

–John Duns Scotus, *De Primo Principio*

Soli Deo Gloria.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Introduction: The Priority of Goodness	1
Vetus Latina, Antiqua Auctoritas	1
The Significance of Analyzing Goodness in Duns Scotus	4
Dissertation Overview	7
Chapter One: Creation and Nature: A History of Being and Goodness	11
The Nature Approach.....	12
Aristotle.....	12
Augustine	14
The Creation Approach.....	25
Aquinas’s Synthesis.....	30
Scotus on Being and Goodness.....	33
Chapter Two: The Convertibility of Being and Good and the Nature of the Transcendentals	37
The Convertibility of Being and Good	38
The Traditional Account of Convertibility	42
Philip the Chancellor.....	42
Albert the Great.....	45
Thomas Aquinas	48
Scotus: Being and Good are Formally Distinct	54
Conclusion	60
Chapter Three: Scotus’s Nature approach: Augustinian Hierarchy of Goods	63
Goodness and Perfection.....	64
The Hierarchy of Substances	66
The Hierarchy of Goodness	76
Chapter Four: Secondary Goodness.....	80
The Meaning of ‘Convenientia’	81
Secondary Goodness as a Secondary Perfection	85
Secondary Goodness as a Non-Absolute Quality	87
Secondary Goodness in Comparison with Beauty.....	88
An Aside: Beauty and the Transcendentals	95
Conclusion	100

Chapter Five: Generic, Moral, and Meritorious Goodness Prior to Scotus	104
Peter Lombard.....	105
Peter of Poitiers.....	109
Philip the Chancellor.....	113
Albert the Great.....	123
Bonaventure	129
Thomas Aquinas: A Different Approach.....	132
The Convertibility of Being and Good	133
The Application of Convertibility to Acts	133
Conclusion	139
Chapter Six: Scotus on Generic, Moral, and Meritorious Goodness.....	142
Secondary Natural Goodness	148
Moral Goodness: Regulated by <i>Recta Ratio</i>	144
Generic Goodness	150
Specific Goodness.....	154
Meritorious Goodness.....	161
Implications.....	174
Chapter Seven: Badness.....	183
Badness and Primary Goodness.....	183
Badness and Secondary Goodness.....	184
Secondary Natural Badness	184
Secondary Moral Badness.....	185
Generic Badness.....	187
Moral Badness	192
Meritorious Badness	197
Conclusion	202
Chapter Eight: Divine Commands, Natural Law, and the Establishment of Moral Norms.....	204
Divine Dependence.....	205
Unrestricted and Restricted Divine Command Theories	209
Divine Willing or Commanding?.....	237
What Type of Dependence?.....	238
Conclusion	245
Chapter Nine: The Separation of Goodness from Rightness.....	247
The Separation of Goodness from Rightness.....	247
The Problem.....	252
Conclusion	274
Conclusion	276
References.....	281

ABSTRACT

At the center of all medieval Christian accounts of both metaphysics and ethics stands the claim that being and goodness are necessarily connected, and that grasping the nature of this connection is fundamental to explaining the nature of goodness itself. In that vein, medievals offered two distinct ways of conceiving this necessary connection: the nature approach and the creation approach. The nature approach explains the goodness of an entity by an appeal to the entity's nature as the type of thing it is, and the extent to which it fulfills or perfects the potentialities in its nature. In contrast, the creation approach explains both the being and goodness of an entity by an appeal to God's creative activity: on this view, both a thing's being and its goodness are derived from, and explained in terms of, God's being and goodness. Studies on being and goodness in medieval philosophy often culminate in the synthesizing work of Thomas Aquinas, the leading Dominican theologian at Paris in the 13th century, who brought together these two rival theories about the nature of goodness. Unfortunately, few have paid attention to a distinctively Franciscan approach to the topic around this same time period. My dissertation provides a remedy to this oversight by means of a thorough examination of John Duns Scotus's approach to being and goodness—an approach that takes into account the shifting tide toward voluntarism (both ethical and theological) at the University of Paris in the late 13th century. I argue that Scotus is also a synthesizer of sorts, harmonizing the two distinct nature approaches of Augustine and Aristotle with his own unique ideas in ways that have profound

implications for the future of medieval ethical theorizing, most notably, in his rejection of both the natural law and ethical *eudaimonism* of Thomas Aquinas.

After the introduction, I analyze the nature of primary goodness—the goodness that Scotus thinks is convertible with being and thus a transcendental attribute of everything that exists. There, I compare the notion of convertibility of being and goodness among Scotus and his contemporaries. While Scotus agrees with the mainstream tradition that being and goodness are necessarily coextensive properties of everything that exists, he argues that being and good are formally rather than conceptually distinct. I argue that when the referents of being and good are considered, both views amount to the same thing. But when the concepts of being and good are considered, positing a formal distinction does make a good deal of difference: good does not simply add something to being conceptually, but formally: it is a quasi-attribute of being that exists in the world independently of our conception of it. Thus Scotus’s formal distinction provides a novel justification for the necessary connection between being and goodness.

Furthermore, I argue that Scotus holds an Augustinian hierarchy of being. This hierarchical ranking of being is based upon the magnitude or perfection of the thing’s nature. But since goodness is a necessarily coextensive perfection of being, it too comes in degrees dependent upon the type of being, arranged in terms of the same hierarchy. This account, while inspired by Augustine’s hierarchical nature approach, is expressed in terms of Aristotelian metaphysics.

But this necessary connection between being and goodness in medieval philosophy faced a problem: Following Augustine, medievals claimed that “everything that exists is good insofar as it exists.” But how is that compatible with the existence of sinful acts: if every being, in so far as it has being, is good, then every act, insofar as it has being, is good. But if sinful acts are bad,

then we seem to be committed to saying either that bad acts are good, or that not every act, in so far as it has being, is good. This first option seems infelicitous; the second denies Augustine's claims that "everything that exists is good." Lombard and his followers solve this problem by distinguishing ontological goodness from moral goodness and claiming that moral goodness is an accident of some acts and does not convert with being. So the sinful act, qua act, is (ontologically) good. But the sinful act, qua disorder is (morally) bad. Eventually, three distinctive grades of accidental or moral goodness will be applied to human acts: generic, circumstantial, and meritorious. I argue that Scotus follows the traditional account of Peter Lombard, Philip the Chancellor, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure in distinguishing ontological goodness from moral goodness, and claiming that only the former converts with being, while the latter is an accident of the act.

Aquinas, in contrast, writing in the heyday of the Aristotelian renaissance, focuses instead on the role of the act **in** the agent's perfection and posits his convertibility thesis of being and goodness in the moral as well as the metaphysical realm. Thus, when one begins a late medieval discussion with Aquinas, and then considers what Scotus says, it seems as though Scotus is the radical who departs from the conservative teachings of Aquinas. And this is just false: we need to situate both Aquinas and Scotus within the larger Sentence Commentary tradition extending back to Peter Lombard and his followers in order to understand their agreement and divergence from the tradition.

Next, I turn the discussion to Scotus's analysis of rightness and wrongness. I first explore the relationship between rightness and God's will, and situate Scotus's account within contemporary discussions of theological voluntarism. I argue Scotus holds a restricted-causal-will-theory —whereby only contingent deontological propositions depend upon God's will for

their moral status. In contrast to Aquinas, Scotus denies that contingent moral laws—the Second Table of the 10 Commandments (such do not steal, do not murder, etc.)—are grounded in human nature, and thus he limits the extent to which moral reasoning can move from natural law to the moral obligations we have toward one another. In conjunction with these claims, I argue that Scotus distinguishes goodness from rightness: An act’s rightness will depend on its conformity to either (1) a necessary moral truth or (2) God’s commanding some contingent moral truth. The moral goodness of an act, in contrast, involves right reason’s determination of the suitability or harmony of all factors pertaining to the act. In establishing this, also argue that much of the disparity among contemporary Scotus scholarship on the question of whether Scotus was a divine command theorist or natural law theorist should be directly attributed to a failure to recognize Scotus’s separation of the goodness of an act from the rightness of an act.

INTRODUCTION:
THE PRIORITY OF GOODNESS

Vetus Latina, Antiqua Auctoritas

Medieval Christian theologians were obsessed with the concept of goodness—and rightly so, since goodness saturates the Christian religious tradition, stemming from both the biblical witness itself, as well as ancient philosophical and theological authorities. The Bible constantly speaks of God’s goodness, both in his nature as God, and in his dealings with his creatures.

Consider the Psalms, which abound with such ascriptions to God:

- Psalm 31:19: “How great is Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You, which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You, before the sons of men!”¹
- Psalm 65:4: “How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near *to You* to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple.”
- Psalm 107:1: “Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting”
- Psalm 119:68: “You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes.”
- Psalm 34:8 “O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!”

But God, as perfectly good, also calls us to be good and do good too: the prophet Micah

¹ All biblical references are from the New American Standard Bible.

(Micah 6:8) says, “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” And the New Testament authors are replete with similar admonitions: Paul writes to the church at Ephesus to “walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ephesians 5: 9-10). And in Galatians, he writes: “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Goodness also functions in significant, but more subtle ways. For example, the biblical account of creation unites the notions of existence and goodness, such that, insofar as something exists, that thing is good. The biblical writers ground this conceptual unity between existence and goodness in God’s nature as a good God and his creation of things that are in some sense like him—good. The creation account in Genesis, for example, portrays God as recognizing the goodness of what he created: “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). And the Apostle Paul also acknowledged this association of the existence of God’s creation with its goodness: “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude” (1 Timothy 4:4).

Moreover, in the eyes of medieval theologians, the Bible conjoins the notions of goodness and desirability: that in some deep and profound sense, things are desirable because they are good. Both finite and infinite goods are *attractable*—they draw us towards them; they beckon us to come, and to partake in their goodness. To say something is good is to say that it has value, and that it’s worth pursuing. This is especially true of God, the highest good (*summum bonum*). “Taste and see,” the Psalmist says, “that the Lord is Good” (Psalm 34:8). In the same vein, Peter writes, “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by

it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (1 Peter 2:2-3). Thus we are drawn to God as our good and our end, for he is most desirable. In fact, God’s infinite goodness not only makes him a desirable end worth pursuing, but an object *worth* worshipping.

In addition to the preeminence of goodness within the biblical tradition itself, the principal philosophical influences on the high middle ages—Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius, and Pseudo-Dionysius—prioritized goodness as one of the chief concepts to analyze, and the foremost thing worth pursuing. In that vein, many of these ancient sources suggested the *ubiquity* of goodness: that goodness was a property or characteristic of all things. It is not surprising, then, that when late-medieval authors encountered these ancient sources—Christian and Pagan—they sought to incorporate various insights about goodness into their medieval Christian worldview: from Plato, that God is the archetypal good and we are good to the extent that we participate in his goodness; from Aristotle, the notion of the good as an end, and God as the highest end and thus highest good (*summum bonum*); from the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus mediated through Pseudo-Dionysius, that goodness is diffusion of being; from Augustine and his conflict with the Manicheans, that everything that exists is good in so far as it exists; and from Boethius, that God is Goodness and Being itself, existing in the simplicity of his undivided nature, and his goodness functions as the helm and rudder by which the fabric of the universe is kept stable.²

In the hands of capable medieval schoolmen, these notions were embraced and debated in various ways. But one common theme stands out: *Everything that exists, in so far as it exists, is good*. This often repeated and seemingly counterintuitive claim stands at the center of medieval

² Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* III.12, L:44-45.

Christian accounts of both metaphysics and ethics. According to Scott MacDonald, all medieval accounts of being and goodness share the following two common features:

[A] There is some sort of necessary connection between being and goodness which is fundamental to explaining the nature of goodness.

And,

[B] Everything which is, is good.³

Medieval accounts of the relationship between being and goodness differ in so far as they offer diverse accounts of [A] in order to support [B]. In this regard, there are two distinct ways of conceiving the necessary connection between being and goodness: the nature approach and the creation approach. The nature approach explains the goodness of an entity by an appeal to the entity's nature as the type of thing it is and to the extent that it fulfills or perfects the potentialities in its nature—the actualization of its being, and consequently, its goodness. In contrast, the creation approach explains both the being and goodness of an entity by an appeal to God's creative activity: on this view, both a thing's being and its goodness are derived from, and explained in terms of, God's being and goodness—as the archetypal pattern for creaturely goodness, and the infinite source of the diffusiveness of being.

Thus the medieval fascination with goodness and its relationship to being was fueled by two distinct but equally important sources—the Bible and the *antiqua auctoritas*—and by the time of the late 13th century, contained a long and storied history.

The Significance of Analyzing Goodness in Duns Scotus

My dissertation provides a thorough examination of John Duns Scotus's metaethics, specifically, his metaphysics of goodness: how he conceives the nature of goodness, its

³ Scott MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1986, 1-2.

relationship to being, and its normative implications. The rationale behind such a project is threefold.

First, much work has been done on the relation of being and goodness in the medieval tradition between Augustine and Aquinas, especially by Scott MacDonald.⁴ However, very little has been written on the nature of goodness in medieval philosophy *after* Aquinas. Moreover, the being and goodness project is often portrayed as culminating in the synthesizing work of Thomas Aquinas, the leading Dominican theologian at Paris in the 13th century, who brought together these two rival theories about the nature of goodness: the nature approach and the creation approach. Unfortunately, few have paid attention to a distinctively Franciscan approach to the topic around this same time period. I propose to partially remedy both of these oversights by means of a thorough examination of John Duns Scotus's approach to being and goodness—an approach that takes into account the shifting tide toward voluntarism (both ethical and theological) at the University of Paris in the late 13th century. I will argue that Scotus is also a synthesizer of sorts, harmonizing the two distinct nature approaches of Augustine and Aristotle with his own unique ideas in ways that have profound implications for the future of medieval ethical theorizing.

Second, one important reason that little work has been undertaken on Scotus's metaphysics of goodness is that the Subtle Doctor doesn't have one type of goodness to be examined, but many types of goodness, often calling the same concept of goodness by multiple names. At various locations in his writings, Scotus names all of the following as types of goodness: primary goodness, secondary goodness, essential goodness, accidental goodness,

⁴ Scott MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*. See also MacDonald, *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1991).

transcendental goodness, infinite goodness, goodness as a primary perfection of being, goodness as a secondary perfection of being, natural primary goodness, natural secondary goodness, moral goodness, generic goodness, meritorious goodness, gratuitous goodness, goodness as ordered to a reward by reason of divine acceptance, specific goodness, virtuous goodness, circumstantial goodness, perfect goodness, goodness as the end, and goodness as conformity with right reason.

With this in mind, one significant goal of the project is to taxonomize these many forms of goodness found in Scotus, with the aim of (1) getting clear about the relation between being and goodness generally, (2) discerning exactly what Scotus's metaethics looks like, and (3) clarifying the relationship between his metaethics and his normative ethical theory. As it turns out, Scotus's metaethics contain a number of novelties that undergird his decisive break with both the medieval ethical eudaimonism and the natural law of his predecessors.

Finally, by clarifying the various kinds of goodness in Scotus, I hope to show that what many take to be Scotus's normative ethical theory is simply his moral metaphysics; and, while this metaethical account of goodness no doubt relates to his theory of normativity, it is not identical with it. I shall argue that while Scotus's metaethics undergirds his normative ethical theory, it provides such an account with little content: normativity will arise, for the most part, in the role that divine commands (as expressions of the divine will) play in the establishment of moral norms and not so much as the perfecting of one's nature by the fulfillment of one's teleological function.

In doing so, Scotus separates the rightness of an act from the goodness of an act. An act's rightness will depend on its conformity to either (1) a necessary moral truth that has intrinsic moral worth or (2) God's commanding some contingent moral truth that lacks moral value apart from the divine will. The moral goodness of an act, in contrast, involves right

reason's determination of the suitability or harmony of all factors pertaining to the act, which includes factors involved in (1) and (2). Given this, goodness is a broader notion than rightness, such that we could conceive of acts on this model which are right but lack the appropriate moral goodness. In establishing this, I hope to further show that much of the disparity among contemporary Scotus scholarship on the question of whether Scotus was a divine command theorist or natural law theorist should be directly attributed to a failure to recognize Scotus's separation of the goodness of an act from the rightness of an act.

Dissertation Overview

In chapter 1, I sketch out the connection between being and goodness in the medieval tradition prior to the thirteenth century. I first explain and then provide examples of the creation and nature approaches. Next, I show how Aquinas synthesized the two traditions. Finally, I summarize the way in which Scotus holds a synthesized nature approach of Augustine and Aristotle. However, Scotus offers two broad types of goodness—primary and secondary—only one of which is directly connected to being. This distinction will set the stage for the next two sections of the dissertation.

In Part Two, I analyze the nature of primary goodness—the goodness that Scotus thinks is convertible with being and thus a transcendental attribute of everything that exists. Chapter 2 examines the notion of convertibility of being and goodness among Scotus and his contemporaries. While Scotus agrees with the mainstream tradition that being and goodness are necessarily coextensive properties of everything that exists, he argues that being and good are formally rather than conceptually distinct. I argue that when the referents of being and good are considered, both views amount to the same thing. But when the concepts of being and good are considered, positing a formal distinction does make a good deal of difference: good does not

simply add something to being conceptually, but formally: it is a quasi-attribute of being that exists in the world independently of our conception of it. Thus Scotus's formal distinction provides a novel conception of [A] in order to explain [B].

In chapter 3, I argue that Scotus holds an Augustinian hierarchy of being. This hierarchical ranking of being, based upon the magnitude or perfection of the thing's nature, Scotus calls "an order of eminence."⁵ I then argue that since goodness is a necessarily coextensive perfection of being, it comes in degrees dependent upon the type of being, arranged in terms of the same hierarchy. I conclude that Scotus subscribes to the well-worn adage that *Everything that exists, in so far as it exists, is good*, and thus there is a necessary connection between being and goodness. This account, while inspired by Augustine's hierarchical nature approach, is expressed in terms of Aristotelian metaphysics.

In Part Three, I explore Scotus's notion of secondary or accidental goodness—the genre of goodness that does not convert with being and is not transcendental. In chapter 4, I consider Scotus's notion of secondary goodness broadly construed. I argue that Scotus provides four characteristics of secondary goodness: (1) a harmony or suitability (*convenientia*) between two things, (2) a secondary perfection of something, (3) a non-absolute quality, and (4) similar to beauty. Chapters 5 and 6 examine secondary goodness as applied to moral acts. In chapter 5, I sketch out the convoluted history of three types of secondary goodness as applied to human acts: generic, moral, and meritorious. As we will see, Aquinas's approach to such issues differs substantially from the tradition that preceded him. In chapter 6, I examine Scotus's account of generic, moral, and meritorious goodness, and contrast his overall approach to goodness with that of Aquinas. On the metaphysics of goodness, I will argue, Scotus follows the traditional

⁵ *De Primo Principio* I.7.

account of Peter Lombard, Philip the Chancellor, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure in distinguishing ontological goodness from moral goodness, and claiming that only the former converts with being, while the latter is an accident of the act. In contrast, Aquinas does not distinguish such things. In chapter 7, I turn the topic to badness. Since goodness and badness are in some sense contraries, and Scotus has provided a long and complex account of goodness, I examine Scotus's equally multifaceted account of badness that plots along the same trajectory as goodness, but as a mirror opposite.

In Part Four, I turn the discussion to rightness and wrongness. Chapter 8 explores the relationship between rightness and God's will, and situates Scotus's account within contemporary discussions of theological voluntarism. I argue Scotus holds a restricted divine will theory—whereby only contingent deontological propositions depend upon God's will for their moral status. In contrast to Aquinas, Scotus denies that contingent moral laws—the Second Table of the Decalogue—are grounded in human nature, and thus he limits the extent to which moral reasoning can move from natural law to the moral obligations we have toward one another. In chapter 9, I argue that Scotus distinguishes goodness from rightness, and explore the relationship between these concepts in Scotus's ethics. It will become clear from this discussion, that Scotus's ethics as a whole face twin problems: the problem of rationality and the problem of nature. While some scholars perceive a contradiction in Scotus's ethics here, others try to explain away either the rationality or voluntarism in his ethical thought, casting him as either an absurd voluntarist or a crypto-Aristotelian whose ethics more closely resembles Aquinas and the mainstream Catholic tradition. I provide some reasons for thinking that, while the two disparate accounts of morality make for uneasy bedfellows, they are not strictly contradictory, and both have much support in Scotus.

On the whole, I conclude the following from this study. About being and goodness: Scotus holds **[B]**—that everything that exists, is good—and like the tradition that preceded him, he uses **[A]**—the necessary connection between being and goodness—to support **[B]**. There are three important aspects of this account. One, Scotus provides a novel way of accounting for the necessary connection of being and good by positing a formal distinction between them;⁶ two, Scotus adopts an Augustinian nature approach to being and goodness, arranging goodness hierarchically according to being. However, Scotus drops much of Augustine’s Neoplatonism in the process, preferring instead to articulate his account in Aristotelian terminology (i.e., in terms of substance and its relationship to various categories of being). Three, while Scotus does speak about goodness in terms of an end—the Aristotelian version of the nature approach—he denies that the type of goodness which results from it is convertible with being. For readers familiar with Aristotle and Aquinas, this move will seem novel; however, I will argue that it has precedence in Peter Lombard and his followers.

Second, I conclude that Scotus separates rightness from goodness, whereby the former depends primarily upon the divine will and the latter upon a whole host of conditions to be spelled out over the course of the dissertation. Because of this distinction, we will need to evaluate the ways in which Scotus was and was not a voluntarist about moral matters. This separation of the goodness of an act from the rightness of an act will also undergird Scotus’s decisive break with the ethical eudaimonism of Aquinas, while simultaneously diminishing the role of natural law in moral deliberation—at least with respect to how we ought to treat one another.

⁶ I will carefully explain the formal distinction in chapter 2. But for now, suffice it say that two things are formally distinct when they are identical in reality (read: metaphysically inseparable), but have distinct, mind-independent *rationes*.

CHAPTER ONE:

CREATION AND NATURE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF BEING AND GOODNESS

As we saw in the introduction, medieval theologians were infatuated with the relationship between being and goodness. According to Scott MacDonald, all medieval accounts of being and goodness share the following two common features:

[A] There is some sort of necessary connection between being and goodness which is fundamental to explaining the nature of goodness.

[B] Everything which is is good.⁷

Medieval accounts of the relationship between being and goodness differ in so far as they offer diverse accounts of [A] in order to support [B]. As I explained in the introduction, there are two distinct ways of conceiving the necessary connection between being and goodness: the nature approach and the creation approach. The nature approach explains the goodness of an entity by an appeal to the entity's nature as the type of thing it is. On this view, "A thing is good to the extent to which it is a paradigm instance of its kind or nature; and since a thing has being to the extent to which it is a paradigm instance of its kind, each thing will be good to exactly the extent to which it has being."⁸ In contrast, the creation approach—which has also been called more

⁷ Scott MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 1.

⁸ Scott MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 19.

generally, a participation approach⁹— explains both the being and goodness of an entity by an appeal to God’s creative activity: just as an entity exists because God—Being itself—causes it to come into being, so also an entity is good because God—Goodness itself—causes it to have a secondary or derivative goodness. On this view, both a thing’s being and its goodness are derived from and explained in terms of God’s being and goodness, usually in terms of a metaphysical and archetypal dependence—i.e., construed along Platonic lines.

Drawing upon Scott MacDonald’s research, I’ll briefly survey various approaches to being and goodness. I first examine two distinct sources of the nature approach, Aristotle and Augustine. Second, I describe Boethius’s creation approach. Third, I survey Aquinas’s attempt to reconcile the creation and nature approaches. Finally, I briefly situate John Duns Scotus’s account of being and goodness as a development of, and a departure from, the nature approach. Scotus’s distinction between primary goodness and secondary goodness—only the former of which converts with being—will set the stage for the rest of the dissertation.

The Nature Approach

Aristotle

Aristotle’s account of goodness arises naturally within the larger context of his discussion of human flourishing in Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle conceives all action as teleological: agents act for the sake of some end conceived as good; hence Aristotle identifies the notion of good with the notion of an *end*. In the context of this discussion, Aristotle criticizes Plato’s conception of goodness (1.6) and explains his own account (1.7).

According to Aristotle, Plato believed that there is a common form of the good that

⁹ See MacDonald, “The Relationship between Being and Goodness,” in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, 4.

inheres in all things that are said to be good.¹⁰ For example, we make the following claims about things that are said to be good: “that is a good knife,” “that is a good dog,” and “that is a good human,” etc. On Aristotle’s reading of Plato, the reason we can predicate goodness of dissimilar things like artifacts, animals, and humans is that each of these things has a common nature shared by all good things. Aristotle criticizes this view with the following argument:

- (1) If the good were a common nature, it would be spoken of in only one way.
- (2) Good is spoken of in more than one way.
- (3) Therefore, it cannot be a common nature.¹¹

According to Aristotle, there is not some one thing that corresponds to the concept of goodness, but many things; goodness is thus a homonymous concept. As Aristotle defines it, a homonymy exists when two objects share a common name but the definition of their being is different.¹² In support of the above argument, Aristotle argues that the concept of good is predicated of various things that differ in their nature: “Since things are said to be good in as many ways as they are said to be...clearly the good cannot be something universally predicated in all the categories but only in one.”¹³ According to MacDonald, when Aristotle identifies the good as homonymous, he means that “there is no one real nature or property in the world corresponding to the name ‘Good.’ Being good is one property for one thing, being good is another property for another.”¹⁴

On Aristotle’s conception of goodness, then, each type of thing has a unique kind of goodness determined by the thing’s nature. Aristotle equates the goodness of a thing with the

¹⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096b7-12.

¹¹ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a17-29; MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 29

¹² *Categories*, 1a1.

¹³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a19-29.

¹⁴ MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 37.

thing's end or completion of potentialities within its nature. Hence this account falls within the nature approach to goodness because it appeals to an entity's nature in order to account for its goodness.

Augustine

While Augustine also adopts a nature approach to the relationship between being and goodness, the way in which he advances his account differs from Aristotle, as Augustine construes goodness within the context of a Neoplatonic hierarchy of being: 'being' is an ordered scale where God is identified with 'Being' itself and every other existent thing obtains its being from God, and has a lesser degree of being proportional to its grade of being. In the *City of God*, he puts it this way:

Since God is the Supreme Being, that is, he supremely is, he is therefore immutable. God gave being to those things which he created out of nothing, but not Supreme Being like he himself has. And he gave more being to some and less being to others; and so he ordered natures according to their grade of being.¹⁵

In *De Natura Boni*, Augustine develops this gradation conception of goodness specifically as a criticism of Manicheanism's cosmic dualism.¹⁶ There he identifies God with the supreme, eternal, immortal, and unchanging Good. In contrast, every created good is good by its own nature, as created by God.¹⁷ Goodness also comes in grades, dependent upon being: there exists an ordering of goods based on three natural properties given to objects by God, specifically, measure, form, and order.¹⁸ Where these properties are present to a high degree, the

¹⁵ In *De Civitate Dei*, XII.2. *Patrologia Latina* 41: "Cum enim Deus summa essentia sit, hoc est summe sit, et ideo immutabilis sit; rebus quas ex nihilo creavit, esse dedit, sed non summe esse, sicut ipse est; et aliis dedit esse amplius, aliis minus; atque ita naturas essentiarum gradibus ordinavit."

¹⁶ The Manicheans believed that good and evil are accounted for by the positing of a good God responsible for good, and a bad God responsible for evil. Both deities—and good and evil—were posited as existent dueling substances.

¹⁷ *De Natura Boni*, ii-iii.

¹⁸ *De Natura Boni*, iii.

entity is a great good, and when there is a small degree of these properties, the entity is a small good. Where there is an absence of these natural properties, there is no natural goodness and consequently, no being.¹⁹ Augustine describes God, at the zenith of this hierarchy, analogously as measure without measure, number without number, and weight without weight.²⁰

In the context of developing this position, Augustine exploits beliefs shared with the Manicheans in order to demonstrate problems with their dualism about good and evil:

- (1) There is a highest good.
- (2) All good things must come from the highest good.
- (3) Every nature is good insofar as it is a nature.
- (4) Therefore, every nature exists only by the highest good.²¹

The Manicheans and Augustine both agree with premises (1) and (2). Since they deny the conclusion, the crux of the argument is premise (3). What does Augustine mean by ‘nature’ which occurs twice in this key premise (*omnis autem natura in quantum natura est, bonum est*)? MacDonald points out that Augustine sometimes uses ‘nature’ to refer to an essence.²² At other times, Augustine uses ‘nature’ to refer to a concrete individual.²³ MacDonald suggests that both definitions of ‘nature’ are at work in this premise, and so it should be read as follows:

- (3*) Every *individual* is good insofar as it has or exemplifies its *nature*.²⁴

Here MacDonald suggests an important way in which Augustine’s account does resemble

¹⁹ *De Natura Boni*, iii.

²⁰ *De Genesi ad litteram*, 4.3.7. Augustine often uses ‘form’ and ‘number,’ and ‘weight’ and ‘order’ interchangeably. See Lewis Ayres, “Measure, Number, and Weight,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 550-552.

²¹ MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 53-54; Cf. *De Natura Boni*.

²² MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 54-55. Cf. *On the Morals of the Manicheans II*.

²³ Cf. *De Trinitate* v.2.

²⁴ MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 56.

Aristotle's. If (3) is understood in terms of (3*),

Then there must also be a sense in which human beings can exemplify the nature of a human being to a greater or lesser degree. Augustine is claiming that all existing things have a nature or are natures in the first sense, and that different things of the same nature can exemplify that nature to different degrees.²⁵

While I agree with MacDonald that Augustine believes individuals can exemplify their natures to different degrees, unfortunately, that is not what is going on in this crucial third premise. In other words, Augustine is not claiming that 'nature' in the first instance should be taken as 'concrete substance,' but 'nature' in the second instance should be taken as a 'kind-nature.'

There are two reasons for denying this interpretation in favor of taking 'nature' as 'individual substance' in both uses of premise (3): textual and conceptual.

First, there are textual reasons for rejecting (3*). In a parallel passage in *On Free Choice of the Will*, written only a few years earlier, Augustine uses the exact same wording as the *De Natura Boni* passage, but explains that by 'nature' he means 'a substance.' He states:

Therefore, it is most truly said that every nature, insofar as it is a nature, is good (*omnis natura in quantum natura est, bona est*). Because if it is incorruptible, then it is better than if it were corruptible. But if it is corruptible, it is without a doubt good, because it becomes less good as long as the corruption [continues]. But every nature is either corruptible or incorruptible. Therefore, every nature is good. What I call 'nature' is most usually called 'a substance.' Therefore, every substance is either God, or from God; for every good is either God or from God.²⁶

So Augustine uses the exact same wording here as he does in *De Natura Boni* (*omnis natura in quantum natura est, bona est*), and yet, clarifies that by 'nature' he means 'a substance.' He does not mean kind-nature, nor does he hint at a different meaning in each use of 'nature' that

²⁵ MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 56.

²⁶ *De Libero Arbitrio* 3.13.36, *Patrologia Latina* 32: "Quapropter quod verissime dicitur, omnis natura in quantum natura est, bona est: quia si incorruptibilis est, melior est quam corruptibilis; si autem corruptibilis est, quoniam dum corrumpitur minus bona fit, sine dubitatione bona est. Omnis autem natura aut corruptibilis est, aut incorruptibilis. Omnis ergo natura bona est: naturam voco quae et substantia dici solet. Omnis igitur substantia aut Deus, aut ex Deo; quia omne bonum aut Deus, aut ex Deo."

MacDonald thinks exists in the premise. Furthermore, he goes on to claim that every substance is either God or from God, thereby making the issue even clearer: he is referring to primary substances—concrete individuals—and not Aristotle’s notion of secondary substance.

Confessions VII, which we will consider in a bit, also confirms this reading. After making similar arguments against the Manicheans, he concludes that whatever exists, is good, and thus evil is not a *substance*. He then claims that “if it were a substance, then it would be good: for either it would be an incorruptible substance and certainly a great good, or it would be a corruptible substance, which cannot be corrupted unless it is good.”²⁷ So in these parallel passages, Augustine seems to take ‘nature’ as primary substance, and not secondary substance.

Conceptually, MacDonald’s account seems to confuse the entity’s existence within the hierarchy of being, imbued with certain properties that fix its location on the scale of existence, with the entity fulfilling its nature as the type of thing it is. In other words, in MacDonald’s formulation of premise (3), he seems to conflate natural or metaphysical goodness with moral goodness. This is important, because only the former plays a substantial role in Augustine’s arguments against the Manicheans for the conclusion that “every nature exists only by the highest good.”

Augustine’s conception of natural or metaphysical goodness should not be confused with, nor identified with, moral goodness. He states, “It is possible that one nature even when corrupted may still be better than another nature which remains uncorrupted, because the one has a superior, the other an inferior measure, form and order.”²⁸ For example, a corrupted rational

²⁷ *Confessions* VII 12 (18). Latin text is from the critical edition *Confessions vol. I: Introduction and Text* ed. James J. O’Donnell (New York: Clarendon Press, 1992): “quia si substantia esset, bonum esset. Aut enim incorruptibilis substantia, magnum utique bonum, aut substantia corruptibilis esset, quae nisi bona esset, corrumpi non posset.”

²⁸ *De Natura Boni*, v. In *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. By John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

spirit has more natural goodness than an uncorrupted irrational spirit because, proportionally, it has more measure, form, and order. By adding this proviso, Augustine distinguishes natural goodness from moral goodness: an object can have more natural goodness but less moral goodness than another object by having more measure, form, and order, but a corrupted will. As far as natural or metaphysical goodness is concerned, this goodness supervenes on the natural properties possessed by an object and the relations among those properties; it thus cannot be reduced to any one of them—any difference in these properties results in a difference in the object’s natural goodness.

Consequently, something is naturally good proportional to the degree to which it has these properties, which are grounded in the entity’s nature, given to it by God. This is what’s at stake in Augustine’s debate with the Manicheans, since they want to claim that badness has an independent existence in a way that mirrors substances. In response, Augustine states that every existent thing (i.e., nature, substance) has its goodness proportional to its being, which can be hierarchically construed in terms of the entity’s measure, form, and order—the metaphysical principles of its being.²⁹ Thus even entities lower down on the scale of existence have some minuscule amount of measure, form and order, and thus some proportionate—though minuscule—amount of goodness.³⁰ So, I suggest that the premise should be reformulated as follows:

(3**) Every substance (nature) is good, in so far as it is a substance (nature).

In support of (3**), Augustine first argues that either a nature (i.e., a substance) can be corrupted or it cannot be corrupted. If a nature cannot be corrupted, then it is the supreme good

²⁹ W.J. Roche, “Measure, Number, and Weight in Saint Augustine,” *The New Scholasticism* 15 (1941), 351.

³⁰ *De Natura Boni*, iii-viii.

(i.e., God). If a nature can be corrupted, then it must have something good left in it, since corruption only harms by taking away something good in it.³¹ This hinges upon Augustine's view of corruption as a privation of goodness. If it is possible that some nature be corrupted, and corruption is a privation of goodness, it follows that the nature itself has some degree of goodness—or it would not be corruptible.³² But if it were incorruptible, then it would be the supreme good. And since natures exist in only two ways—corruptible and incorruptible—(3**), is in fact true, and Augustine's conclusion follows: *every nature exists only by the highest good*.

In this context, the argument from corruptibility is taken as support for premise (3**), which is used to support the conclusion that every nature exists only by the highest good. In *Confessions* VII, however, the corruptibility argument is used simply to demonstrate that “whatever things exist are good.” There Augustine expands this argument by claiming that if natures were deprived of every good, they would not exist at all. But if they exist and are in principle corruptible, then they must have some degree of goodness left to be corrupted. If not, they would not exist. Since they do exist, they must be good. He concludes, “Whatever things exist are good.”³³

What then is the relationship between natural goodness and moral goodness? Augustine claims that *an object's value is proportional to its being*. As a result, the greater measure, form, and order an object has, the more being it has, and consequently, the more *value* it has. Moral goodness, Augustine claims, is a right ordering of love according to an object's value.³⁴

³¹ *De Natura Boni*, vi.

³² See also *Confessions* VII. xii (18).

³³ *Confessions* VII. Xii (18).

³⁴ *Letters*, 137, V.17. *Patrologia Latina* 31. He states, “Here is ethics: since a good and honorable life is formed in no other way than when one loves the things which ought to be loved in the way that they ought to be loved.” “Hic ethica, quoniam vita bona et honesta non aliunde formatur, quam cum ea quae diligenda sunt, quemadmodum diligenda sunt.”

Consequently, we ought to love things in accordance with their value, which is determined by their natural goodness, grounded in an object's non-moral properties. Moral goodness consists in loving things proportionally to their natural goodness, which follows their degree of being.

He says,

We must, however, observe right order even in our love for the very love by which we love that which is worthy to be loved, so that there may be in us that virtue which enables us to live well. Hence, it seems to me that a brief and true definition of virtue is 'rightly ordered love.'³⁵

So, on the scale of natural goods, which follows being itself, God has the most goodness. Two things follow from this. First, since the highest good is that good which all other goods are directed towards, and since our love for any object ought to be proportional to the object's ontological goodness, God should be loved most as the highest good. Because God is identical with Being itself, and consequently, Goodness itself, all human action should be directed toward this end.³⁶

Augustine often connects his metaphysics of goodness with his *ethical eudaimonism*, such that Augustine's formal account of *eudaimonia* is infused with content that reflects his Christian Neoplatonism. So he says that the search for God is synonymous with the search for happiness,³⁷ that happiness is joy found in loving God for his own sake,³⁸ that in seeking happiness, we are seeking none other than God,³⁹ that we become happy by participating in

³⁵ *De Civitate Dei*, XV.22. In *Augustine: City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Augustine says in *Letter* 157,II.9 "The soul is carried wherever it is carried by its love, as if by a weight." When added to his comments in *De Trinitate* VIII.5.8, that all love is love of the good or the blessed, Augustine believes that all action is motivated (i.e., "carried") by love of something we think is good.

³⁶ *Letters*, 137, V.17.

³⁷ *Confessions*, VI.xi (19).

³⁸ *Confessions*, X.xxiii (33).

³⁹ *Confessions*, X.20 (29): "Quomodo ergo te quaero, domine? Cum enim te, deum meum, quaero, vitam beatam quaero."

God,⁴⁰ and that God is the fountain of our happiness (*fons nostrae beatitudinis*) and is the end of all our longing (*ipse omnis appetitionis est finis*).⁴¹ In *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, he states, “if virtue leads us to the happy life, then I would define virtue to be nothing at all except the highest love of God.”⁴² This is not surprising, since on a Neoplatonic model, “the supreme beatitude and the highest good are identical, because the very notion of perfection excludes two or more competitors for this position at the apex of the hierarchy of being.”⁴³

Second, if love for any object ought to be proportional to the object’s natural goodness, then moral wrongness consists in a wrong ordering of loves, where objects are not loved proportional to their natural goodness. From this, Augustine believes humans can go astray in two ways: (1) in seeking happiness in the wrong things or (2) in seeking happiness the wrong way; the former misses the end, the latter attains the end for the wrong reasons.

The first type of moral wrongness centers on a disproportionate loving of lesser goods instead of the highest good.⁴⁴ We often seek goods (like friendship) that are lower goods in place of the highest good, God. Thus Augustine thinks sin is immoderate inclination toward lower goods.⁴⁵ Instead of proportioning our love for an object according to its natural goodness, we love these lesser goods more than they should be loved, and we love the highest good (i.e.,

⁴⁰ *De Civitate Dei*, VIII.5.

⁴¹ *De Civitate Dei*, X.3.

⁴² *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 1.15.25. *Patrologia Latina* 32: “Quod si virtus ad beatam vitam nos ducit, nihil omnino esse virtutem affirmaverim, nisi summum amorem Dei.”

⁴³ Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 211. See *Consolation of Philosophy* III for Boethius’s arguments for this.

⁴⁴ In *De Civitate De* VIII.5 Augustine says, “The rational soul ought not to worship as its god those things which are placed below it in the *order of nature*, nor ought it to exalt as gods those things above which the true God has exalted it.” In *Augustine: City of God Against the Pagans*. And in *Free Will* he claims that sin is the turning of the mind away from finding enjoyment in God and toward what has been created by God. *De Libero Arbitrio* 3.1.1. See also *Confessions*, I.xx (31).

⁴⁵ *Confessions*, II.V (10).

God) less than we ought to. In doing this, we act against the natural order of things.⁴⁶

Second, moral wrongness consists in seeking happiness in the right end, but in the wrong way. Here Augustine distinguishes *uti* (use) from *frui* (enjoyment), paralleling the distinction between means and ends. Augustine says that “to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To ‘use,’ on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one’s disposal to obtain what one desires, if it is a proper object of desire.”⁴⁷ An ultimate end, a thing which is sought and loved for its own sake, must never be used, only enjoyed. Since God is the ultimate end, only God himself is to be enjoyed. Conversely, we must never enjoy lower goods that are means to God, but only use them appropriately. Thus it would be inappropriate, for example, to love or use God for the sake of gaining material possessions.⁴⁸

Thus we can go astray by either the enjoyment of lower goods, which ought to be used, or by using the ultimate good, God, rather than enjoying him. The latter consists in using God as a means to enjoying something else—getting the teleological chain backwards. This, once again, is grounded in Augustine’s hierarchy of goods: a certain direction exists among goods such that lesser goods are always to be used as means to the highest good and our final end—God—who is to be enjoyed and never used.

Given this, we can see another connection between being and goodness: namely, substances can be corrupted (and thus deprived in some sense of their being) by acting morally badly, i.e., by loving goods disproportionate to their value. So there is a sense in which Augustine thinks that rational substances can contribute to their own diminishing of their being

⁴⁶ Hence Augustine says that evil is not a substance, but a swerving of the will away from the Supreme Substance, towards lower goods. *Confessions*, VII.X (16). See also *Confessions*, II.V (10)-II.VI (14).

⁴⁷ *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.4, trans. J.F. Shaw, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers 2004).

⁴⁸ See *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 25.

and goodness, although it is difficult to imagine exactly how this might work. Clearly, Augustine believes that sinning (a disproportionate loving of goods) results in a diminishing of our being, via a diminishing of our measure, form, and order. But these terms have some fluidity in Augustine, so let's try to get clear on what he means by them.

Briefly, measure (*mensura, modus*) is the principle by which God limits and sets boundaries for created things, providing them their existence and place in the universe.⁴⁹ Form (*forma, species*) or number (*numerus*) is the kind of thing it is, along with the quantitative and qualitative perfections of the entity. Thus Augustine often trades between these two notions—form and beauty—the kind of thing it is (*species*), and its beauty in terms of the number of its perfections.⁵⁰ Finally, order (*ordo*) or weight (*pondus*) refers to God's ordering all things to himself, and subsequently, the principle in creatures that moves them to rest and stability in God.⁵¹

Measure, form, and order are not only ontological or metaphysical principles of every material being, they also order and direct the rational soul. In *De Genesi ad Litteram* 4.4.8, Augustine claims that these principles govern not only the material world but also the immaterial soul: measure governs and limits actions, keeping them within their proper place; form or number in the soul refers to its affections and virtues, directing the soul to the form and beauty of wisdom; weight orders and moves the soul towards rest and stability in goods worth pursuing.⁵² In *De Natura Boni*, Augustine claims the diminishing of measure, forma, and order occurs when

⁴⁹ *De Genesi ad Litteram* 4.3.7.

⁵⁰ Roche, "Measure, Number, and Weight in Saint Augustine," 355. See *De Natura Boni*, xxiii; *De Genesi ad Litteram* 4.3-4.5.

⁵¹ *De Genesi ad Litteram*, XII, VI, cap3-6. Roche, "Measure, Number, and Weight in Saint Augustine," 362.

⁵² *De Genesi ad Litteram* 4.4.8; *De Civitate Dei*, XIX.13. See also C. Harrison, "Measure, Number, and Weight in Saint Augustine's Aesthetics," *Augustinianum* 28 (1988), 600-602.

there are less of these than there ought to be.⁵³ And in *On the Morals of the Manicheans*, he says that by turning to lower-level goods, created beings diminish their goodness and rationality.⁵⁴

So when we act badly, there is a sense in which our being is diminished, by diminishing our measure, form, and order. Thus there is a sense in which Augustine has two slightly different accounts: one is an ontological account of goodness, and the other a moral account—both of which are necessarily tied to being, but the latter one only negatively. This will become important with later thinkers (like Lombard and Scotus), who will follow Augustine in his ontological, hierarchical-nature account of being and goodness, while distancing themselves from the more Neoplatonic elements in Augustine, and conceiving moral goodness as an accident of being in the category of action and thus not convertible with being.

So for Aristotle, substances are good to the extent that they fulfill their end which consists in actualizing potentialities in their nature. Since every being has some degree of actuality, every being has goodness in some respect. For Augustine, natures are good in so far as they exist—and their goodness is proportional to their grade of being: the more being, the more goodness. Thus natures can be arranged according to their hierarchy of being. Furthermore, if natures are susceptible to corruption, they must have some amount of goodness that can be corrupted. If they can't be corrupted, then either they don't exist or they are the supreme good. In either case, every nature that exists is good. Hence both Augustine and Aristotle appeal to an entity's nature in order to explain the necessary connection between being and goodness.

⁵³ *De Natura Boni* xxiii. “Malus ergo modus, vel mala species, vel malus ordo, aut ideo dicuntur, quia minora sunt quam esse debuerunt, aut quia non his rebus accommodantur quibus accommodanda sunt; ut ideo dicantur mala, quia sunt aliena et incongrua.”

⁵⁴ *On the Morals of the Manicheans* 5.6-7.

The Creation Approach

While the creation approach also uses [A] to explain and justify [B], it explains the necessary connection between being and goodness by an appeal, not to the nature and end of an entity, but to God's creative activity as the First Good that created the being and goodness of the entity. Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus* is the paradigm creation approach, and particularly interesting considering that his framing of the problem presupposes the necessary connection between being and goodness, and yet nowhere mentions the nature approach's solution—a solution Boethius was certainly familiar with in the writings of Augustine (particularly *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*) and Aristotle.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Boethius's solution to the problem he raises about being and goodness nicely demonstrates his vision of unifying the thought of Plato and Aristotle: while he uses specific Aristotelian terminology (i.e., substance, accident, etc.), his solution is decidedly Platonist.⁵⁶

De Hebdomadibus is a treatise written to John the Deacon in response to John's question concerning how substances can be good when they are not substantial goods. Boethius spends most of the treatise strengthening and motivating John's question before providing his own answer. He begins with an argument designed to show what everyone agrees to be the case—that 'everything that exists is good':

- (1) Everything that exists tends toward good.
- (2) Everything tends only toward what it is like.
- (3) Therefore, things that tend toward the good are themselves good.

⁵⁵ While the *De Hebdomadibus* is heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, particularly Proclus and his school, Boethius does show some influence of Augustine in his treatise: Boethius rejects the notion that God is beyond being, favoring instead the Augustinian conception of God as Goodness and Being. Furthermore, Boethius says nothing about non-being and the One, which were prominent in Proclus and his followers. See Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*, 207.

⁵⁶ See MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 74-75.

- (4) Therefore, everything that exists is good.⁵⁷

The way Boethius frames the initial problem already presupposes the necessary connection between being and goodness, i.e., [A]. Given this, the question is *how* it is the case that everything that exists is good, i.e., [B].⁵⁸ It is at this point that the problem is raised in the form of a dilemma, neither horn of which seems palatable to Boethius, and which, if the premises are true, threatens the truth of (4):

- (5) If substances are good, they are good either by participation or by substance.
(6) They are not good by participation.
(7) They are not good by substance.
(8) Therefore, substances are not good at all.⁵⁹

But (8) contradicts the commonsense view above (i.e., (4)), and so necessitates Boethius's response as to how things are good. Boethius's solution will split the horns of the dilemma, providing a third option, and thus rejecting (5) in the process. First, let's consider why Boethius thinks that a thing's goodness cannot be explained accidentally or substantially. Boethius argues for the truth of (6) in the following way:

- (6a) If substances are good by participation, then they are in no way good in themselves.
(6b) If they are in no way good in themselves, then they do not tend toward the good.
(6c) But they do tend toward the good (1-3).
(6d) Therefore, they are not good by participation.

⁵⁷ "Things which are, are good. For the common opinion of the learned holds that everything that is tends to good and everything tends to its like. Therefore, things which tend to good are themselves good." *De Hebdomadibus*, Lines 56-60. All translations of *De Hebdomadibus* (also known as *Quomodo Substantiae*) are from the Loeb edition unless noted otherwise. *Boethius: Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 74, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937). My formulation of the argument relies heavily, but not exclusively, on MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 77.

⁵⁸ *De Hebdomadibus*, L: 60-61: "We must, however, enquire how they are good..."

⁵⁹ MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 79. Cf. *De Hebdomadibus*, L: 60-85.

And, given (5),

(6e) Therefore, they must be substantial goods.⁶⁰

In (6a), Boethius means that when a substance is good by participation, it has goodness as an accident: i.e., its goodness is not a kind-defining feature of its nature. In the same way that whiteness doesn't characterize the nature of the object with that quality, if had accidentally, goodness wouldn't characterize the nature of the substance that has it. But if goodness didn't characterize the nature of the substance itself, it would not be good in itself. But then it would not tend toward the good. But by stipulation, substances do in fact tend toward the good; therefore, goodness cannot be an accidental property of being, and consequently, substances cannot be good by participation.

Goodness must therefore be a substantial property of being. As Aertsen explains, if things are good by their substance, “then things are good in virtue of their being. This means that being and being good are identical in virtue of their being.”⁶¹ Boethius takes this to mean that being and being good are identical in substances: i.e., substantial goods lack metaphysical composition. But if being and being good are identical in substances, then Boethius perceives the following problem:

(7a) If they are substantial goods, then their being is identical with their goodness.

(7b) If their being is identical with their goodness, then they are like the first good.

⁶⁰ “We must, however, enquire how they are good—by participation or by substance. If by participation, they are in no wise good in themselves; for a thing which is white by participation is not white in itself by virtue of its own being. So with all other qualities. If then they are good by participation, they are in no way good in themselves; therefore, they do not tend to good. But we have already agreed that they do. Therefore, they are good not by participation but by substance.” *De Hebdomadibus*, L: 60-68.

⁶¹ Jan Aertsen, “Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good,” in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca: Cornell university Press, 1991), 61. Cf. *De Hebdomadibus* L: 68-75.

- (7c) Nothing is like the first good.
- (7d) Therefore they will be this first goodness itself.
- (7e) Therefore all things which exist are God.
- (7f) It is not the case that all things which exist are God.
- (7g) Therefore, their being is not identical with their goodness.
- (7h) Therefore, they are not substantial goods.⁶²

Boethius seems to suggest that if things are substantially good, then their being and being good will be identical, which is just to say that they are metaphysically simple substances—a property only attributable to Being and Goodness itself, i.e., God. Therefore, substances are not good (8), since they are neither accidentally nor substantially good. And thus, premise (4) cannot be true. But Boethius wishes to maintain (4).

His solution to the problem is to reject premise (5): namely, denying that goodness can only be a substantial or accidental property of being. In order to do this, Boethius proceeds in two steps. First, he provides a thought experiment whose goal is to demonstrate that without the First Good, there would be no creaturely goodness. Suppose that there was no First Good and all created things that exist are good; namely, suppose **[B]** and no God—no First Good.⁶³ His goal is to consider how these created substances could be good if the First Good did not exist.

Boethius argues that if created goods existed, their being and their being good would be

⁶² “Therefore, they are not good by participation but by substance. But of those things whose substance is good the particular being is good. But they owe their particular being to absolute being. Their existence therefore is good; therefore mere existence of all things is good. But if their existence is good, things which exist are good in virtue of their existence, and their existence is the same as the existence of the good. Therefore they are substantial goods, since they do not participate in goodness. But if the particular being in them is good, there is no doubt but that since they are substantial goods, they are like the first good, and thereby they will be that good itself; for nothing is like it save itself. Hence all things that are, are God—an impious assertion. Wherefore they are not substantial goods, and so there is not in them good existence; therefore, they are not good in virtue of their existence.” *De Hebdomadibus*, L: 67-83.

⁶³ *De Hebdomadibus*, L: 86-96.

different, for if their being and their being good were identical, they would be the First Good (see (7a)-(7d)), which by stipulation, does not exist.

But if their being and their being good are different, they are composite substances. However, composite substances stand in need of explanation concerning their composition, and this can only be explained if a simple substance existed—and in this case, a simple substance whose being is identical to his goodness. Given that created goods lack metaphysical simplicity, Boethius concludes, “But since they are not simple, they could not even exist at all unless that which is the one sole good had willed them to exist.”⁶⁴ The conclusion Boethius draws from this thought experiment is that if there is no First Good, then there can be no creaturely goodness at all, and hence, creaturely goodness depends upon the First Good, since composite substances stand in need of explanation by way of a metaphysically simple substance.

Second, based upon this result, Boethius splits the horns of the dilemma in (5), arguing that creaturely goodness is accounted for in the same way that their being is, namely, because the First Good caused them to exist. Hence creatures are good because they stand in a proper *relation* to the First Good. He concludes,

Therefore, they are called good because their being flowed (*defluo*) from the will of the Good. For the First Good, because it exists, is good in virtue of its existence; but a secondary good is also good itself, because its goodness flows (*fluo*) from a being whose existence is itself good. But the being itself of all things flows (*fluo*) from that which is the First Good and which is the type of good that is rightly called good in virtue of its existence. Therefore, their being is good.⁶⁵

Thus metaphysically composite substances stand in need of explanation for the unity of their

⁶⁴ *De Hebdomadibus*, L: 117-119.

⁶⁵ *De Hebdomadibus*, Line 119-127. Translation mine. “Idcirco quoniam esse eorum a boni voluntate defluxit, bona esse dicuntur. Primum enim bonum, quoniam est, in eo quod est bonum est; secundum vero bonum, quoniam ex eo fluxit cuius ipsum esse bonum est, ipsum quoque bonum est. Sed ipsum esse omnium rerum ex eo fluxit quod est primum bonum et quod bonum tale est ut recte dicatur in eo quod est esse bonum. Ipsum igitur eorum esse bonum est.”

being and goodness. Boethius supposes that without a simple substance whose being is identical to its goodness, no creaturely goodness would exist at all. Furthermore, composite substances are not good by participation, nor are they substantial goods. Rather, their being and goodness is explained relationally and causally, by the will of the First Good, in which Boethius uses metaphorical language suggestive of Neoplatonic emanationism.

Notice that the solution still maintains the necessary connection between being and goodness, because everything which has being from the First Being also has goodness from the same Being who is the First Good. This is a creation approach to goodness because it explains the necessary connection between being and goodness by an appeal to an entity's creation by God and relation to God—whose goodness is his being. Hence, goodness is neither an accidental property nor a substantial property, but a relational property.⁶⁶ Thus Boethius offers an explanatory/relational account: goodness derives from standing in relation to the creator whose being is his goodness. Since Boethius uses metaphorical language of creaturely goodness “flowing” from the first good, the ambiguity causes later schoolman to interpret this relational account various ways: Thierry of Chartres, for example, interprets this causally, while Clarenbald of Arras provides a more Platonic, participatory account of this relationship.⁶⁷

Aquinas's Synthesis

Aquinas also subscribes to **[B]** and he uses **[A]** as a means of support for **[B]**. In doing so, however, Aquinas utilizes aspects of both the nature and creation approaches to goodness.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ This is not the only time Boethius appeals to relations to solve debates of a similar nature. See *De Trinitate* V for another use of relation in the context of Trinitarian individuation.

⁶⁷ See MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas*, 154-204.

⁶⁸ Thomas Williams, “From Metaethics to Action Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 334

In support of the necessary connection between being and goodness, Aquinas argues that being and goodness are convertible because they are the same in reality (*secundum rem*) and differ only in sense (*secundum rationem*).⁶⁹ Aquinas contends that the *ratio* of goodness is that of desirability, offering Aristotle's dictum, "The good is what all things desire."⁷⁰ Now, a thing is desirable only insofar as it is perfect (*perfectum*), and everything desires its own perfection. The Latin *perfectum* denotes the completeness of the thing—hence it refers to the thing's *end*.⁷¹ A thing is perfect or complete only in so far as it is actual, where actuality implies the fulfillment (*perfectum*) of a thing's potentialities. But being or existence is what makes something actual; therefore, something is perfect only insofar as it is actual: "Hence it is clear that a thing is good insofar as it has being, for to be is the actuality of every thing."⁷² Thus 'to be' is to be in actuality, and actuality is the completeness or perfection of the thing, and this perfection is its goodness.

So whatever has being, has goodness. Goodness differs from being only in its *ratio*, by adding the notion of desirability to the notion of being. Since every being has some degree of actuality (since it exists), it has a certain amount of perfection, and thus has a certain amount of goodness. Thus **[B]** is arrived at via **[A]**.⁷³ As we will see in the next chapter, Aquinas argues that being and goodness are really identical, but conceptually distinct: they are inseparable in

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.1.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a1.

⁷¹ See his *Commentary on the Metaphysics* II, where he makes the connection between the ratio of the good and the ratio of the end explicit: "Eadem enim ratio boni et finis est, nam bonum est quod omnia appetunt."

⁷² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.1. "unde manifestum est quod in tantum est aliquid bonum, in quantum est ens, esse enim est actualitas omnis rei." See also *Summa Theologiae* I, q.3, a.4 and *Summa Theologiae* I, q.4, a.1.

⁷³ In *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.3, Aquinas draws this conclusion as follows: "Every being, insofar as it is a being, is good. For every being, in so far as it is a being is in actuality, and in a certain manner, perfect: for every act implies some amount of perfection. But perfection has the notion of desirability and goodness...and so it follows that every being, insofar as it is a being, is good."

reality, but separable in the mind.

Up until this point, this approach has been distinctly a nature approach to goodness. However, Aquinas actually synthesizes the two traditions in at least two ways. First, since goodness is equated with an end, and God is the ultimate end of all creatures, creaturely goodness must ultimately be explained in terms of the First Good. In his commentary on *De Hebdomadibus*, Aquinas agrees with Boethius that created goods are good by their “stance” toward the first good, which Aquinas interprets as a *cause*.⁷⁴ In *De Veritate* XXI.5, Aquinas argues that goodness has the character of a final cause, which is God, since he is the ultimate end. He concludes that good cannot be said of a creature unless we presuppose the relation of Creator to creature.⁷⁵ Second, Aquinas understands God’s act of creating as aimed at an end, and all things imitate or participate in God in so far as they act for the sake of ends as the fulfillment of their own potentialities and thus are like God in a certain respect.⁷⁶ For example, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, he writes, “It should be said that whatever things are good, only have their goodness insofar as they constitute a resemblance to divine goodness. And so it is fitting that when goodness is the *ratio* of delight and desire, all things are loved in order to the

⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Commentary on De Hebdomadibus*.

⁷⁵ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, XXI.5. See *Summa Theologiae* I q.6 a.2, Aquinas connects Boethius’s metaphorical language of goodness “flowing” from the first good to created goods with the Aristotelian notion of desirability and perfection: “For Good is attributed to God...insofar as all desired perfections flow (*effluo*) from him as from the first cause.”

⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.6, a.1. “To be good belongs chiefly to God. For something is good according to its desirableness. But everything desires its own perfection. But the perfection and form of an effect consists in a certain likeness of an agent, since every agent brings about something similar to itself. And so the agent itself is desirable and has the nature of the good, for that thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness. Therefore, since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is obvious that the aspect of goodness and desirableness belong to him.” In *De Veritate* XXI.4, he claims “Every agent is found to cause something similar to itself. And so if the first good is the effective cause of all good things, then it is necessary that his likeness is imprinted in the things produced. And so everything will be called good as an inherent form because of a similitude to the highest good implanted in it, and also because the first good is the exemplar effective cause of all created goodness.” Translations mine.

first good.”⁷⁷

Thus Aquinas synthesizes the Aristotelian nature approach with the Boethian creation approach: good is connected with the notion of an end, and all things are good in so far as they perfect their nature with respect to their end. But since God is the ultimate end of all creatures, creaturely goodness depends upon God as the First Good, ultimate end, and final perfection of creaturely natures. And in so far as we act for the sake of an end, we imitate divine goodness in creation. As will we see in this introduction and over the course of this dissertation, Duns Scotus is also a synthesizer of sorts; however, Scotus synthesizes the Augustinian and Aristotelian nature approaches while at the same time breaking with the tradition in an important respect.

Scotus on Being and Goodness

Fundamental to Scotus’s account of the relation between being and goodness is his distinction between two types of goodness: primary (essential) and secondary (accidental). As we will see, in one sense, Scotus’s account of being and goodness fits perfectly in the tradition, for there is a necessary connection between primary goodness and being, since primary goodness is a proper attribute of being and is coextensive with it: goodness, like being, transcends the categories and so everywhere that being is found, there too will goodness be.⁷⁸ On this score, Scotus fits within the Augustinian nature approach, interpreted through the Aristotelian categories: he conceives goodness as mapping onto the grade of being an entity has, so that the more being an entity has, the more goodness it will have.⁷⁹ Goodness is also interpreted in terms

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum*, ed. Mandonnet (Paris, 1929) I, d.1, q.3, a.1. Respondeo dicendum, quod quaecumque sunt bona, non habent bonitatem nisi in quantum accedunt ad similitudinem bonitatis divinae. Unde oportet, cum bonitas sit ratio dilectionis et desiderii, ut omnia amentur in ordine ad bonitatem primam. See also *Super Sent.*, I, d.8, q.2, a.2: Aeternitas enim non est nobilior quam bonitas. Sed bonitas communicatur cum creaturis, ita quod a bono Deo creatura sit bona. Ergo videtur quod similiter aeternitas, ut alia ab ipso sint aeterna.

⁷⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3.

⁷⁹ *Ordinatio II*, d.7, q.un., n.28.

of the perfection of an entity, and the perfection of an entity with respect to its primary goodness will be its form or being.⁸⁰ Thus being and goodness are found in every category of being,⁸¹ and so everything that exists, in so far as it has being, will be good. So in this sense Scotus agrees with tradition in terms of **[B]**, providing an Augustinian nature approach of **[A]** in support of **[B]**. However, as we will see in the next chapter, Scotus has a novel way of explaining the necessary connection between being and goodness. Prior to Scotus, being and goodness were seen as conceptually distinct. In contrast, Scotus argues they are formally distinct. In doing so Scotus provides a new justification for **[B]** through his unique conception of **[A]**.

Yet Scotus thinks that something can be perfected in two ways: one with respect to its form, one with respect to its end.⁸² And since goodness and perfection are the same, something can be good in two ways—one with respect to its form and one with respect to its end.⁸³ According to Scotus, the secondary or accidental goodness of an entity is explained in terms of the end, and other factors.⁸⁴ Here, Scotus implements an Aristotelian nature approach that explains the goodness of an entity with the fulfillment of certain ends or goals delimited by the entity's nature. But as we will see in the following chapters, Scotus denies that this type of goodness is convertible with being.⁸⁵

Furthermore, while it is the case that the end plays a central role in the secondary perfection of something and thereby contributes substantially to its secondary goodness, Scotus

⁸⁰ *Ordinatio* IV, d.31, q.un, n.13; *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3 (Wadding).

⁸¹ *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1, q.3, n.134; *Ordinatio* III, d. 8, q. un., n.50; *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3.

⁸² *Reportatio* II, d.34,n.3 (Wadding); *Ordinatio* IV, d.31, q.un., n.13.

⁸³ *Ordinatio* IV, d.31, q.un, n.13; *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3 (Wadding).

⁸⁴ However, as it will become clear later in the dissertation, the only rational end that our nature directs us toward is the Infinite Good. Whatever other obligations we have will be supplied by God's will.

⁸⁵ *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un, nn.7-8; *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.55.

thinks that the fulfillment of the end alone isn't sufficient for secondary goodness,⁸⁶ partially because this goodness isn't simply about an *agent* perfecting or actualizing his or her *nature*, but about what makes an *act* metaphysically good,⁸⁷ and partially because Scotus thinks this type of goodness isn't an absolute quality that maps onto being, but a relational notion that involves the harmony between a number of conditions.⁸⁸

Secondary goodness, of which moral goodness is a species, is a relation between an act judged by right reason to conform to a number of circumstances, including the end, the manner, the time and the place.⁸⁹ None of these alone is sufficient for an act to be morally good—not even the end.⁹⁰ Whatever the reasons are that Scotus still wants to connect secondary goodness with perfection and end, Scotus's denial that secondary goodness is necessarily connected with being breaks the intimate connection between *being* and *being good* held so dear by some of his medieval predecessors—at least in the sense of being good morally. However, I will argue that the novelty of this distinction does not belong to Scotus, but to Peter Lombard and his followers—Peter of Poitiers, Philip the Chancellor, and Albert the Great.

But before we see this, we must examine in detail Scotus's conception of primary goodness and its relationship to being (chapters 2-3). And here, Scotus holds a formal distinction between being and good, and uses his formal distinction in his account of **[A]** to explain and justify **[B]**—but in a manner slightly different from the previous tradition (chapter 2). Furthermore, Scotus argues that being comes in degrees of perfection, and so too does

⁸⁶ *Ordinatio* II, d.40 q.un, nn.7-10; See also *Ordinatio* I, d.48, q.un., n.5.

⁸⁷ *Quodlibet* 18.1; *Ordinatio* I, d.17 pars.1, q.1-2, n.55; *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un, nn.7-10.

⁸⁸ *Quodlibet* 18.1; *Ordinatio* I, d.17; *Ordinatio* II, d.40. q.un, nn.7-10.

⁸⁹ *Quodlibet* 18.1.

⁹⁰ *Ordinatio* II, d. 40 q.un, nn.7-10.

goodness that necessarily supervenes upon being. In doing so, Scotus holds an Augustinian nature approach to being and goodness interpreted in Aristotelian language, and devoid of many of the Neoplatonic elements (chapter 3).

CHAPTER TWO:
**THE CONVERTIBILITY OF BEING AND GOOD AND THE NATURE OF THE
TRANSCENDENTALS**

Medieval philosophers generally thought that being and goodness were transcendental and convertible. As transcendentals, they transcend Aristotle's categories. As convertible, they are extensionally equivalent. On the traditional account (exemplified by Philip the Chancellor, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas), being and good differ in concept but are identical in reference. When taken extensionally, being and good are convertible or interchangeable. Thus, [B] is often justified by a particular account of [A]; namely, being and good are really identical and only *conceptually* distinct—a mind-dependent distinction. John Duns Scotus also claims that being and good are convertible; however, he insists that there is more than simply a conceptual distinction between them: good is a proper attribute of being, and as such, is *formally* distinct from it. This chapter explores the implications of positing a formal distinction between being and good for the notion of convertibility, and subsequently, the two distinct justifications—what I'll call “the conceptual account” and “the formal account”—for the claim that “everything that exists, is good.” What's at stake in this chapter is not the nature versus creation approaches *per se*, but various ways medievals—all working under various versions of the nature and creation accounts—justified [B].

On the traditional account, being and good are *really identical* but *conceptually distinct*. Scotus, however, posits a *real identity* and *formal distinction*, which amounts to necessary

coextension and not interchangeability in the strict sense. Given this, one might think that Scotus departs substantially from the traditional account of convertibility. I will argue, however, that both Scotus and the traditional account offer a deflationary description of convertibility: being and good are interchangeable only in the sense that they are necessarily coextensive concepts, although Scotus and the traditional account give different arguments for this necessary coextension. For the tradition, convertibility amounts to necessary coextension. For Scotus, of whatever being is predicated *in quid*, goodness is predicated *in quale*—as a coextensive attribute of being. I conclude that when the referents of being and good are considered, both views amount to the same thing. When the concepts of being and good are considered, however, positing a formal distinction does make a good deal of difference, and a substantially distinct reason for the necessary connection between being and good.

The Convertibility of Being and Good

Scotus defines a transcendental as “whatever is not contained under any genus.”⁹¹ Four types of concepts fit this definition: (1) being, (2) proper attributes of being (one, true, good), (3) disjunctive attributes (such as *infinite-or-finite*, *necessary-or-contingent*), and (4) the “pure perfections,” which are attributes that are better to have than not to have.⁹² Scotus thinks that ‘being’ is the first transcendental and is univocally predicated of everything of which it can be predicated *in quid*. Being is an unqualifiedly simple (*simpliciter simplex*) concept that cannot be broken down or explained in terms of something more fundamental; every other concept presupposes the concept of being and cannot be conceived apart from being, while being can be

⁹¹ *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars1, q.3, n.114. “transcendens quodcumque nullum habet genus sub quo contineatur.”

⁹² *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars1, q.3, n.114. A. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 1946), 10-11

conceived distinctly without the aid of another concept.⁹³

Scotus describes ‘good,’ ‘one,’ and ‘true’ as proper attributes (*passiones*) of being.⁹⁴ A proper attribute is formally distinct from its subject. The formal distinction falls in between a real distinction and a conceptual distinction: two realities are formally distinct when they are really identical but have different *rationes* rooted in some aspect of the thing itself.⁹⁵ Two realities are *really identical* if and only if they are really inseparable. Thus, for any *x* and *y*,

(RI) *x* and *y* are really identical = df. (a) it is logically impossible that *x* exist in reality without *y*; and (b) it is logically impossible that *y* exist in reality without *x*.⁹⁶

Conversely, two realities are *really distinct* if and only if they are capable of separate existence, at least by divine power. So, for any *x* and *y*,

(RD) *x* and *y* are really distinct = df. (a) it is possible (at least by divine power) that *x* exists in reality without *y*; and (b) it is possible (at least by divine power) that *y* exists in reality without *x*.

So the medieval test for numerical identity is not complete sameness but inseparability. Once this is established, then we can further ask whether they are completely the same. If we can think about the same thing in different ways, or form distinct concepts about it, the aspects of that thing are conceptually distinct. Precisely, two realities are *conceptually distinct* when they are really identical (RI) and the distinction is caused by the mind alone. So, for any *x* and *y*,

⁹³ *Ordinatio* I, d.3, q.2. “Alius est conceptus simpliciter simplex, et alius est conceptus simplex, qui non est simpliciter simplex. Conceptum simpliciter simplicem voco, qui non est resolubilis in plures conceptus, ut conceptus entis et ultimate differentiae. Conceptus simplex, sed non tamen simpliciter simplex, est quicumque potest concipi ab intellectu actu simplicis intelligentiae, licet possit resolve in plures conceptus seorsum conceptibiles, sicut est conceptus definiti, vel speciei.” And, “Ens autem non potest concipi nisi distincte, quia habet conceptum simpliciter simplicem; ergo, potest ens est primus conceptus distincte conceptibilis.”

⁹⁴ See for example *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VI, q.3, n.20; *Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.4-5, n.273, and *Reportatio* II A, d.16.

⁹⁵ See *Ordinatio* I, d.8, p.1, q.4, n.193.

⁹⁶ Scotus thinks that real inseparability is both necessary for real identity (*Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.4-5, n.200-202) and sufficient for real identity (see *Quodlibet* 3, n.15). See Peter King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Scotus* ed. Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22-24; and Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 149.

(CD) *x* and *y* are conceptually distinct =df. (1) *x* and *y* satisfy the conditions of (RI); and (2) *x* and *y* are only distinct insofar as (a) some mind has some concept that applies to *x* and not *y*; and (b) some mind has some concept that applies to *y* and not *x*.

In other words, while *x* and *y* necessarily refer to the same reality, it is possible for the mind to conceive *x* without conceiving *y*, and conversely. Hence they are inseparable in reality, but separable in the mind. *Morning Star* and *Evening Star*, for example, are distinct concepts, but the terms ‘Morning Star’ and ‘Evening Star’ are extensionally equivalent: they refer to the same reality, namely, Venus.

In contrast, two realities are *formally distinct* when they are really identical, but not entirely the same, and the difference between the two realities is not mind-dependent. So, for any *x* and *y*,

(FD) *x* and *y* are formally distinct = df. (1) *x* and *y* satisfy the conditions of (RI); and (2) (a) the *ratio* of *x* does not include the *ratio* of *y*; and (b) the *ratio* of *y* does not include the *ratio* of *x*; and (3) (a) the *ratio* of *x* would not include the ratio of *y* and (b) the *ratio* of *y* would not include the *ratio* of *x*, even if there were no minds thinking about *x* and *y*.⁹⁷

Although two formally distinct realities are existentially inseparable, they have different *rationes*, not because the intellect thinks of the same thing in different ways, but because the

⁹⁷ In “Ockham on Identity and Distinction” Marilyn Adams formulates clause (2) of Scotus’s formal distinction in the following way: “if *x* and *y* are capable of definition, the definition of *x* does not include *y* and the definition of *y* does not include *x*; and (3) if *x* and *y* are not capable of definition, then if they were capable of definition, then definition of *x* would not include *y* and the definition of *y* would not include *x*.” Scotus too formulates the formal distinction in this way at times (See *Ordinatio* I, d.8, p.1, q.4, n.193). On her schematization of the formal distinction, being and good would fall under clause (3) since they are incapable of a real definition in terms of Aristotelian classification—in terms of a genus, species, and differentia. But then (3) is completely unhelpful in determining the relationship between being and goodness, since it would simply claim that *if* being and goodness were definable, the definition of being would not be included in the definition of good and vice versa. It is helpful here to follow Peter King in noting that all definitions are *rationes*, but not all *rationes* are definitions. Something can lack a real Aristotelian definition while still having a set of characteristics that make it what it is—i.e., a *ratio*. So instead of formulating the formal distinction in terms of definitions, I have formulated it in terms of *rationes*. See King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Scotus*, 23; Adams, “Ockham on Identity and Distinction,” *Franciscan Studies* 36 (1976), 5-74.

intellect discovers a formal difference in the thing itself.⁹⁸ In other words, while two formally distinct concepts refer to exactly the same reality, something about each thing's respective *ratio* enables the mind to distinguish them. And this distinction is not mind-dependent, but a feature of the thing itself (*ex parte rei*).⁹⁹ On Scotus's account, "two really identical but formally distinct realities will be something like distinct essential (i.e., inseparable) properties of a thing."¹⁰⁰ Since this formal distinction applies to being and its proper attributes,¹⁰¹ being and good are really identical in the sense that they are existentially inseparable and so 'being' and 'good' refer to the same reality, but at the same time, something about that reality that allows the mind to distinguish its goodness from its being, and such a distinction would exist, even if there were no minds doing the distinguishing.¹⁰²

On the traditional account, as we will see, being and good are *really identical* (RI), but *conceptually distinct* (CD). Scotus, however, posits a *real identity* and formal *non-identity* (FD). What are the implications of positing the formal distinction between being and good for the medieval doctrine of convertibility? In other words, what substantive difference does it make when being and good are formally rather than conceptually distinct? Well, to see this, we need

⁹⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.4, n.193. Richard Cross helpfully adds that "The formal distinction is the kind of distinction that obtains between (inseparable) properties on the assumption that nominalism about properties is false." See Cross, *Duns Scotus On God* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 108.

⁹⁹ See *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.4, nn.172-193.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 149.

¹⁰¹ *Ordinatio* III, d. 8, q. un., n.50. "licet enim entitati absolutae sit idem realiter veritas et bonitas, et huic entitati haec veritas et haec bonitas, non tamen formaliter et quiditative, quia veritas et bonitas sunt quasi passiones entis, IV Metaphysicae. Ita in realitate a qua accipitur genus et a qua accipitur differentia, et similiter de quiditate et de entitate individuali, et de aliis multis, de quibus frequenter tactum est de ista differentia ex parte rei, qua haec realitas non est formaliter illa, licet sit identice illa." See also *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1, q.3, n.134: Following Aristotle, Scotus claims that just as lines and numbers contain proper attributes in virtue of being a line or a number, so also being contains proper attributes.

¹⁰² *Ordinatio* I, d.2, pars 2, q.1-4, n. 390: "Et Intellego sic 'realiter,' quod nullo modo per actum intellectus considerantis, immo quod talis entitas esset ibi si nullus intellectus esset considerans; et sic esse ibi, si nullus intellectus consideraret, 'dico esse ante omnem actum intellectus.'"

to consider the leading accounts of the convertibility of being and goodness prior to Scotus.

The Traditional Account of Convertibility

Positing goodness and the like as necessary attributes of being formally distinct from it seems like a radical departure from the traditional account of convertibility. And in some ways it certainly is. However, as we will see, even on the conceptual account—exemplified by Philip, Albert, and Aquinas—the interchangeability of being and good really amounts to necessary coextension. Let's consider each of their accounts in turn.

Philip the Chancellor

Philip the Chancellor was the first to clearly articulate the doctrine of the transcendentals, and the first to devote an entire *Summa* to the topic of goodness. In the first question of his *Summa de Bono*, Philip considers the comparison between being and good. He begins by noting that even though being and good defy formal definition within the Aristotelian categorical system, these transcendental concepts can nevertheless be given certain descriptions (*notificationes*). He argues for this in the following way: “good and being are interchangeable, because whatever is a being is good and the converse. But being does not have a definitional account. Therefore neither does good.”¹⁰³ Being cannot be defined on an Aristotelian classificatory system because providing proper definitions involves giving a species, genus, and differentia—which can't be given for being since it belongs to what Philip calls the “*communissima*.” And since good is interchangeable with being, good also lacks a proper Aristotelian definition.

¹⁰³ Philip the Chancellor, *Philippi Cancellarii Summa de Bono*, ed. Nicolai Wicki (Bern: Franke, 1985), 5, L: 2-4: “Bonum et ens convertuntur, quia quidquid est ens, est bonum et e converso. Sed ens rationem non habet diffinitivam; ergo nec bonum.”

Nevertheless, Philip insists that three *descriptions* do apply to good, citing various authorities for each. First, good can be described as an end or what is desired. Second, good can be described as what multiplies or diffuses being. Third, good can be described as the indivision of actuality from potentiality, either *simpliciter* or in some respect.¹⁰⁴ Philip then argues that this third description is primary; thus God is the highest good since he is pure actuality, whereas creatures are good in some respect since they have a certain degree of actuality mixed with potentiality. In his argument that being and good cannot be given a definitional account, Philip presupposes the convertibility of being and good. If we look carefully at his reason for claiming that being and good are convertible, he says that they are convertible or interchangeable “because whatever is a being is good and the converse.” In other words, Philip appeals to coextension as the grounding for interchangeability.

Later in question 1 of the Prologue, Philip argues that describing good in terms of being does not prevent the convertibility of being and good. He reasons that even though they are convertible in regard to the *content and extent of their referents*, good exceeds being conceptually, since goodness is indivisible from an end or actuality, which Philip calls “completion.”¹⁰⁵ Here we see the beginning of the classic formulation of the relationship between being and good: they are conceptually distinct because they have different descriptions and meanings, but they refer to the same reality. Notice once again, Philip expresses convertibility in terms of identity of reference and coextension: whatever referent has being will

¹⁰⁴ *Summa de Bono*, 6, L: 17-22: “Habet autem notificationes quasdam, quia iuxta beatum Dionysium ‘bonum est quod desideratur ab omnibus’ et Aristoteles: ‘Omnia bonum exoptant.’ Item, de verbis beati Dionysii in libro De Divinis Nominibus in principio tractatus de bono potest hec extrahi: ‘Bonum est multiplicativum aut diffusivum esse.’ Item, alia extrahitur ab Aristotele et aliis philosophis: ‘Bonum est habens indivisionem actus a potential simpliciter vel quodam modo.’”

¹⁰⁵ *Summa de Bono*, 8, L: 60-63: “Bonum et ens converti non impedit quin notificetur per ens, quia licet convertantur quantum ad continentiam et ambitum suppositorum, bonum tamen habundat ratione super ens, scilicet per hoc quod est indivisum a fine vel actu, qui dicitur complementum.”

also have goodness.

Scott Macdonald notes that this is the first time that the *concepts* of being and good are distinguished from the *referents* of being and good: “When the distinction has been drawn, the problem of the relation between being and goodness divides into the problem of the relation between the concepts and the problem of the relation between the referents of being and good.”¹⁰⁶ The concepts of being and good are *not* convertible, since the concept of ‘good’ conceptually adds to being the notion of indivision of actuality from potentiality. With respect to the referents, Philip envisions at least two ways of arguing that being and good have the same referents,¹⁰⁷ and in both cases, his approach amounts to necessary coextension.

The first approach appeals to the description of good in terms of actuality and completion. As we have seen, Philip claimed being and good are referentially interchangeable because whatever is a being is good and conversely. He then explained the description of the good in terms of actuality or completeness. And since everything that exists has a certain degree of actuality, everything that exists is good in some respect. This is why when Philip claims that being and good are convertible, he appeals to their coextensive nature: whatever is a being has goodness and whatever has goodness is a being—since goodness denotes completion or actualization of a nature, which everything that exists has in some respect. So interchangeability in reference amounts to necessary coextension.

In the second approach, Philip explains why being and good have the same referents by an appeal to the notion of an end and final cause. In question 7 of the Prologue, Philip discusses

¹⁰⁶ See Scott MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy Before Aquinas*, 229. In support of this, Macdonald cites Pouillon, “Le premier traite des proprietates transcendentales: La ‘Summa de bono’ du Chancelier Philippe,” *Revue Neoscholastique de Philosophie* 42 (1939), 51.

¹⁰⁷ MacDonald, *The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy Before Aquinas*, 229. Cf. *Summa de Bono*, q.1 (5-8) and q.7 (26-27).

the flowing of things from the first good. He begins by citing a problem raised by Boethius in the *de Hebdomadibus*: if all things flow from the nature of the first being because of his goodness, then why it is in accordance with the first being's goodness—and not his justice or other attributes—that all things exist. He responds:

There are three characteristics concomitant with being: unity, truth, and goodness. But unity is the first of these, truth second, and good third; for the efficient, formal and final causes can coincide in the same thing, but not the material cause. Hence each essence, having these three kinds of causes, has three characteristics which are concomitant with its being, insofar as it is from the first being: from the first being *qua* 'one', every being is made one, from the first being *qua* 'formal exemplar cause,' every being is made true, from the first being *qua* 'final cause,' every being is made good.¹⁰⁸

Philip then argues that while one adds nothing to being except indivision, true and good do add something to being beyond indivision; namely, the notions of formal and final cause, respectively.¹⁰⁹ Thus good is concomitant with being because everything that has being exists from God's causal activity and is thus ordered to him as its final cause—which constitutes the thing's goodness. So in both of Philip's explanations of why being and good are identical in reference, he appeals to their coextensiveness. But on both accounts, he also claims that the concepts of being and good differ. Thus in his defense of **[B]**, he offers two approaches to **[A]**, both assuming a real identity and conceptual difference between being and good.

Albert the Great

Albert the Great offers a similar account of interchangeability in the *Sentences* I, d.1,

¹⁰⁸ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 26-27, L:15-21: "ad hoc dicendum est quod sunt tres condiciones concomitantes esse: unitas, veritas, bonitas. Unitas autem est prima illarum, secunda veritas, tertia bonitas; in idem enim possunt concidere efficiens, formalis, et finalis, sed materialis non. Unde unaqueque essentia habens has tres rationes causarum tres habet condiciones que concomitantur esse eius secundum quod est a primo ente, ut a primo ente secundum rationem unius efficiatur unumquodque ens unum, ab ipso secundum quod est causa formalis exemplaris verum, secundum quod est finalis bonum."

¹⁰⁹ *Summa de Bono*, 27, L: 26-28: "Sed non est sic de vero et bono, quia utrumque ponit in sui ratione preter indivisionem rationem alicuius cause, ut verum formalis, bonum finalis."

a.20. There he asks the question “whether everything which exists is good insofar as it has being.” In his solution, he states that being and good can be considered in two different ways; either conceptually or extensionally.¹¹⁰ If considered conceptually, then (1) being is not convertible with good and (2) the dictum “everything which exists is good insofar as it has being” will be false.¹¹¹ However,

If being and good are considered extensionally, they are thus convertible: because although good concerns an agent insofar as he is good, and being concerns an agent insofar as he is a being, nevertheless because the agent acts only for an intended good, good therefore accompanies being itself and is not separated from it extensionally, even though it is separate conceptually: and the expression ‘insofar as’ [in the statement “everything which exists is good insofar as it has being”] indicates this extensional identity.¹¹²

When Albert explains the sense in which being and good are convertible in the above passage, he claims that they cannot be separated extensionally—whatever has being, is also good. So on Albert’s account, convertibility really amounts to necessary coextension. Any stronger sense of interchangeability is precluded by the fact that being and good differ in their respective *ratio*; in other words, they are conceptually distinct: ‘good’ means something different from ‘being,’ even though they refer to the same reality.

This is further confirmed from two passages in Albert’s *Summa De Bono*. First, in addressing the same question—“whether everything which exists is good in so far as it has being”—Albert responds with the following comments:

For every created good flows from the first good, insofar as he is an agent having within himself an end through an intention. And on account of this, the being of a created thing is

¹¹⁰ Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* I, d.1, a.20: “Dicendum, quod bonum et ens dupliciter considerari possunt, scilicet secundum suas intentiones, vel secundum sua supposita.”

¹¹¹ *Sentences* I, d.1, a.20. “Si considerentur secundum suas intentiones, tunc non convertuntur, nec erit verum quod omne quod est in quantum est, bonum est.”

¹¹² *Sentences* I, D.1, a.20: “Si autem considerentur bonum et ens secundum supposita, sic convertuntur: quia licet bonum sit ad efficiens ut est bonum, et ens ad efficiens ut est ens, tamen quia non operator efficiens nisi per bonum semper ipsum ens, et non separator ab ipso secundum suppositum, licet separetur secundum intentionem: et hanc identitatem suppositorum notat quod dicitur ‘in quantum.’”

never separate from the notion of good, and nevertheless, for a created thing ‘being’ is not the same as ‘being good,’ because being is from an agent and good is from the end moving the agent. And this is what Boethius says, that what is good [is such] because it is from the good, and being good is not the same as being, but is a necessary consequent of being, which is only separable from being by the intellect alone.¹¹³

Albert contends that being and good do not exist apart from one another but are necessarily coextensive, although each has a different concept or *ratio* formed on the part of the intellect. He goes on to claim that the phrase “everything that exists is good insofar as it has being” has two different meanings: “this can mean two things, in virtue of the fact that the phrase ‘insofar as’ can denote the identity of the concepts (*intentiones*) of being and good, and taken in such a way the expression will be false, or it can note the identity or agreement of the referents, and so the expression will be true.”¹¹⁴ If the meaning is the latter, the statement is true because *what-is* and *what-is-good* will necessarily have the same referent.

In another passage of the *Summa de Bono*, Albert directly asks whether good is convertible with being. There he considers the relationship between being and good in three different ways: in one way being is prior to good, in another way good is prior to being, and in a third way they are interchangeable.¹¹⁵ If the *concepts* of being and good are considered, then being is prior to goodness. The reason, according to Albert, is that the concept of being is the simplest concept and cannot be broken down or analyzed in terms of something conceptually

¹¹³ Albertus Magnus, *Summa De Bono* (Aschendorff, 1959), tr.1, q.1, a.7. “Omne enim bonum creatum fluxit a bono primo, in quantum ipsum est efficiens in se habens finem per intentionem. Et propter hoc esse creati numquam absolvitur a ratione boni, et tamen non est sibi idem esse quod bonum esse, quia esse est ab efficiente et bonum a fine movente efficientem. Et hoc est quod dicit Boethius, quod bonum est, quia est a bono, et bonum esse non est idem quod esse, sed necessarium consequens ad esse, quod non est separabile ad ipso nisi intellectu solum...”

¹¹⁴ *Summa De Bono*, tr.1, q.1, a.7. “Similiter cum dicitur: ‘omne quod est, in quantum est, bonum est’, haec est duplex ex eo quod li ‘in quantum’ potest denotare identitatem intentionis entis et boni, et sic falsa erit locution, vel potest notare identitatem suppositi vel convenientiam, et vera erit.”

¹¹⁵ *Summa De Bono*, tr.1, q.1, a.6: “Solutio: Decendum, quod bonum uno modo est posterius ente et secundo modo est ante ipsum et tertio modo convertitur cum ipso.”

prior to it. Goodness, however, can be analyzed in terms of something more fundamental; namely, being related to an end.¹¹⁶ Second, goodness is prior to being when the goodness considered is God's and the being under consideration is a creature's.¹¹⁷ Third, if being and good are considered extensionally or according to their referents, "then good and being are convertible *because* there is nothing which is not good either perfectly or imperfectly."¹¹⁸ So when being and good are considered according to their referents, they are in fact interchangeable because they are necessarily coextensive—nothing that exists lacks the corresponding goodness. So the sense in which Albert uses the term 'convertible' is with respect to the referents of being and good, such that their convertibility amounts to necessarily coextension. So throughout his discussion, Albert distinguishes the identity of the referents of being and good from the concepts of being and good. As such, being and good are really identical (in what they refer to), but conceptually distinct.

Thomas Aquinas

In support of the necessary connection between being and goodness, Aquinas contends that being and good are convertible because they are the same in reality and differ only in sense.¹¹⁹ Aquinas claims that the *ratio* of goodness is that of desirability. But a thing is desirable only insofar as it is perfect (*perfectum*), and everything desires its own perfection.

¹¹⁶ *Summa De Bono*, tr.1, q.1, a.6. "Si enim consideretur intentio boni et intentio entis, in unoquoque ens erit creatum primum et causa primaria, et bonum erit per informationem in ente et secundum. Intentio enim entis est intentio simplicissimi, quod non est resolvere ad aliquid, quod sit ante ipsum secundum rationem. Bonum autem resolvere est in ens relatam ad finem."

¹¹⁷ *Summa De Bono*, tr.1, q.1, a.6. "Si vero considerentur bonum et ens non in quocumque, sed bonum in causa prima et ens in creatis, sic ens erit posterius bono."

¹¹⁸ *Summa De Bono*, tr.1, q.1, a.6: "Si autem terio modo considerentur bonum et ens, scilicet secundum supposita, ut scilicet consideretur id quod est ens, et id quod est bonum, tunc bonum et ens convertuntur, quia nihil est, quod non sit bonum vel perfecte vel imperfecte..."

¹¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.1.

Something is perfect or complete only in so far as it is actual, where actuality implies the fulfillment (*perfectio*) of a thing's potentialities. But being or existence is what makes something actual; therefore, something is perfect only insofar as it is actual.¹²⁰ Thus 'to be' is to be in actuality, and actuality is the completeness or perfection of the thing, and this perfection is its goodness. Since every being has some degree of actuality, it has a certain amount of perfection and thus has a certain amount of goodness. Hence goodness and being are the same in referent, although the *ratio* of each concept differs.

What kind of relation holds between the concepts of being and goodness? His clearest articulation of this is found in *De Veritate* XXI, a.1, where he asks whether 'good' adds anything to 'being.' In reply, Aquinas notes that something can be added to something else in three ways: (1) accidentally, (2) in a limiting or determining manner, or (3) conceptually.¹²¹ Something is added to a thing accidentally when something outside the essence of the thing is added to it, as when the color whiteness is added to a body. Something is added in a limiting manner when it makes some further specification within a class or genus. For example, 'rational' adds something to the concept of animal: it belongs to the concept of animal to have a soul, but the concept is indeterminate with respect to whether that soul is rational or non-rational. Hence adding 'rational' to the concept of 'animal' limits and determines the concept. Finally, something is added conceptually when the addition is completely on the part of the mind.

In which sense of "adds" does the concept of goodness add something (i.e., desirability) to being? Aquinas argues that goodness only adds something to being conceptually:

- (1) Something can be added to another thing in only three ways: accidentally, in a limiting manner, or conceptually.

¹²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.1. "unde manifestum est quod in tantum est aliud bonum, in quantum est ens, esse enim est actualitas omnis rei." See also *Summa Theologiae* I, q.3,a.4 and *Summa Theologiae* I, q.4,a.1.

¹²¹ Aquinas, *De Veritate* XXI.1.

- (2) Good cannot accidentally add anything to being.
- (3) Good cannot add anything to being in a limiting manner.
- (4) Therefore, either good adds nothing to being or it adds something to being conceptually.
- (5) It is not the case that good adds nothing to being.
- (6) Therefore, good adds something to being conceptually.¹²²

In support of (2), Aquinas notes that accidents by their very nature add nothing to the being of a thing, and so goodness could not be an accidental property of being. In support of (3), Aquinas admits that in certain cases this type of limiting and determining does add something to being, as was the case with the example of ‘rational’ to ‘animal.’ However, this happens only in the same category in which the limiting occurs—‘rational’ adds to the being of ‘animal’ in the category of substance. To limit something in this manner requires the subject’s existence in one category. In other words, these limits are further specifications of being within the ten categories themselves and thus cannot be the type of addition to being that goodness adds, for both being and goodness transcend the ten categories.¹²³ Thus Aquinas concludes that good must either add nothing to being or add something to being only conceptually.

In support of (5), Aquinas enlists Avicenna’s claim that being is the first thing that is conceived by the intellect, and hence “every other noun must either be a synonym of being or

¹²² *De Veritate* XXI.1: “Non autem potest esse quod super ens universale aliquid addat aliquid primo modo, quamvis illo modo possit fieri additio super aliquod ens particulare; nulla enim res naturae est quae sit extra essentiam entis universalis, quamvis aliqua res sit extra essentiam huius entis. Secundo autem modo inveniuntur aliqua addere super ens, quia ens contrahitur per decem genera, quorum unumquodque addit aliquid super ens; non quidem aliquod accidens, vel aliquam differentiam quae sit extra essentiam entis, sed determinatum modum essendi, qui fundatur in ipsa essentia rei. Sic autem bonum non addit aliquid super ens: cum bonum dividatur aequaliter in decem genera, ut ens, ut patet in I Ethicor: et ideo oportet quod vel nihil addat super ens, vel addat aliquid, quod sit in ratione tantum. Si enim adderet aliquid reale, oportet quod per rationem boni contraheretur ens ad aliquod speciale genus. Cum autem ens sit id quod primo cadit in conceptione intellectus, ut Avicenna dicit, oportet quod omne aliud nomen vel sit synonymum enti: quod de bono dici non potest, cum non nugatorie dicatur ens bonum; vel addat aliquid ad minus secundum rationem; et sic oportet quod bonum, ex quo non contrahit ens, addat aliquid super ens, quod sit rationis tantum.”

¹²³ *De Veritate* XXI.1.

add something at least conceptually.”¹²⁴ Thus goodness at least adds something to being conceptually. Aquinas is quick to note, however, that something can be added conceptually in two ways: as a negation or a relation. While ‘one’ adds a negation to being, ‘true’ and ‘good’ are predicated positively and thus must add a relation to being: good adds to being the relation of perfection, specifically with respect an end. In the reply to the objections, Aquinas once again emphasizes that the relation between being and goodness is only a conceptual relation—not a real relation, because real relations are confined to only one category. But if goodness is convertible with being, then it must—like being—transcend the categories.

Given this, in what sense does Aquinas think that being and good are interchangeable? Aquinas specifically addresses the interchangeability of being and good in two places: his *Commentary on the Sentences* I d.8, q.1, a.3 and *De Veritate* XXI, a.2. In the *Sentences*, Aquinas argues that the names ‘being’, ‘one’, ‘true’, and ‘good’ can be compared to each other in two ways, either extensionally or conceptually. When taken extensionally, he claims that they are (1) convertible with each other, (2) the same in referent, and (3) coextensive (*nec unquam derelinquunt se*).¹²⁵ Do these three facts about the extensional relation of being and good amount to the same thing, or are they distinct claims? The answer hinges on how Aquinas understands convertibility, identity of reference, and coextensiveness, for necessary coextension doesn’t necessarily imply convertibility, nor does it necessarily imply an identity of reference. Furthermore, the type of interchangeability of being and good isn’t one of interchangeability *salva veritate*, but only in terms of their referents. In this early work, the relationship between

¹²⁴ *De Veritate* XXI.1, trans. by James V. McGlynn, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953).

¹²⁵ Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* I, d.8,q.1, a.3, “Respondeo dicendum, quod ista nomina, ens et bonum, unum et verum, simpliciter secundum rationem intelligendi praecedunt alia divina nomina: quod patet ex eorum communitate. Si autem comparemus ea ad invicem, hoc potest esse dupliciter: vel secundum suppositum; et sic convertuntur ad invicem, et sunt idem in supposito, nec unquam derelinquunt se; vel secundum intentiones eorum; et sic simpliciter et absolute ens est prius aliis.”

convertibility, identity of reference, and coextensiveness is vague.

In *De Veritate* XXI, a.2, Aquinas explains convertibility of being and good in terms of a necessary identity of referents because being and good are necessarily coextensive concepts. Here, he asks whether being and good are interchangeable according to their referents.¹²⁶ He answers affirmatively, and his reply is instructive for understanding his notion of convertibility. Aquinas replies that the characteristic (*ratio*) of the good consists in perfecting one thing by means of an end, but everything which has the characteristic of the end, has the characteristic of good. But there are two characteristics of an end: namely, that things that have not obtained the end desire it, and second, the end is loved as enjoyable by those things which participate in the end.¹²⁷ Aquinas then claims that these two characteristics of an end belong to being itself, because things that do not participate in being tend toward it by a natural appetite, while those that presently possess being desire to love and preserve their being with all their power.¹²⁸ In short, the *ratio* of good implies the *ratio* of being, since good is perfective of a thing with respect to an end, and the *ratio* of the end implies the *ratio* of being.

That's only one side of the coin: proving the necessary coextension of being and good by means of biconditional entailment, Aquinas must show that the concept of good implies the concept of being and also that the concept of being implies the concept of good. In the current passage, Aquinas demonstrates that the concept of good implies the concept of being. Yet

¹²⁶ *De Veritate* XXI.2. "Secundo quaeritur utrum ens et bonum convertantur secundum supposita."

¹²⁷ *De Veritate* XXI.2: "Dicendum, quod cum ratio boni in hoc consistat quod aliquid sit perfectivum alterius per modum finis, omne illud quod invenitur habere rationem finis, habet etiam rationem boni. Duo autem sunt de ratione finis; ut scilicet sit appetitum vel desideratum ab his quae finem nondum attingunt, et ut sit dilectum, et quasi delectabile, ab his quae finem participant."

¹²⁸ *De Veritate* XXI.2: "Haec autem duo inveniuntur competere ipsi esse. Quae enim nondum esse participant, in esse quodam naturali appetitu tendunt; unde et materia appetit formam, secundum philosophum in I Phys. Omnia autem quae iam esse habent, illud esse suum naturaliter amant, et ipsum tota virtute conservant..."

Aquinas simply asserts that being also entails the *ratio* of good. We can, however, supply the argument from other passages of the Thomist corpus. Briefly, ‘to be’ is to be in actuality, and actuality is the completeness or perfection of the thing, and this perfection is a thing’s goodness.¹²⁹

After asserting that the *ratio* of being implies the *ratio* of good, Aquinas claims “just as it is impossible that there is some being that does not have existence, so also it is necessary that every being is good from the fact that it has being.”¹³⁰ And since the *ratio* of the good also implies the *ratio* of being, we have the appropriate biconditional entailment. Aquinas concludes that “it is impossible for anything to be good that does not have being, *and so it remains that good and being are convertible.*”¹³¹ The reason Aquinas concludes that being and good are convertible is due to their necessary coextension, grounded in the biconditional entailment of their *rationes*. So, interchangeability, identity of reference, and necessary coextension amount to the same thing: being and good are extensionally convertible concepts referring to the same reality, which Aquinas explains in terms of the reciprocally entailing nature of their two *rationes*. Consequently, *what-is* and *what-is-good* refer to all and only the same entities. Hence, **[B]** is justified by a particular account of **[A]**, the heart of which centers on the claim that being and good are really identical, but conceptual distinct.

¹²⁹ See *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.1.

¹³⁰ *De Veritate* XXI.2: “Ipsum igitur esse habet rationem boni. Unde sicut impossibile est quod sit aliquid ens quod non habeat esse, ita necesse est ut omne ens sit bonum ex hoc ipso quod esse habet;”

¹³¹ *De Veritate* XXI.2: “Cum autem bonum rationem entis includat, ut ex praedictis patet, impossibile est aliquid esse bonum quod non sit ens; et ita relinquatur quod bonum et ens convertantur.”

Scotus: Being and Good are Formally Distinct

Scotus—like his predecessors—does claim that being and good are convertible;¹³² however, Scotus posits a formal distinction between being and good rather than a conceptual distinction. In order to appreciate this divergence, let's first consider his distinction between *in quid* and *in quale* predication, and second, his doctrine of unitive containment. Once we grasp these further distinctions, we will see that being and good are convertible in the sense that they are necessarily coextensive concepts. In some ways this transforms the tradition; in other ways, the account remains very similar.

Following Porphyry, Scotus conceives of two types of predication: *in quid* predication and *in quale* predication. In *in quid* predication, the predicate expresses the essence of a thing (either its genus or its species); such predication answers the question “what is it?” By contrast, in *in quale* predication, the predicate expresses some further qualification of the essence (such as a specific difference, property, or an accident); such predication answers the question “in what way is it?”¹³³ These distinctions are nothing new. However, in *Ordinatio* I, d.8, Scotus applies the language of *quid/quale* predication to the transcendental order itself.¹³⁴

There the passage concerns whether Aristotle teaches the doctrine of the transcendentals. In answering the question, Scotus proposes several of Aristotle's teachings that imply he does. First, he claims that Aristotle says that truth and being are predicated univocally of both God and creatures. Second, Aristotle teaches that if being is predicated of God, it will be predicated *in quid*. Scotus concludes that Aristotle implicitly teaches (1) univocity of being and (2) that some

¹³²*Ordinatio* I, d.1, pars 1, q.2, n.56. “Dico quod bonum uno modo convertitur cum ente, et isto modo potest poni in quolibet genere.”

¹³³ See Allan B. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus*, 79.

¹³⁴ See Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus*, 81 and *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3, n.126-127.

transcendental predications are said *in quid*—he has in mind ‘being’—while other transcendental predications are said *in quale*. Scotus gives ‘true’ as an example of the latter.¹³⁵ On this scheme, being is predicated *in quid*, while true, good, and one are predicated *in quale*. Since the latter are coextensive attributes of being, of whatever being is predicated *in quid*—namely, everything that exists—truth, goodness, and unity will be predicated *in quale*. Positing the former answers “what is it?” and so everything that exists will be a being; positing the latter describes the way something is,¹³⁶ and so everything that exists will have the qualities of unity, truth, and goodness. So the proper attributes of being, such as goodness, are necessarily inseparable qualifications or properties of being. While unity, truth, and goodness are formal perfections of being itself, the terms signified by them refer to the same reality.

Second, in his *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* IV.2, Scotus introduces the notion of unitive containment to explain the sense in which being and unity are convertible. Here, Scotus wishes to avoid two accounts of the relationship between being and its proper perfections. On the one hand, Scotus insists that being and its perfections are not distinct realities from the essence of the subject—i.e., they are not really distinct from it, as if it were another nature, capable of independent existence. On the other hand, Scotus maintains that being and the perfections unitively contained under it are not simply distinct on the part of the mind (i.e., conceptually distinct); rather, the attributes contained under being are real perfections of the

¹³⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3, n. 126: “Sed numquid Aristoteles ista praedicata generalia numquam docuit? Respondeo. Ex VIII Metaphysicae docuit nihil dici de Deo ut genus (ex auctoritate praeallegata), et tamen docuit univoce dici de Deo et creatura ‘veritatem’ II Metaphysicae, sicut supra allegatum est (ubi dicit ‘principia sempiternorum esse verissima’); et in hoc docuit entitatem dici univoce de Deo et creatura, quia subdit ibi (II Metaphysicae) quod “sicut unumquodue se habet ad esse, sic se habet ad veritatem”; patet etiam—secundum eum—quod si ens dicitur de Deo, hoc erit in ‘quid’. Ergo implicite in istis docuit aliquod praedicatum transcendens dici ‘quid’, et non esse genus nec definitionem, et alia praedicata transcendentia dici in ‘quale’ (ut verum), et tamen non esse propria nec accidentia secundum quod ista universalia competunt speciebus aliquorum generum, quia nihil quod est species alicuius generis competit Deo aliquo modo.”

¹³⁶ See Peter King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Scotus*, 59, n.17.

essence.¹³⁷ So the essence or being of a subject is really identical with, but formally distinct from, its proper perfections. While Scotus appeals here to unitive containment of being and its perfections, his account remains rather cryptic. He does, however, direct the reader to consult his other works concerning unitive containment.

Reportatio IIA d.16 comprises Scotus's most mature treatment of unitive containment.¹³⁸ Appealing to Pseudo-Dionysius, he claims that when one thing is unitively contained in another, the "two things" are neither completely the same nor completely distinct. Rather, unitive containment requires both unity and a distinction.¹³⁹ One type of unitive containment occurs when a subject unitively contains things which are quasi-attributes. For example, the attributes of being are not distinct things from being itself (i.e., capable of separate existence). The reason for this, according to Scotus, is that being and its proper attributes are necessarily coextensive: no matter which one of these attributes is attributed to a thing, Scotus claims, that thing will be a being, true, and good. Scotus concludes that these proper attributes are not things other than being itself. However, he warns, just because these quasi-attributes are not completely distinct from being does not mean that they are part of the quiddity or essence of a thing.¹⁴⁰ They are,

¹³⁷ *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* IV, q.2, n.143: "Sustineri ergo potest illa opinio de identitate reali sic: quod sicut essentia divina infinitas perfectiones continet et omnes unitive, sic quod non sunt alia res, sic essentia creata potest alias perfectiones unitive continere. Tamen in Deo quaelibet est infinita; et ideo proprie non potest dici pars unius totalis perfectionis; nec ab aliquo potest sumi ratio generis et differentiae quae semper per se important partem perfectionis specie potentialem et actuaalem, et ideo perfectionem limitatam. In creatura quaelibet perfectio contenta limitata est, et limitatior essentia continente secundum totalitatem considerata. Ideo quaelibet potest dici pars perfectionis, non tamen realiter differens quod sit alia natura, sed alia perfectio realis—alienate, inquam, non causata ab intellectu, nec tamen tanta quantam intelligimus cum dicimus 'diversae res'; sed differentia reali minori, si vocetur differentia realis omnis non causata ab intellectu."

¹³⁸ The editors of *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* have included the Latin text (from cod. Oxon. Mert. 61, f.179v-180r) in footnote 165. See *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* IV, q.2, n.143.

¹³⁹ *Reportatio* IIA, d.16, q.un: "De continentia unitiva loquitur Dionysius, 5 De divinis nominibus, quia continentia unitiva non est omnino eiusdem, ita quod idem omnino contineat se unitive, nec etiam omnino manentium distincte, requirit ergo unitatem et distinctionem."

¹⁴⁰ *Reportatio* IIA, d.16, q.un: "Est ergo continentia unitiva duplex: uno modo sicut inferius continet superiora essentialia, et ibi contenta sunt de essentia continentis, sicut eadem est realitas a qua accipitur differentia in albedine et a qua genus proximum, ut color et qualitas sensibilis et qualitas, et quamquam essent res aliae, unitive

after all, predicated *in quale* and not *in quid*.

The reason for Scotus's claim that unitive containment requires both unity and distinction was left unexplored in *Reportatio* IIA, d.16. He does, however, offer an explanation in *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.4. In that passage, Scotus considers whether justice and mercy are distinguished in God. In his solution, Scotus claims that the divine essence unitively contains the divine attributes:

The essence unitively contains every actuality of the divine essence. Now things that are contained without any distinction are not *unitively* contained, because there is no *union* if there isn't any distinction. Nor is there unitive containment of things that are unqualifiedly really distinct, because such things are contained in such a way that they remain many, that is, disparate. Therefore, this word 'unitive' implies some sort of distinction between the things that are contained – enough of a distinction that they can be said to come together in some union, though not the sort of union that rules out any composition or aggregation of distinct things. This can obtain only if one posits formal non-identity along with real identity.¹⁴¹

In this passage, Scotus offers some clear conditions for unitive containment. Unitive containment requires some degree of sameness and some degree of distinction. Scotus argues that this is only possible when a formal distinction is posited with a real identity; hence, a formal distinction between two things is a necessary condition of unitive containment.

The reason is as follows: unities require parts or components. On the one hand, if two things are really distinct (capable of separate existence), then there is no true unity in which one contains the other. Furthermore, if two things are only accidentally united, then there is not a

continentur in albedine. Alia est continentia unitiva quando subiectum unitive continet aliqua quae sunt quasi passiones, sicut passiones entis non sunt res alia ab ente, quia quaecumque detur, ipsa res est ens, vera, bona. Ergo vel oportet dicere quod non sunt res aliae ab ente, vel quod ens non habet passiones reales, quod est contra Aristotelem, IV Metaphysicae expresse. Nec tamen magis sunt tales passiones de essentia, nec idem quiditati [Ms. = quiditatem] quam si essent res alia.”

¹⁴¹ *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.4, n. 74: “Ad primum, divinum ‘esse’ unitive continet omnem actualitatem divinae essentiae. Unitive non continentur quae sine omni distinctione continentur, quia unio non est sine omni distinctione; nec unitive continentur quae simpliciter realiter distincta continentur, quia illa multipliciter sive dispersim continentur. Hoc ergo vocabulum ‘unitive’ includit aliqualem distinctionem contentorum, quae sufficit ad unionem, et tamen talem unionem quae repugnat omni compositioni et aggregationi distinctorum; hoc non potest esse nisi ponatur non-identitas formalis cum identitate reali.”

true unity. On the other hand, if the two realities are completely the same, then there isn't a true unity because there is only one thing—it would lack the metaphysical composition needed. So both a unity and a distinction are necessary, and this is only possible if the two realities are more than conceptually distinct. A conceptual distinction isn't enough because there is no real composition and so no real unity—but simply one thing. So unitive containment requires (1) some type of essential unity and (2) some type of aggregation. Only the formal distinction allows for both (1) and (2).

Thus unitive containment occurs when something—say, some essence E—contains realities that are formally distinct from each other and from E itself but are nevertheless really identical with each other and with E—i.e., the realities are incapable of separate existence and so the terms that designate those realities are identical in reference. The divine essence, for example, contains formally distinct attributes that are united with it essentially, such that, for any attribute A and the divine essence E, A and E are really identical but formally distinct. Any A contained in E can function as a distinct property bearer of E. Given unitive containment, the divine attributes are essential properties of the divine nature distinct enough to form an actual unity when contained in the divine essence, but in such a way that they are incapable of separate existence. In the same way, the soul unitively contains its faculties of intellect and will; intellect and will are formally distinct from each other and the soul itself, but they are incapable of separate existence and the terms that designate those realities are identical in reference.

By the same token, being unitively contains its proper attributes of goodness, truth, and unity. As such, being and its proper attributes form a unity, whereby the attributes of being (one, true, good) are essential properties of being formally distinct from being and each other, and yet truly united in such a way that they are incapable of separate existence and the terms that

designate the concepts are identical in reference. This is why Scotus surmises that the conceptual distinction between being and goodness fails: there would exist only one thing without any true composition, since the distinction between the concepts is only a distinction of reason. But the concept of being and its attributes are not simply distinct on the part of the mind, but are real perfections of an entity discovered by the mind. Hence only unitive containment, whereby real-identity and formal difference is posited can account for both the relationship between the concepts of being and goodness and their referents.

Scotus's terminology concerning the proper attributes of being fluctuates in many places. Sometimes, he simply calls them 'attributes' (*passiones*) of being,¹⁴² occasionally 'proper attributes' (*passiones propriae*) of being,¹⁴³ and often 'quasi-attributes' (*quasi passiones*).¹⁴⁴ Why the divergence in terminology? It seems that Scotus wavers in his terminology in order to emphasize different aspects of the relationship between being and its attributes. On the one hand, Scotus seems to call them 'attributes' or 'proper attributes' to emphasize (1) their necessary coextensiveness with being and (2) their real identity and formal difference with being.

On the other hand, when Scotus refers to them as 'quasi-attributes,' he means to emphasize the peculiar relationship they have with being. Since being isn't a thing, it doesn't have real attributes in the strict sense, but it does have metaphysical "add-ons." So in the case of being and its proper attributes like goodness, we are dealing with one further level of abstraction than from ordinary existent things. Accordingly, in order to underscore their peculiar relationship with being, he calls them 'quasi-attributes,' emphasizing the fact that since being

¹⁴² See *Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.4-5, n.273; *Ordinatio* I, d.39, q.1-5, n.13 (Appendix A in the Vatican edition vol VI).

¹⁴³ See *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1, q.3, n.134.

¹⁴⁴ See *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VI, q.3, n.20, *Ordinatio* III, d. 8, q. un., n.50, and *Reportatio* IIA, d.16, q.un.

isn't strictly a "thing," it can't have real attributes. Rather, it has 'quasi-attributes' which function for being in the same way that real attributes of a subject function.

We can now draw the following conclusions about Scotus's account: first, when Scotus claims that being and good are convertible, he means that they are necessarily coextensive concepts, and the terms that designate those concepts are extensionally equivalent—they refer to the same reality, such that of whatever being is predicated *in quid*, goodness will be predicated *in quale*. Second, the concepts of being and good differ. Scotus posits a formal difference in reality and not simply on the part of the mind: while goodness is unitively contained in being, goodness means something different because it adds a formal perfection to being.¹⁴⁵ And it adds a perfection to being, not simply conceptually, but as a real property of it, unitively contained by it, and yet, formally distinct from it. Thus while being and good mean different things because they have distinct mind-independent *rationes*, they are nevertheless convertible, but only in the sense that they are existentially inseparable from each other and are therefore necessarily coextensive properties of everything that exists.

Conclusion

So the standard, conceptual account of convertibility claims that being and goodness are intentionally distinct, but extensionally equivalent: the concepts mean different things but designate the same reality. Hence the concepts of being and good are not convertible intentionally but only extensionally. This is successful for Philip, Albert, and Aquinas because being and goodness are only *conceptually* distinct: they are not distinct in reality but only in the way we conceive the concepts. Hence there is no problem with interchangeability—we are

¹⁴⁵ For Scotus's treatment of good as a formal perfection of being and the relationship between perfection and goodness, see *Ordinatio* IV q.31, q. un., n.13 and *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3 (Wadding).

referring to the same reality conceived in different ways, and the way it is conceived is not on the part of the object or referent, but only on the part of the mind. And since predicating being of something always and only refers to the same class of objects that good is predicated of, being and good are necessarily coextensive concepts. Thus Philip, Albert, and Aquinas all provide a deflationary account of convertibility that suggests simply a necessary coextension of being and good: being and good are not convertible *salva veritate*, but only in terms of their referents.

If this is correct, then Scotus's view does amount to the same thing when considered extensionally: being and good are necessarily coextensive because they are really identical but formally (rather than conceptually) distinct. In the end, both ways of conceiving being and good end in a rather deflationary account of interchangeability: being and goodness are interchangeable or convertible only in the sense that they are necessarily coextensive concepts; albeit for different reasons. For Philip *et al.*, extensional equivalence formulated in terms of real identity and conceptual difference amounts to necessary coextension. For Scotus, extensional equivalence is grounded in a real identity and formal distinction, because good is a proper attribute of being, such that of whatever being is predicated *in quid*, goodness is predicated *in quale*. In other words, the concepts of being and goodness differ, but being and being good refer to exactly the same reality. Thus Scotus differs from the tradition in terms of the content of the concepts of being and good (i.e., how he conceives of **[A]**), while agreeing with the tradition in terms of the identity of their referents (i.e., **[B]**). So while formal account and the conceptual account both hold **[B]**, they do so for slightly different reasons, because they conceive of different ways in which the concepts are related to one another.

So on both accounts being and goodness are not synonymous. Furthermore, on both accounts, *what-is* and *what-is-good* refer to the same thing: they are extensionally equivalent.

On both interpretations, therefore, there is a necessary coextension between being and good. And while this is shared with his predecessors, Scotus's reasons for this are very different: the concepts of being and good are not simply generated by the mind conceiving of the same reality in different ways—like the Morning Star and Evening Star—but are formally different *rationes* discovered by the mind. Good does not simply add something to being conceptually, but formally: it is a quasi-attribute of being that exists in the world independently of our conception of it. Goodness, on Scotus's account, is a (formal) property of being. Since this kind of goodness is convertible with being, it too transcends the categories. And as we will see in the next chapter, this goodness is something positive and is characteristic of any positive thing according to the grade of being the entity has: the more entity, the more goodness, the less entity, the less goodness.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ *Ordinatio* II, d.7. "... bonitatem naturalem volitionis quae competit sibi in quantum est ens positivum, quae etiam competit cuicumque enti positive secundum gradum sua entitatis (magis et magis, minus et minus)."

CHAPTER THREE:
SCOTUS’S NATURE APPROACH:
AN AUGUSTINIAN HIERARCHY OF GOODNESS

As we saw in chapter 1, Augustine articulated a nature approach to explain the necessary connection between being and goodness. Recall that the nature approach explains the goodness of an entity by an appeal to the entity’s nature as the type of thing it is. Augustine’s nature account was influenced by a Neoplatonic theory of goodness in which an object’s natural or ontological goodness corresponds to its level or grade of being—the more being, the more natural goodness. Furthermore, this hierarchical account of natural goods provides normative constraints on one’s love and desires, for Augustine argues one ought to love an object proportional to its grade of natural goodness.

Given Scotus’s Aristotelianism, one might presume a complete rejection of such an account. This presumption, however, would be false. For one, the influence of Platonism and Neoplatonism on scholasticism even after the “rediscovery” of Aristotle is well noted.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, scholastics in the 13th century felt the need to integrate not only Aristotle into their philosophy and theology, but also Augustine and Boethius—both of whom were heavily

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages: Outlines of a Corpus Platonium Medii Aevi* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939); Carlos Steel, “Plato Latinus (1939-1989),” in *Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale: traductions et traducteurs de l’antiquité tardive au XIV^e siècle: actes du Colloque internationale de Cassino, 15-17 juin 1989*, eds. J. Hamesse and M. Fattori (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain), 301-316; and Jan A. Aertsen, “Platonism,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* vol. I, eds. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 76-85.

influenced by Neoplatonism.¹⁴⁸ As we will see, Scotus adopts the Augustinian hierarchy of goodness that corresponds to being, but often articulates such an account in Aristotelian terminology.

The argument of this chapter proceeds in three steps. First, I explore Scotus's claim that goodness and perfection (of being) are identical. Second, Scotus thinks that being is arranged hierarchically. This hierarchical ranking of being, based upon the magnitude or perfection of the thing's nature, Scotus calls "an order of eminence."¹⁴⁹ Third, goodness, as a necessarily coextensive perfection of being, comes in degrees dependent upon the type of being, arranged in terms of the same hierarchy. In contemporary terms, the connection between being and goodness expresses a form of weak supervenience.

Goodness and Perfection

Scotus believes that *bonum* and *perfectum* are the same. Drawing upon Aristotle's account of completeness or perfection in *Metaphysics* V.16, Scotus states that the word 'good' signifies perfection, but there are two different ways in which something can be perfect or complete and so two different ways something can be good.¹⁵⁰ In one way, something is perfect (think completeness¹⁵¹) *intrinsically* by having a form or essence which constitutes the nature of the thing, i.e., its being. In another way, something obtains its perfection by reaching the end

¹⁴⁸ Even Thomas Aquinas—the Aristotelian *par excellence*—was influenced by neoplatonism on a number of issues. For an example from his doctrine of creation and its relationship to God's goodness, See Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, 208-228. Moreover, some scholars even postulate such a hierarchy of being in Aristotle himself, so it's entirely possible that Scotus draws upon both these preeminent figures in formulating a hierarchical account of being. See Donald Morrison, "The Evidence for Degrees of Being in Aristotle," *Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987): 382-402.

¹⁴⁹ *De Primo Principio* I.7.

¹⁵⁰ See *Ordinatio* IV, d.31, q.un., n.4, *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, q.2, n.24, and *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3.

¹⁵¹ The Latin word '*perfectum*' has both connotations.

delimited by the potentialities in the thing's nature, and so this kind of perfection *extrinsically* perfects the entity.¹⁵² Scotus summarizes this difference in the following passage from the

Reportatio:

It is necessary to know what 'good' signifies. I say that 'good' and 'perfect' are the same according to Aristotle in *Metaphysics* VI. But 'perfect' is said in a twofold manner: in one way [it names] that to which nothing is lacking intrinsically, and this perfection is an essential and intrinsic perfection, or a primary perfection. In another way, something is called 'perfect' by a secondary perfection. Thus good is therefore said in a twofold manner: a primary way and a secondary way. In a primary way, good cannot have a contrary, nor a privation in its nature, because contraries are suited to occur concerning the same thing...insofar as it is primary goodness, it names a perfection *in itself and in reference to itself*. The good therefore, as primary goodness, has only a contradictory opposite, as the non-good; but the good according to the second way, that which is *extrinsic*, has badness as its privative opposite.¹⁵³

Scotus emphasizes that primary or essential goodness intrinsically perfects a thing "in itself and in reference to itself,"¹⁵⁴ that is, as an absolute quality of a thing, there is no need to reference something outside the thing's being to explain its goodness. Furthermore, primary goodness is a necessarily coextensive property of being, formally distinct from it. So everything that has being will have this corresponding goodness. Scotus's terminology for this type of goodness varies throughout his writings: in different places he calls the goodness that converts with being

¹⁵² *Ordinatio* IV, d. 31, q. un., n.13: "Ad questionem dico secundum Philosophorum V Metaphysicae cap. 'De Perfectio': Bonum et perfectum idem; duplex est autem perfectio: intrinseca forma; extrinseca finis, -- vel prima forma, secunda finis..."

¹⁵³ *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3 (Wadding). The reference to Book VI of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is wrong; *Metaphysics* V is the correct reference. "...oportet scire quid bonum significat. Dico quod bonum et perfectum idem sunt 6 Metaph. Perfectum autem dupliciter dicitur: uno modo, cui nihil deest, et hoc intrinsece, et illud est perfectum perfectione essentiali intrinseca, seu perfectione prima; alia modo dicitur perfectum perfectione secunda. Sic igitur bonum duplex est: Primo modo, et secundo. Bonum primo modo non potest habere contrarium, neque privativum in natura, quia contraria nata sunt fieri circa idem...inquantum primum bonum dicit perfectionem in se et ad se. Bonum igitur bonitate prima tantum habet oppositum contradictorie, ut non bonum; bonum autem secundo modo, quod est extrinsecum, habet malum oppositum privative."

¹⁵⁴ *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3. "primum bonum dicit perfectionem in se et ad se."

“primary goodness,”¹⁵⁵ “natural goodness,”¹⁵⁶ and “essential goodness.”¹⁵⁷ Scotus often contrasts convertible goodness with “secondary”¹⁵⁸ or “accidental”¹⁵⁹ goodness, which corresponds to the second and extrinsic sense of perfection.

In a later chapter I clarify this distinction, but let me briefly elaborate on it here. Primary goodness characterizes a substance as good when the substance lacks nothing that makes it the type of thing that it is—i.e., its being. In contrast, secondary goodness is accidental to the thing itself—it could continue in its existence without being good in the secondary sense. Secondary goodness, as John Hare characterizes it, is *in* substances, whereas primary goodness characterizes them *as* substances.¹⁶⁰ Having some virtue, for example, would be a secondary goodness, since the substance could exist without having the virtue in question. This chapter focuses on primary or ontological goodness. In order to understand the implications of this for Scotus’s hierarchy of value, let’s consider his hierarchical account of being.

The Hierarchy of Substances

Scotus holds that being is predicated univocally of everything that exists—both God and creatures. Before being is divided into the ten categories, it is “quantified” under two modes, infinite and finite. Finite being is then divided into Aristotle’s ten categories which represent

¹⁵⁵ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9 and *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, q.2, n.24.

¹⁵⁶ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, n.28 and *Ordinatio* II, d.40, n.7.

¹⁵⁷ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9.

¹⁵⁸ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9 and *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, q.2, n.24.

¹⁵⁹ See *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, nn.62-64, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9, and *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, q.2, n.24

¹⁶⁰ John F. Hare, “The Supervenience of Goodness on Being,” in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe (Routledge, 2009), 152.

finite modes of being.¹⁶¹ When Scotus speaks of a “finitely quantified mode of being,” ‘quantified’ does not refer to the category of quantity, but to the magnitude or greatness of being,¹⁶² which he connects to having some amount of perfection and from which a hierarchy of essences or natures can be constructed.¹⁶³ This hierarchical ranking of being, based upon the magnitude or perfection of the thing’s nature, Scotus calls “an order of eminence.”¹⁶⁴ Let’s consider each of these points in more detail.

In *Quodlibet* Five, Scotus asks whether a relation of origin (such as Paternity in the Trinity) is formally infinite. Scotus will deny that relations of origin are formally infinite; however, he procures the following argument for the affirmative:

- (1) Being is first divided into finite and infinite before it is divided into the ten categories.

So,

- (2) Every being is either finite or infinite.
- (3) The relation of origin is not a finite relation.

Premise (3) states that divine relations between Trinitarian Persons do not fall under that category of *finite* relation, since nothing finite can be predicated of an infinite being. Given that the relation of origin cannot be a finite relation, the interlocutor concludes:

- (4) The relation of origin is formally infinite.¹⁶⁵

Scotus responds to the argument in a number of ways, but I’ll focus on one aspect of his

¹⁶¹ *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3, n.113. “Ens prius dividitur in infinitum et finitum quam in decem praedicamenta, quia alterum istorum, scilicet ‘finitum’, est commune ad decem genera.” See also *Lectura* I, D.8, pars1, q.3, n.107.

¹⁶² See Peter King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Scotus*, 27.

¹⁶³ See for example *Quodlibet* V.58. See also *Ordinatio* I, d.19, q.1, n.8.

¹⁶⁴ *De Primo Pincipio* I.7.

¹⁶⁵ *Quodlibet* V.3: “Ens dividitur per finitum et infinitum prius quam descendat in decem genera; ergo quodcumque ens, etsi non sit in aliquo genere, erit finitum vel infinitum; relatio originis non est finite, quia tunc non esset idem realiter essentiae divinae, finitum enim non potest esse idem realiter infinito; igitur ipsa est formaliter infinita.”

response relevant to our discussion. He begins with conceding premise (1), that being is first divided into finite and infinite before dividing into the ten categories, such that finite and infinite are not further distinctions within some category of being; rather, finite and infinite are divisions of *quantified* being.¹⁶⁶ He then claims that finite and infinite, as proper attributes of being,¹⁶⁷ pertain to quantified being in terms of having some amount of perfection. In other words, a thing's perfection is measured by its quantity. At the most general level, this quantity is either total (the infinite being) or partial (finite beings) in what Scotus calls a "hierarchy of essences." Finite or partial quantity for some substance is indexed to its natural kind, such that each natural kind has a certain amount of perfection or quantity rooted in its form or being.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, no two natural kinds can have the same quantity or amount of perfection, and thus we can hierarchically arrange such natural kinds depending upon their grade of being.¹⁶⁹ Let's call this the 'Principle of Inequality for Differing Natural Kinds,' or 'PI' for short. We can formulate (PI) as follows: for any two natural kinds, K_1 and K_2 ,

(PI): K_1 and K_2 are equal in perfection if and only if K_1 and K_2 are the same kind.¹⁷⁰

Scotus responds to the initial question by claiming that in order for there to be a comparison or ranking of natures, the ranking must occur between natural kinds (i.e., in the category of substance), and each entity of comparison must be either total or partial (i.e., the infinite being or some finite being). But Paternity is neither a total nor a partial entity in this sense.

¹⁶⁶ *Quodlibet* V.58.

¹⁶⁷ This probably refers to the transcendental attribute of *finite or infinite* that Scotus thinks is a proper attribute of being when predicated in disjunction. See *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3.

¹⁶⁸ *Quodlibet* V.58.

¹⁶⁹ *Quodlibet* V.58. Also See *De Primo Principio*, 3.25: "Duae Naturae eodem communi non habent gradum aequalem. Probatur per differentias dividentes genus; si sunt inequales, ergo et esse unius erit perfectius esse alterius; nullum esse perfectius ipso necesse esse ex se."

¹⁷⁰ This formulation comes from J.T. Paasch, *Divine Production in Late Medieval Trinitarian Theology: Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2012), 152.

But the truth of (PI) in conjunction with the claim that not every existent entity has the same kind-nature entails that we can rank essences in terms of their grade of perfection. Scotus calls this ranking an “order of eminence.” In the *Reportatio* I-A d.19 and *Quodlibet* 6, Scotus clarifies his use of quantity as a measure of perfection by explaining a twofold sense of quantity—categorical quantity and transcendental quantity—connecting the latter with the magnitude of being grounded in the thing’s perfection.¹⁷¹

According to Scotus, we can compare things to each other in three ways, by considering three different types of relations that can obtain between entities: identity, similarity, and equality.¹⁷² Relations for Scotus are accidents and “relative beings.” As accidents, they accidentally inhere in one of their *relata*;¹⁷³ as “relative beings,” their existence depends upon an absolute category. So relations accidentally inhere in one thing and refer to another. Relations and absolutes differ, according to Scotus, in their *rationes*: the *ratio* of something absolute is *ad se* because it refers “to itself,” while the *ratio* of a relation is *ad aliud*—it, by nature, refers to something beyond itself.¹⁷⁴ So absolute beings really have being, but relative beings only have being in a derivative sense: their existence depends upon their foundation in something absolute. These three relations—identity, similarity, and equality—have their foundations in the absolute

¹⁷¹ These texts are roughly contemporaneous. The *Reportatio* is an examined report of Scotus’s lecture on the *Sentences* that began about 1303 or 1304 in Paris. The *Quodlibetal Questions* were disputed in Paris for Advent in 1306 or Lent in 1307. Since there are no substantial doctrinal differences in the relevant material, I’ll treat these works together. The Latin for the *Reportatio* I-A is taken from Allan B. Wolter and Oleg V. Bychkov, *John Duns Scotus: The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture, Reportatio I-A* (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 2004). The Latin and numbering for *Quodlibetal Questions* is taken from the Spanish-Latin semi-critical edition by Felix Alluntis, *Obras del Doctor Sutil Juan Duns Escoto: Cuestiones Cuodlibetales, Edicion Bilingue* (Madrid: Biblioteca De Autores Christianos, 1968).

¹⁷² See *Ordinatio* I, d. 19, q.1.

¹⁷³ See Mark G. Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 68.

¹⁷⁴ See for example, *Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.5, n.244, *textus interpolatus*: “relatio, si non fundetur in alio, non est relatio; igitur, vel erit processus in infinitum, vel relatio tandem fundabitur in absoluto. Sed ratio absoluti est quod sit ad se, ratio vero formalis relationis est habitudo ad aliud; non est autem eadem entitas formalis ‘ad se’ et ‘ad aliud;’ igitur etc.”

categories of substance, quality, and quantity, respectively.¹⁷⁵ Accordingly, the foundation of the identity relation is a thing's quiddity or substance; the foundation of the similarity relation is some accident in the category of quality; finally, the relation of equality is founded upon the category of quantity, in terms of having some magnitude of perfection.¹⁷⁶

In *Reportatio* IA, d.19, Scotus explains that each of the foundations of these relations can be taken in two different ways: either strictly or generally. When taken strictly, the foundations belong only to the categories of substance, quantity, and quality. But when foundations of the three relations are taken generally, they can be found in things that are not formally in these three categories.¹⁷⁷ So according to Scotus, there are two types of relations, categorical and transcendental.

Categorical relations are really distinct from their foundations¹⁷⁸ and come in three broad categories: (1) numerical relations, (2) causal relations, and (3) relations concerning measure.¹⁷⁹ Transcendental relations, in contrast, are only formally distinct from their foundations and can

¹⁷⁵ See *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, q.1-3, n.12.

¹⁷⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d.19, n.8: “De Secundo dico quod quodcumque ens in se est ‘quid’ et habet in se aliquem gradum determinatum in entibus et est forma vel habens forma; et secundum hoc, sicut tripliciter potest considerari quodcumque ens, ita etiam super ipsum potest fundari triplex relatio communiter sumpta: quia identitas super quodcumque ens in quantum est ‘quid’, aequalitas et inaequalitas super quodcumque ens in quantum habet magnitudinem aliquam perfectionis (quae dicitur ‘quantitas virtualis’, de qua dicit Augustinus IV *De Trinitate* quod “in his quae non sunt mole magna, idem est melius esse quod maius esse”), similitudo autem vel dissimilitudo potest fundari super quodcumque ens in quantum est ‘quale’ at qualitas quaedam...”

¹⁷⁷ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, n.12.

¹⁷⁸ See *Quodlibet* VI.82 and *Ordinatio* I, d.31, q.un, n.6: Videtur dicendum quod ad relationem realem tria sufficient: primo, quod fundamentum sit reale et terminus realis; et secundo, quod extremorum sit distincto realis; et tertio, quod ex natura extremorum sequatur ipsa talis relation absque opera alterius potentiae, comparantis unum extremum alteri.

¹⁷⁹ See Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325*, 69-72; Peter King “Scotus on Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 36. Scotus recognizes that this list, derived from Aristotle, is deficient, but are nevertheless the main types of relations. Other relations will be viewed in terms of their similarities to these. See *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* V, q.11, n.59.

apply to everything that exists, regardless of their relationship to the ten categories.¹⁸⁰ Making this distinction between categorical and transcendental relations, and suggesting the “general” or “broad” use of quantity, seems like a novel move on the part of Scotus, but Scotus finds precedent for such a distinction in Aristotle and Augustine.¹⁸¹

Scotus notes that Aristotle speaks of quantity and its attributes—such as great and small—as applied to things outside the actual category of quantity. The names ‘great’ and ‘small,’ in such a case, are “transferred” to things that exist beyond categorical quantity.¹⁸² Augustine also appeals to a broader sense of quantity in *De Trinitate* 7, with respect to mass: to have a greater mass (in terms of goodness and perfection) is to be better.¹⁸³ Do not miss what Scotus does here: he takes the Augustinian hierarchy of being—which Augustine had grounded in measure, form, and order—Neoplatonic principles—and he grounds them instead in the quantity or magnitude of the perfection of being respective to each thing—an Aristotelian concept.

Scotus then shows that taking these foundations in a broader sense is also possible with the foundations of identity and equality. With respect to identity, for example, “it is certain that identity is said of things other than those in the three categories, because it is convertible with

¹⁸⁰ See *Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.4-5, n.260 for Scotus’s claim that transcendental relations are really identical but formally distinct from their foundations. The discussion in the passage concerns the relationship between God and creatures.

¹⁸¹ See also *Quodlibet* VI.13.

¹⁸² For Scotus’s conception of categorical quantity, see Richard Cross, *The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 116-170.

¹⁸³ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, nn. 13-14. It is clear from Scotus’s remarks on this Augustine quote in *Quodlibet* VI.13, that Scotus takes this as referring to mass in a “transferred” sense of greatness: “Augustinus autem VI De Trinitate cap.8 istam magnitudinem, quam Philosophus dicit translative dictam, dicit esse magnitudinem non molis sed bonitatis et perfectionis: ‘in his,’ inquit ‘quae non mole magna sunt, idem est maius esse quod melius esse.’ Patet ergo quod ‘magnum,’ primo modo secundum Aristotelem proprie dictum et secundum Augustinum ‘magnum’ mole, non est in Deo nec in aliquo spirituali; Sed ‘magnum,’ translative secundum Philosophum et ‘magnum’ bonitate et virtute vel perfectionis secundum Augustinum, potest poni ibi, quia illud est transcendens, conveniens suo modo omni enti.”

being.”¹⁸⁴ Since being transcends the categories, so too does the identity relation founded upon it, for everything that exists will be identical with itself. He concludes that all of the foundations of these relations can be common to things other than those which are formally and really in these three categories.

So when taken in a general sense, the foundations (substance, quality, quantity) and the subsequent relations (identity, similarity, and equality) are transcendental, for he claims that each thing, i.e., everything that exists,

Can be considered as ‘what it is’ i.e., according to its own quiddity, and so can be the foundation of the relation of identity or diversity. But when it is considered as having a certain grade of its own essential perfection and determinate grade of its virtual quiddity, taken in that way, it can be the foundation of the common relation of equality and inequality. Or it can be considered as having some form or some perfection through some mode of the informing form according to which it is called a quality. And in this way it can be the foundation of the relation of similarity or dissimilarity.¹⁸⁵

So when taken in the general sense, these three foundations and the three corresponding relations can be transcendental, since they apply to everything that exists.¹⁸⁶

Scotus then raises the problem of how these relations are transcendental when they do not necessarily convert with being. He refers the reader to *Ordinatio* I, d.8, where he argues that the transcendentals include not only things that are convertible with being—such as good, true, and one—but also disjunctive attributes, pure perfections, etc. The reason concerns Scotus’s definition of a transcendental. In d.8, Scotus defines a transcendental as whatever is not

¹⁸⁴ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, n.16.

¹⁸⁵ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, n.17: “Unde sciendum quod quaelibet res potest considerari ut quid est, id est secundum quiditatem suam, et sic potest esse fundamentum relationis identitatis vel diversitatis. Sed ut consideratur secundum quod habet certum gradum perfectionis suae essentialis et determinatum gradum suae quiditatis virtualis, sic potest esse fundamentum communis relationis aequalitatis vel inaequalitatis. Vel potest considerari ut habet formam aliquam vel perfectionem aliquam per modum formae informantis secundum quam dicitur qualis. Et sic potest fundare relationem communem similitudinis vel dissimilitudinis.”

¹⁸⁶ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, n.18. See also *Quodlibet* VI.13. With respect to magnitude or greatness, he claims: “Sed ‘magnum’, translative secundum Philosophum et ‘magnum’ bonitate et virtute vel perfectionis secundum Augustinum, potest poni ibi, quia illud est transcendens, conveniens suo modo omni enti.”

contained under any one category.¹⁸⁷ These relations—and the foundations upon which they depend—fit that bill whether or not they are convertible with being, since they can be predicated of everything that exists (in the ‘general’ sense).

Furthermore, Scotus conceives certain attributes, when predicated in disjunction (i.e., ‘necessary or possible,’ ‘finite or infinite,’ ‘act or potency,’ etc.), as transcendentals because they are not contained under any one category and thus apply to every being that exists (i.e., every being is either ‘necessary or possible,’ ‘finite or infinite,’ etc.) and are thereby convertible with being *when predicated in disjunction*.¹⁸⁸ Take any two beings that exist and it is true that that the second being of the comparison is either ‘identical or diverse,’ ‘similar or dissimilar,’ and ‘equal or unequal’—the first depends upon whether the latter being shares the same quiddity or nature; the second depends upon whether they share some quality and to what degree; the final depends upon whether that have the same magnitude.

Given that we can now rank and compare natures depending upon their magnitude grounded in their quantity—or “virtual quantity” as Scotus sometimes puts it—the following question arises: can we include God in this hierarchical ranking? The answer depends upon the distinction between strict and general usage of the terms in question, between categorical and transcendental quantity: when these three relations and their foundations are taken in the *strict sense*, as referring to the *categories* of substance, quality, quantity, they cannot be found in the divine nature because they imply limitation—these categories are proper only as divisions of finitely quantified being.¹⁸⁹ But when taken in the general sense, magnitude or equality applies

¹⁸⁷*Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars1, q.3, n.114. “transcendens quodcumque nullum habet genus sub quo contineatur.”

¹⁸⁸ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, n.19. See also *Ordinatio* I, d.39, q.1-5, n.13 (Appendix A in the Vatican edition vol. VI).

¹⁸⁹ See *Quodlibet* VI.13; *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, n.20; *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3, n.113.

to every being prior to its division into the ten categories.¹⁹⁰ Thus as transcendentals, these three relations and their respective foundations can be applied to the divine nature, since transcendentals apply to being prior to the division into finite and infinite.¹⁹¹

One reason for this, according to Scotus, is that disjunctive transcendentals appropriately carve reality at its joints. In each division of being, one member of the pair will be perfect and the other member imperfect.¹⁹² The pairs ‘necessary or possible,’ ‘infinite or finite,’ ‘act or potency,’ for example, are the fundamental ways something can be, and the former member of each pair is more perfect than the latter. Consequently, in every pair of transcendental disjunctive attributes, the more perfect member of the disjunct can be predicated of the divine.¹⁹³ Since diversity, inequality, and dissimilarity are imperfections, the other corresponding disjuncts are thereby applied to God. Furthermore, since magnitude corresponds to having some degree of perfection and the divine essence has “every grade of unqualified perfection as an infinite sea,” the divine essence has this infinite degree of magnitude.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, n.20. See also *Ordinatio* II, d. 1, q.4-5, n.231: “Ad argumentum primum alterius opinionis dico quod nihil alicuius generis dicitur de Deo, sicut dictum est distinctione 8 primi libri; et sicut absoluta, ita et relations quae formaliter dicuntur ‘entis in communi’, quia quidquid convenit enti in quantum est indistinctum ad finitum et infinitum, convenit ei prius quam dividatur in genera, et ita transcendens.” See also *Ordinatio* II, d. 1, q.4-5, n.277.

¹⁹¹ *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3, n.113. “Ens prius dividitur in infinitum et finitum quam in decem predicamenta, 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 prius, et per consequens ut est transcendens et est extra omne genus. Quaecumque sunt communia Deo et creaturae, sunt talia quae conveniunt enti ut est indifferens ad finitum et infinitum: ut enim conveniunt Deo, sunt infinita, ut creturae, sunt finite; ergo per prius conveniunt enti quam ens dividatur in decem genera, et per consequens quodcumque tale est transcendens.”

¹⁹² *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars 1, q.3, n.21.

¹⁹³ *Ordinatio* I, d.19, q.1, n.10: “De tertio dico quod sicut nullum genus nec aliquid alicuius generis dicitur de Deo formaliter, ita nec passio alicuius generis, et per consequens nec aliqua relationum communium secundum quod stricte sumuntur, ut scilicet sunt passionis generum determinatorum; sed quia end dicitur formaliter de Deo et quaecumque passio convertibilis cum ente, et passionum non-convertibilium—sed disiunctarum—semper extremum nobilius, idea hoc modo illud extremum dicitur de Deo quod vel dicit nobilitatem vel non repugnant nobilitati, sed reliquum repugnant.”

¹⁹⁴ *Reportatio* I-A, d.19, pars.1, q.1-3, 21-22. Scotus goes on to answer the first question raised in the article concerning the equality of the divine persons by claiming that this magnitude is common to all the divine persons,

Hence magnitude is the grade of perfection founded upon the essence or nature of the thing and the attributes contained therein. Magnitude expressed in terms of quantity (in the ‘general’ or transcendental sense) is a measure of a thing’s greatness on a scale of value, where God’s infinite magnitude sets the upper limit.¹⁹⁵ Finite creatures are great according to their approximation to the divine.

Scotus’s argument for a hierarchy of being (HOB) can thus be summarized as follows:

- (HOB1) Magnitude measures the perfection of an essence or kind nature.
- (HOB2) Two kind natures are equal in perfection if and only if they are of the same kind nature (PI).
- (HOB3) Not every substance has the same kind nature.
- (HOB4) Therefore, kind natures can be hierarchically arranged in terms of their magnitude of perfection.

When (HOB4) is combined with other claims that Scotus makes concerning perfection, we can plausibly fill out his hierarchy of being:

- (HOB5) Being is quantified under two modes, finite and infinite.¹⁹⁶
- (HOB6) Infinite names the highest grade of perfection.¹⁹⁷
- (HOB7) God has an infinitely quantified mode of being.
- (HOB8) Therefore, God is infinite in perfection.
- (HOB9) Finite beings can be ordered on this scale below the infinite being in terms of how much perfection they have grounded in their being.¹⁹⁸

We have arrived now at what has been commonly called the ‘Great Chain of Being,’ or what

since magnitude refers to the divine being itself and is thus not divided between the persons. So all of the persons the divine nature have the “maximum and truest equality in magnitude.” The reason is connected with his claims in *Quodlibet* V: the comparison and ranking of natures based upon magnitude occurs at the level of nature, not the level of persons or supposits. See also *Ordinatio* I, d.31, q.un.

¹⁹⁵ *Quodlibet* V.57; *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1, q.1-2, n.58; and *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars.1, q.2.

¹⁹⁶ *Quodlibet* V.58.

¹⁹⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1, q.1-2, nn.58-60.

¹⁹⁸ See *Quodlibet* V.57; *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1 q.1-2, n.95-97.

Scotus often calls an “order of eminence.”

The Hierarchy of Goodness

In closing, I wish to summarize two points made in this and the previous chapter and draw one conclusion from them about the nature of goodness. First, when Scotus posits the convertibility of being and goodness, he means that they are necessarily coextensive concepts, and the terms that designate those concepts are extensionally equivalent—they refer to the same reality. The concepts of being and good, however, differ: Scotus posits a formal difference in reality and not simply on the part of the mind. Goodness, on Scotus’s account, is a (formal) property of being.¹⁹⁹ Second, every being has a quantity or magnitude which measures the thing’s perfection given its kind nature, and these kind natures can be arranged hierarchically, depending upon their magnitude of perfection.

Finally, natural or primary goodness is characteristic of any existent thing according to its grade of being, such that the higher the grade of being, the more goodness; the lesser the grade of being, the less goodness.²⁰⁰ It is inferred from these points that since (primary) goodness is commensurate with the being of the entity as a coextensive property of it, and being comes in degrees or grades, primary goodness is a degreed property of a thing corresponding to its perfection of being, arranged according to the same hierarchical structure that being is organized. In other words, the order of *value* corresponds to the order of *being*. On such an account, the grade of being determines the grade of goodness found in the entity and so goodness is a degreed property of a thing.

¹⁹⁹ See for example *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VI, q.3, n.20; *Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.4-5, n.273; *Ordinatio* III, d. 8, q. un., n.50; and *Reportatio* II A, d.16.

²⁰⁰ See for example *Ordinatio* II, d.7, nn.28.

In contemporary terms, Scotus's characterization of being and goodness can (at least) be labeled a version of weak supervenience.²⁰¹ As Kim characterizes it, for any two sets of properties A and B:

(WS1) Necessarily, for any x and y, if x and y share all properties in B, then x and y share all properties in A—that is, indiscernibility in B entails indiscernibility in A.²⁰²

We can reformulate (WS1) in a manner that aligns with Scotus's own account. For any two kind natures, K_1 and K_2 , and properties B (being) and G (goodness):

(WS2) Necessarily, for any K_1 and K_2 , if K_1 and K_2 have the same amount of B, then K_1 and K_2 have the same amount of G—that is, indiscernibility in B entails indiscernibility in G.

If K_1 and K_2 have the same amount of being, then they are in fact identical kind natures and will necessarily instantiate the same degree of goodness. Furthermore, if K_1 and K_2 differ in their amount of being—say, K_1 is dogness and K_2 humanness—then they will necessarily differ in their degree of natural goodness. Since no two kind natures can have the same amount of being (PI), every kind nature can be ranked according to its value.

Given the transcendental nature of being and good, however, this supervenience relation can be extended beyond kind natures to everything that exists. Here the scope is no longer limited to specific kind natures or substances in the hierarchy of being, but extends in such a way

²⁰¹ I shall not offer Scotus's account in terms of strong supervenience that ranges across possible worlds for two reasons. First, that characterization hinges upon highly debated aspects of Scotus's modal theory that are beyond the purview of this dissertation. Second, at times Scotus seems completely comfortable claiming that the same kind nature could be imbedded with different powers and capacities. If so, this could affect that nature's degree of being and consequently, its goodness. It seems to me however, that even if we grant this, a weak version of supervenience would still hold: given the amount of being for some kind nature (that could have been different than it is), it would still follow that goodness weakly supervenes on that degree of being.

²⁰² Jaegwon Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 79.

that the supervenience of goodness on being can be quantified over everything that exists; in other words, over everything that has being. So,

(WS3) Necessarily, for any x and y , if x and y have the same amount of B, then x and y have the same amount of G—that is, indiscernibility in B entails indiscernibility in G.

Thus any difference in the amount of being will necessarily result in a difference in the amount of goodness. However, being and goodness are not simply coextensive with each other, but the values of each stand in a specific relation to each other, namely, one of dependence: value of G *depends* essentially on the value of B.²⁰³ In other words, the value of an entity directly correlates with the type of entity, rooted in its magnitude of being.

Since goodness is a necessarily coextensive property of being, and being first separates into finite and infinite modes before dividing into the ten categories, goodness similarly divides into two modes, finite and infinite. Whereas infinite goodness is singular in nature (i.e., God), finite goodness further subdivides into Aristotle's ten categories, since Scotus thinks that each category has some amount of being or existence, however small it might be. Consequently, each category of being will contain an amount of ontological goodness that corresponds with the amount of being in that category: the more being, the more goodness.

So in this sense Scotus agrees with tradition in terms of **[B]**, providing an Augustinian nature approach to **[A]** in support of **[B]**, but moving beyond tradition by postulating the formal distinction to explicate the precise relationship between being and good, and cashing out such an

²⁰³ The type of goodness under consideration here is primary or ontological goodness (also called essential/natural goodness by Scouts) and should not be confused with moral goodness. Secondary goodness, of which moral goodness is a species, is a relation between an act judged by right reason (via knowledge of the nature of the agent, the agent's causal powers, and the type of act) to conform to a number of circumstances, including the end, the manner, the time and the place. Moral goodness, according to Scotus, is not convertible with being.

account within the context of the Aristotelian categories of being. However, as stated above, Scotus thinks that something can be good in two ways; one with respect to its form (primary goodness), one with respect to its end (secondary goodness).²⁰⁴ But since the order of value corresponds to the order of being, Scotus—like Augustine—argues that we ought to proportion our love for objects according to their primary or ontological goodness, and this will play a central role in determining an act's secondary goodness—at least with respect to our relationship to God.²⁰⁵ But to see this, and how Scotus transforms such an account, it is first necessary to examine Scotus's conception of secondary goodness in detail, which is the topic of Part III.

²⁰⁴ *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3; *Ordinatio* IV, d.31, q.un.

²⁰⁵ See for example *Ordinatio* III, d. 27, q.un., n. 14; *Ordinatio* III, d.29, nn.5-8.

CHAPTER FOUR: SECONDARY GOODNESS

As we saw in the previous chapter, Scotus thinks that something can be perfected in two ways: in one way with respect to its form or being, and in another way with respect to its end.²⁰⁶ And since goodness and perfection are the same, something can be good in two ways: one with respect to its form, the other with respect to its end.²⁰⁷ So in contrast to primary goodness, which intrinsically perfects a subject and converts with being—the topics of the previous three chapters—this other type of goodness, usually called secondary or accidental goodness, does not convert with being, but extrinsically perfects its subject.²⁰⁸ Generally, attributions of secondary goodness refer to the harmony or suitability (*convenientia*) of a thing to something else. In *Quodlibet* 18, Scotus explains the distinction between these two types of goodness as follows:

For just as primary goodness of being, which is called essential goodness, is the integrity or perfection of being in itself, conveys positively a negation of imperfection that excludes imperfection and diminution, so also secondary goodness of being, which is accidental or supervenient to the entity, is its perfect suitability to, or integral harmony with, something else with which it ought to be suitable, or of something else to it.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ *Reportatio* 2, d.34,n.3; *Ordinatio* IV, d.31, q.un.

²⁰⁷ *Ordinatio* IV, d.31, q.un. In his moral writings, Scotus will qualify this a bit, because he thinks that there is more to this secondary perfection than simply the end (*Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un), but the end does play a significant role.

²⁰⁸ *Lectura* I, d.1, pars 1, q.2, n.63; *Ordinatio* I, d. 1, q.2; *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.55; *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un.

²⁰⁹ Scotus, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9. *Cuestiones Cuodlibetales: Edicion Bilingue*, ed. Felix Alluntis (Madrid, 1958): “Sicut enim bonitas primaria entis, quae dicitur bonitas essentialis, quae est integritas vel perfectio entis in se, importat positive negationem imperfectionis, per quod excluditur imperfection et diminutio sic bonitas entis

In this chapter I highlight four ways Scotus describes secondary goodness: (1) as a harmony or suitability (*convenientia*), (2) as a secondary perfection, (3) as a non-absolute quality, and (4) as similar in nature to beauty. This discussion, I hope, will set the context for Scotus's principal application of secondary goodness, namely, that moral goodness is a type of secondary goodness in the acts of rational agents.

The Meaning of 'Convenientia'

One of the central characteristics of secondary goodness is the fittingness or harmony—*convenientia*—between various things that ought to stand in such a relationship to each other. In this section I explore Scotus's usage of the term '*convenientia*' in his theological and philosophical works. I argue that *convenientia*, used as technical term, conveys a proper relationship among entities: a relation that should be there, given the entities that form its basis.

In *Quodlibet* 18, Scotus states that secondary or accidental goodness is a thing's perfect suitability to or integral harmony with either (1) something else to which it ought to be suited, or (2) something else that ought to be suited to it. He then claims that these two types of suitability (*duae convenientiae*) are commonly connected and explains the subtle difference between them. For clarity, I'll distinguish the two types of suitability as 'Suitability₁' and 'Suitability₂', respectively.

Suitability₁ consists in thing's perfect suitability or integral harmony with something else to which it ought to be suited. For example, health is called a good for man, because it is fitting

secundaria, quae est accidentalis sive superveniens entitati, est integritas convenientiae vel integra convenientia eius alteri cui debet convenire vel alterius sibi.”

for him (*quia est ei conveniens*).²¹⁰ Here Scotus enlists Augustine for support: “Health without pain and exhaustion is good.”²¹¹ In other words, humans should be healthy: it’s appropriate for humans, when functioning properly, to be healthy. Thus, health is suitable₁ for a human being.

Suitability₂ obtains when a thing has a perfect suitability to, or integral harmony with, something else that ought to be suited to it. Here Scotus lists two examples. First, food is called good because it has a proper or fitting taste (*quia habet saporem sibi convenientem*). In other words, food *ought* to taste good. Second, quoting Augustine, Scotus claims that “Good is the face of a man with proportional features, graced with laughter, and a brilliant complexion.”²¹² This refers to suitability₂ because “such a face is called good, by having those things which are fitting to it.”²¹³ In this case, faces ought to look nice, and they are called good when they have qualities that make them such.

It seems as though the subtle difference Scotus wishes to make concerns what is being called good in each case: in the first case, the thing that is called good is suitable to something else (e.g., health for a human), but in the second case, the thing that is called good (e.g., food) is called such because it has other things that are suitable to it (e.g., appropriate taste). So perhaps ‘suitable’ means the same thing in both cases, but the basis of the attribution of goodness to a thing differs in the two cases: its being suitable to something else in the first case and having things suitable for itself in the second.

As we will see, Scotus goes on to claim that both types of suitability apply to acts: an act must be appropriate to the agent and also have the features suitable to itself as the kind of act that

²¹⁰*Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9.

²¹¹*Quodlibet* 18.9. “‘bona’ inquit ‘valetudo sine doloribus et lassitudine.’” See Augustine *De Trinitate* VIII.3.

²¹² Ibid. See also Augustine *De Trinitate* VIII.3: “Et bona facies hominis dimensa pariliter, et affecta hilariter, et luculenter colorata.”

²¹³ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9. “Quia talis facies dicitur bona, habendo illa quae sibi conveniunt.”

it is.²¹⁴ But notice that in both cases *convenientia* conveys a relation between two entities that *ought* to be there, given their natures or types of things that they are. Humans should be healthy, faces ought to look good, food should taste good, and acts ought to be appropriate to their agent and the kind of act it is.

Scotus also adopts *convenientia* to explain proper relations between ideas, most notably in his commentaries on various works of Aristotle. Scotus often asks whether Aristotle appropriately or correctly applies or defines something, or whether some definition suitably captures the things being defined. In the case of the first, Scotus often asks whether Aristotle suitably or appropriately (*convenienter*) distinguishes concepts or posits the right answer to some philosophical issue. For example, in his *Questions on Aristotle's Categories*, Scotus asks “Whether Aristotle *appropriately* distinguished species of motion.”²¹⁵ In his *Questions on the Metaphysics*, Scotus asks “Whether the Philosopher *appropriately* posits three modes of relations or relatives.”²¹⁶ In the questions on the first book of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, Scotus asks whether *differentia*, which Aristotle assigns between letters and words and passions and things, is fitting or appropriate.²¹⁷ In each of these cases and many others, Scotus uses the word ‘*convenientia*,’ or its adverb form ‘*convenienter*,’ to ask whether Aristotle fittingly or appropriately uses some term or defines or distinguishes something correctly. In typical fashion,

²¹⁴ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9.

²¹⁵ Scotus, *Quaestiones Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis* Q. 44, ed. R. Andrews, G. Etzkorn, G. Gal, R. Green, T. Noone, R. Wood (The Franciscan Institute: St. Bonaventure, 1999). “Quaeritur utrum Aristoteles convenienter distinguat species motus.” See also Q.43: “Circa istud quaeritur utrum Aristoteles convenienter assignet modos prioris.”

²¹⁶ Scotus, *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* V, Q.12, ed. R. Andrews, G. Etzkorn, G. Gal, R. Green, F. Kelley, G. marcil, T. Noone, R. Wood (The Franciscan Institute: St. Bonaventure, 1997). “Utrum Philosophus convenienter ponat tres modos relationis sive relativorum.”

²¹⁷ Scotus, *Quaestiones in Primum Libros Perihermenias Aristotelis* Q. 4, ed. R. Andrews, G. Etzkorn, G. Gal, R. Green, T. Noone, R. Plevano, A. Traver, R. Wood (The Franciscan Institute: St. Bonaventure, 2004).

Scotus then goes on to make various distinctions to answer the question. But note the normative manner in which Scotus uses *convenientia* and its various cognates: Scotus wants to know if Aristotle uses some term or distinction *appropriately* given what's involved in the issue.

In these same philosophical works, Scotus uses *convenientia* to ask whether some distinction or definition is fitting or appropriate to the subject. For example, in his *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, he asks whether the division of unity into one in genus, one in species, one in number, and one in proportion is fitting (*conveniens*).²¹⁸ We see the same usage of *convenientia* in his *Questions on the Categories of Aristotle*,²¹⁹ and frequently in his *Questions on the Book of Porphyry's Isagoge*.²²⁰ In these cases, '*convenientia*' refers to the fittingness or properness of the definition or concept, given the nature of the terms involved.

Finally, in *Quodlibet* 18.39, Scotus appeals to the concepts of truth and falsity to explain the nature of *convenientia* in its moral context by providing an analogy. Falsity, he claims, expresses a *disconvenientia*. In contrast, the concept of truth conveys the adequation of the mind to being, resulting in a *convenientia* or *conformitas*: when a thought or belief conforms to reality, the truth relation obtains. Similarly, in the case of secondary goodness, a *conformitas* or a harmony (*convenientia*) obtains when the proper connection exists between certain things that should be related; namely, the nature of the act to the end, object, etc., as the agent's right reason

²¹⁸ Scotus, *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* V, Q.4.

²¹⁹ Scotus, *Quaestiones Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis* Q. 30, Q.35, and Q. 38

²²⁰ Scotus, *Quaestiones in Librum Porphyrii Isagoge*, ed. R. Andrews, G. Etzkorn, G. Gal, R. Green, T. Noone, R. Wood (The Franciscan Institute: St. Bonaventure, 1991). Q. 15: "Whether the definition of a genus is fitting (*convenienter*) to what has been given." Q.17: "Whether 'difference of species' is fittingly (*convenienter*) posited in the definition of a genus." Q.19: Whether 'in quid' is appropriately (*convenienter*) posited in the definition of a genus." Q.21: "Whether this definition of a species is fitting (*conveniens*): 'A species is what is predicated of many numerical differences in virtue of the fact that it is a quiddity.'" Q. 23: "Whether the first division of differences is fitting (*conveniens*)." Q.25: "Whether the first division of a difference, namely, 'a difference is what a species surpasses from a genera' is appropriately (*convenienter*) given." Q.35: "Whether this definition of an accident is fitting (*conveniens*)..."

dictates.²²¹ This highlights the relational aspect of secondary goodness. When the appropriate *relata* are connected, a *convenientia* obtains: ‘a fittingness’ or a ‘conformity’ in both cases.²²²

Thus the technical term ‘*convenientia*’ conveys a proper relationship among entities that ought to be related in some way, grounded in the nature of the things that should be related.

Secondary Goodness as a Secondary Perfection

Scotus frequently claims that secondary goodness is a *secondary perfection*. As we saw in chapter 3, a primary, proper, or essential perfection necessarily characterizes its subject: a primary perfection essentially qualifies something as the type of thing it is.²²³ Transcendental goodness, for example, is a primary and proper perfection of being since it characterizes a substance as good when the substance lacks nothing that makes it the type of thing that it is—i.e., its being. In contrast, secondary goodness accidentally perfects its subject—the entity could continue in its existence without being good in the secondary sense. Having the virtue of courage, for example, would be a secondary perfection, since a human could exist—as a human—without the having the virtue. Thus a secondary perfection qualifies a subject in an accidental way: it’s a real perfection, but the kind of perfection extrinsic to the nature of the

²²¹ Scotus thinks that an agent’s right reason ought to make a judgment as to which acts are fitting to the agent in a particular set of circumstances. The details of such an account are forthcoming. But briefly, reason judges *rightly* when two conditions are met: First, a rational agent’s act requires not simply perceiving one’s end, as non-rational animals often do, but forming a judgment about the appropriateness or fittingness of the act with respect to the end. But, forming a judgment of an act requires two things. First, it requires not just anyone’s judgment, but the judgment of the person doing the action. I’ll call this the ‘autonomy clause.’ As we will see, this autonomy clause will play a crucial role in Scotus’s separation of rightness from goodness. Second, this judgment must be derived from certain knowledge the agent has; specifically, knowledge of three relevant factors: the nature of the agent, the power according to which he acts, and the essential conception of the act. Having all three relevant pieces of knowledge in place is thus individually necessary and jointly sufficient for an agent to pass judgment on the appropriateness of the act to the given circumstances. See *Quodlibet* 18.

²²² *Quodlibet* 18, a.3, nn.39-40. See also *Lectura* II, d.40, q. un, n.11, for Scotus’s correspondence theory of truth, i.e., truth is a conformity of something out in the world with the intellect.

²²³ See also *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* V, q.11, n.20.

thing, whereby the subject could exist without the secondary perfection.

In this context, the ‘subject’ refers to the act of willing, and the perfection (goodness) adds to the act when the act conforms with certain conditions as the agent’s right reason dictates. Here, Scotus wishes to highlight secondary goodness’s accidental character – it’s added to an act as an accident is added to a subject. It doesn’t constitute the act as such, but adds to it. So all acts are good by virtue of the fact that they exist; that is, all acts have primary goodness, which converts with being. But not every act is accidentally good. As a secondary perfection, this goodness adds to an act only when the act suitably conforms to a number of external features or conditions.

It might be helpful to see this distinction briefly play out in Scotus’s talk of badness. Badness, he claims, is not a privation of the primary goodness of being (transcendental goodness), but of secondary goodness:

Badness is not opposed to the goodness that is convertible with being, but is opposed to the nature which it deprives, and it never deprives the entire nature, just as blindness is not opposed to just any nature, but to the power of vision in the eye, and so it is a lack of goodness in the eye which *ought* to be there. And so that goodness, which is opposed to sin, is rectitude which *ought to inhere in an act of willing*, and its discord is its own badness. And hence sin is a privation of goodness—not that is there, but that *should* be there.²²⁴

Badness corrupts something good that should be there. Blindness, for example, is privately bad because it deprives someone of some good which they ought to have, namely, sight. Moral badness, which conflicts with secondary moral goodness, is not opposed to the transcendental goodness of being, since, in order for something to be bad, it must first be a thing that exists, but

²²⁴ *Lectura* II, d.34-37, q.1-5, n.61. “Malum non opponitur bono quod convertitur cum ente, sed opponitur naturae quam privat, et numquam privat totam naturam, sicut caecitas non opponitur cuilibet naturae, sed virtuti visivae in oculo, unde est carentia boni in oculo quod deberet inesse. Ita bonitas ista, cui opponitur peccatum, est rectitudo quae deberet inesse actui voluntatis, et eius discordia est suum malum. Unde peccatum est privatio boni non quod inest, sed quod deberet inesse.”

rather conflicts with the type of goodness that a will *should* have. A will ought to behave rightly in the same way that eyes ought to see: there is a normativity to the goodness in question. But if the entity, whether we're talking about eyes or wills, were to lose that goodness that it ought to have, the entity wouldn't cease to exist as the type of thing it is, but it would be defective nonetheless. Hence secondary goodness accidentally perfects its subject.

Secondary Goodness as a Non-Absolute Quality

Scotus also claims that secondary goodness is not an absolute quality, but a relative one. As previously mentioned in a different context, relations for Scotus are “relative beings” because their existence depends upon an absolute category. Relations and absolutes, according to Scotus, differ in terms of their *rationes*: the *ratio* of something absolute is *ad se* because it refers “to itself,” while the *ratio* of a relation is *ad aliud*—it, by nature, refers to something beyond itself.²²⁵ So relative beings depend upon their foundation in something absolute. According to Scotus, only the first three of Aristotle's categories are ‘absolute’ in the above sense: substance, quality, and quantity. The other seven categories are ‘relatives’ because their existence depends upon their foundation in an absolute category (while referring to something else). For example, consider the “taller than” relation: suppose John is taller than Bill. The relation “taller than” inheres in the foundational category of John's quantity, and refers to Bill. The relation couldn't exist without the foundation, but is nevertheless something over and above the foundation itself.

Secondary goodness is relational in a similar sense: it's not an absolute quality because it

²²⁵ See for example, *Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.5, n.244, *textus interpolatus*: “relatio, si non fundetur in alio, non est relatio; igitur, vel erit processus in infinitum, vel relatio tandem fundabitur in absoluto. Sed ratio absoluti est quod sit ad se, ratio vero formalis relationis est habitudo ad aliud; non est autem eadem entitas formalis ‘ad se’ et ‘ad aliud;’ igitur etc.”

depends upon conditions from multiple categories, such as a substance, an act, etc., especially as right reason dictates: “I say that the moral goodness of an act is from the aggregation of all those things which are fitting to the act, *not an absolute quality from the nature of the act*, but what is fitting to it according to right reason.”²²⁶ So when Scotus states that secondary goodness is a non-absolute quality, he emphasizes once again its relational nature: its *ratio* is *ad aliud*; like any relative or relation, its nature is directed at its *relata* and its existence essentially depends upon its foundation. Thus secondary goodness cannot be explained solely in terms of the nature of the act *as an act* (i.e., in terms of an absolute quality), but necessarily refers to the act’s extrinsic relation to other things. When the relation is proper or fitting (*conveniens*) to the act and the agent as dictated by right reason, the act obtains its secondary goodness.²²⁷

Secondary Goodness in Comparison with Beauty

Moral philosophers in the western tradition since Plato and Aristotle have often looked to analogies with health or medicine on the one hand, and aesthetics on the other, in order to explain certain features of the moral realm. While Aquinas focuses his own analogies on health, many scholars have noticed Scotus’s appeal to aesthetics, and especially the similarities between goodness and beauty in describing a morally good act.²²⁸ This connection with beauty, I hope, will shed some light on nature of secondary goodness.

According to Scotus, the marks of beauty are the ordered arrangement and harmony

²²⁶ *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un, n.8: “De secundo, dico quod bonitas actus moralis est ex aggregatione omnium convenientium actui, non absolute ex natura actus, sed quae conveniunt ei secundum rationem rectam.”

²²⁷ Just how acts obtain this secondary goodness will be the topic of a later chapter.

²²⁸ See Mary Beth Ingham, *The Harmony of Goodness: Mutuality and Moral Living According to Duns Scotus* (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012), 96. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 1098a9-10 and 1103a34 for an analogy with a musician. See *Nicomachean Ethics* I 1094a7, 1094b24, 1097a16-18 for analogies between morality and health.

among the parts that constitute the beautiful thing. For example, Scotus claims that “light and color require a determined counterbalancing arrangement in a subject” and that “the beauty of a body is the symmetry of the parts with a certain attractiveness of color.”²²⁹ He claims that the “beauty of bodies...is the appropriate arrangement of the members.”²³⁰

What is true for beautiful bodies is also true in the musical realm: the harmonious sound on a lyre delights the hearer, but when the same strings are plucked in a different order they make a different sound, and that change doesn’t always result in a *delightful* sound. When such a change occurs, the transformation in the sense of hearing results from the sound itself, but its delightfulness “is not derived from the sound as it is a sound, but from its harmony and its being ordered in such a way.”²³¹ Obviously, the sounds themselves provide the basis for hearing the sounds, but the organization and relation between such sounds make them beautiful to the sense of hearing. So the beauty of a sound derives not merely from the sound, but from the ordered arrangement of the sounds functioning harmoniously.²³²

In the parallel passage from the *Ordinatio*, Scotus provides an example from the beating of a percussion instrument:

Similarly, a sound is more from the percussion of the sounding body than from the order of the percussion; but the sound's being agreeable to the sense of hearing is more from the order of the percussion than from the efficacy of the power that strikes [the object]. Indeed,

²²⁹ *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, q.15, n.1 (Wadding). “Lux et color requirunt determinatam dispositionem contrariam in subject.” “Pulchritudo corporis est partium congruentia cum quadam coloris suavitate.”

²³⁰ *Quaestiones Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis* Q.36, n.89. “Ad tertium dico decor et pulchritudo, loquendo de pulchritudine corporali quae est conveniens membrorum dispositio, sunt in quarta specie qualitatis.”

²³¹ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars. 1, q.un, n. 95: “Sonus harmonicus in cithara immutat auditum, delectationem causando; et si fiant eadem notae, alio tamen modo ordinatae—ut si cordae percutiantur alio ordine—non causabit delectationem nec sonum delectabilem. Quid est causa principalis istius immutationis? Certe sonus, et non convenientia aut proportio in sono, quia relation non est causa effectus; temen absolutum sub relatione potest esse causa effectus cuius non esset causa nisi haberet illam relationem...immutatio igitur auditus a sono est propter sonum, sed quod sit delectabilis, hoc non est a sono ut sonus est, sed ut harmonicus et sic ordinatus.”

²³² In the same way that a relation requires an absolute for its foundation but is nevertheless something over and above the things that it relates.

the power that strikes [the object] could be more efficacious and yet [the sound it produces could be] less agreeable, indeed not agreeable at all to the sense of hearing, because the sound isn't harmonious.²³³

According to Scotus, just beating a drum doesn't make the sound delightful or agreeable to the listener; rather, it's the order and harmony imposed on the beats that makes the sounds produced beautiful. Just making the sound louder—adding more being to the sound—doesn't necessarily make the sound more beautiful or harmonious.²³⁴ While the beating or striking of the drum causes the sound itself, the beauty or agreeableness of the sound results from the complex and harmonious relation that various beats have to each other and the listener.²³⁵

Scotus applies this same criterion not only to music and bodies, but to morally good acts, in which he draws a direct parallel. For example, consider the two following passages:

It can be said that just as beauty is not some *absolute quality* in a corporeal body, but is the *aggregation of all things appropriate to such a body* (such as magnitude, shape, and color), *and the aggregation of all its aspects* (which are all fitting of that body and to each other), so also the moral goodness of an act is a certain *décor* of the act, including the aggregation of proper proportion to all things to which it should be proportioned (such as the potency, the object, the end, the time, the location and the manner), and this specifically as what is

²³³ *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars 1, q.1-2, n.152: “Similiter, sonus magis est ex percussione corporis sonantis quam ex ordine percussiois, et tamen ut acceptabilis auditui, magis est ex ordine percussiois quam ex efficacia potentiae percutientis; immo posset esse efficacior virtus percutiens, et minus acceptabilis; immo omnino non acceptabilis auditui, quia non est sonus harmonicus.”

²³⁴ Note that this would be the case if beauty were an absolute, transcendental quality that is formally distinct with being. But this passage makes it clear that beauty is not such a quality.

²³⁵ Although the two passages above don't specifically speak of beauty, Scotus does speak of the harmony and order of the music delighting the hearer, and in other contexts, Scotus suggests that the proper response to beauty is delight. In fact, the more beautiful the body, the more delight it brings. *Ordinatio* I, d.1, pars 2, n.133: “Magis enim necessario pulcherrimum visum delectat appetitum visivum quam minus pulchrum, et si ille appetitus posset se ferre in illum visum actu elicito, magis necessario se ferret vel ferretur in pulchrius visum quam in minus pulchrum.” For Scotus's connection between beauty and delight, see also *Ordinatio* III, d.34, q.un, n.55 (Quod si loquamur de divitiis in quantum sunt pulchrae, hoc est in quantum sunt bonum delectabile...); *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, q.15, n.1-2 (Wadding). Francis J. Kovach calls this Scotus's subjective account of beauty and that “delight is the natural effect of beauty in the beholder” (447). See Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus's Philosophy and Theology,” *Deus et homo ad mentem I. Duns Scoti. Acta tertii Congressus scotistici internationalis. Vindebonae, 28 sept.-2 oct. 1970* (1972): 447.

dictated by right reason ought to pertain to the act...²³⁶

And,

I say that just as beauty in a body is derived from the *aggregation of all things fitting to that body and the [relations] between them*, for instance, the size, color, and shape...so also natural goodness—not that which is convertible with being, but that which has badness as its opposite—is a *secondary perfection* of a thing, whose completeness [is derived] from all the things fitting to it and the relations between those things.²³⁷

Consider four things that will aid in our seeing Scotus's connection between beauty and secondary goodness. First, notice that in each of these passages,²³⁸ Scotus offers two individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for beauty in corporeal bodies: one, beauty in a body results from the combination or aggregation of all things that are fitting to *that particular body (est aggregatio omnium convenientium tali corpori)*. He gives the examples of size (magnitude), color, and shape. The size, color, and shape that make a giraffe beautiful will no doubt be different from the same qualities in a peacock. So proper fittingness is indexed to *particular* types of bodies.

But not only must the qualities fit particular kinds of bodies, the relations between such features themselves must also harmonize. In other words, the parts that make up the beautiful body must also be proportioned suitably with each other. For example, while a large nose might be fitting to some humans, if the size of the body was proportionally small to the nose, then the

²³⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, p.1, q.2, n.62: “dici potest quod sicut pulchritudo non est aliqua qualitas absoluta in corpore pulchro, sed est aggregatio omnium convenientium tali corpori (puta magnitudinis, figurae, et coloris), et 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...”

²³⁷ *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un, n.7: “Dico quod sicut in corpore pulchritudo est ex aggregatione omnium convenientium illa corpori et inter se, puta quantitatis, coloris et figurae...ita bonitatis 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.”

²³⁸ See also *Reportatio* II, d. 40, q.un, n.4.

person in question wouldn't be beautiful because the nose wouldn't fit the face. So while a large nose might be proper to Andre the Giant or Goliath, the same nose on a small woman would be disproportionate to her size, and thus, unfitting and not beautiful. Likewise, acts must be fitting to their agent—as the type of agent and act—and harmonious with all the factors pertaining to the act as dictated by right reason.

Second, beauty, like (secondary) goodness, is a secondary perfection of the thing, and so extrinsic to the body itself. As we've seen, primary perfections essentially and intrinsically characterize substances as the types of thing that they are, and so primary perfections cannot be lost without changing the nature of the entity. Secondary perfections are extrinsic and accidental perfections of the entity, because they extrinsically add something to the entity in question. As Gerard Sondag puts it, "Both goodness and beauty are called *perfectiones secundae*, because an act can lose its goodness, and a body can be ugly *natura stante*, that is without any change in the proper nature of that being."²³⁹

Third, beauty, like secondary goodness, is not an absolute quality. Here, 'absolute' can be taken in two senses, and I think both are appropriate. First, absolute qualities characterize subjects without the need to refer to something beyond the nature of the subject to do so. Primary goodness, for example, would be such a quality. In contrast, non-absolute qualities are relational in nature—they require reference to something beyond the nature of the subject for their content. Beauty from the beating of the drum, for example, doesn't depend simply on how hard one hits the drum, but upon the order and harmony imposed upon the beating by the drummer.²⁴⁰ Likewise, an act's secondary goodness does not simply depend upon performing

²³⁹ Gerard Sondag, "The Conditional Definition of Beauty by Scotus," *Medioevo* 30 (2005), 196.

²⁴⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars 1, q.1-2, n.152.

the act, but upon certain suitable conditions being present when the agent acts.²⁴¹ So beauty and secondary goodness are non-absolute because whether they add to the act or the body depends upon *other appropriate features*. And this implies a second way beauty and (secondary) goodness are not absolute qualities: they are not absolute, taking ‘absolute’ to mean ‘non-composite.’ In other words, they are not simple qualities had by entities.²⁴² The size of a body in terms of its quantity, for example, would be a simple quality in this sense. But beauty can’t be simple in this way, since its existence depends upon the suitability and harmonious relations among a number of qualities, including color, size, and shape. In other words, beauty is composite in nature. The same holds true for secondary moral goodness, since its existence in an act depends upon the end, the object, etc., as dictated by right reason.

Consequently, two human bodies can have an identical amount of being—and thus an identical amount of ontological goodness—while differing in their respective amounts of beauty, say, if one has disproportional features. This shows that ontological goodness—i.e., transcendental goodness—is not really or formally identical with beauty.²⁴³ Similarly, two acts can have the same amount of being and thus the same amount of ontological goodness, say, because they are the same type of act, but differ in their secondary goodness. For example, if one person were to give alms to the poor for the sake of vainglory, while another gave the same amount of alms out of love for humanity, the acts would retain the identical amount of ontological goodness as their respective types of acts, but the latter act would also have a secondary goodness that the former act lacked, since it aimed at a good end.

²⁴¹ For example, whether the act of having sex with a woman has secondary goodness depends upon whether that woman is my wife or not, among other things.

²⁴² Cf. Gerard Sondag, “The Conditional Definition of Beauty by Scotus,” 197-198. He thinks that this is the sole meaning of “*pulchritudo non est aliqua qualitas absoluta in corpore pulchro*.”

²⁴³ I’ll deal with this issue in depth below, as some have mistaken beauty as one of Scotus’s transcendentals.

Fourth, I think it's best to characterize both secondary goodness and beauty as supervenient properties. In fact, Scotus himself likens beauty and goodness to a complex supervenient property in at least two passages. In a passing comment in *Ordinatio* IV, Scotus states that “perfection supervenes on an act, just as beauty supervenes on a youth.”²⁴⁴ Since both beauty and secondary goodness are secondary perfections, secondary perfections supervene upon them—they add to each something over and above the nature of the things that ground them.

We see this clearly in a passage distinguishing secondary from primary goodness:

For just as primary goodness of being, which is called essential goodness and is the integrity or perfection of being in itself, conveys positively a negation of imperfection that excludes imperfection and diminution, so also secondary goodness of being, which is accidental or *supervenient* to the entity, is its perfect suitability to, or integral harmony with, something else which it ought to have or which ought to have it.²⁴⁵

If we think carefully about beauty and goodness, we can see why Scotus wishes to characterize both of them in terms of supervenience: since such a body's beauty depends upon the suitability of its size, shape, and color to that body, any change in these base properties will necessarily result in a change in its amount of beauty. So if two beautiful bodies agree in their base properties, they will agree in their respective beauty.

Similarly, since an act's secondary goodness depends upon its suitability to the agent and the circumstances surrounding the completion of the act, as right reason dictates, any change in these base conditions or circumstances results in a change in the act's moral goodness.

Furthermore, as we should expect in ethics, any two acts performed by the same type of agent under the same conditions and circumstances, should necessarily result in the same amount of

²⁴⁴ *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, pars. 1, q.4, n.197: “Perfectio superveniens operationi, sicut pulchritudo iuveni.”

²⁴⁵ Scotus, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9: “Sicut enim bonitas primaria entis, quae dicitur bonitas essentialis, quae est integritas vel perfectio entis in se, importat positive negationem imperfectionis, per quod excluditur imperfection et diminutio sic bonitas entis secundaria, quae est accidentalis sive superveniens entitati, est integritas convenientiae vel integra convenientia eius alteri cui debet convenire vel alterius sibi.”

secondary goodness.

An Aside: Beauty and the Transcendentals

Astute readers may already know the answer to this question, but since it's a controversial topic these days, it needs to be asked nonetheless: does Scotus think that beauty—like truth, unity, and goodness—is transcendental? In other words, is beauty a necessarily coextensive property of being? Well, that seems to depend upon who you ask. Some scholars, such as Kovach, argue that Scotus numbers beauty among the transcendentals.²⁴⁶ Others, such as Wolter, deny this.²⁴⁷ Some, like Jan A. Aertsen, remain silent on the topic.²⁴⁸

According to Wolter, the answer is clearly, “no.” In his seminal work on Scotus's conception of the transcendentals, Wolter claims that “Unity, truth, and goodness are the transcendental attributes coextensive with being.” He goes on to claim that “Unlike Alexander of Hales, who identifies beauty with the *bonum honestum*, Scotus does not attempt to add ‘the beautiful’ as a distinct member of the trinity of coextensive transcendentals.”²⁴⁹ Wolter's argument hinges on the fact the Scotus never *explicitly* mentions beauty among the coextensive attributes of being. Two considerations worth mentioning that make this claim inconclusive without corroborating evidence (which I intend to provide below): first, as an argument from silence, it is the weakest form of evidence.

Second, while Scotus never explicitly lists beauty among the coextensive attributes of being, his claims about what counts as a coextensive attribute is ambiguous, for his wording

²⁴⁶ Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus's Philosophy and Theology,” 448

²⁴⁷ Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus*, 100.

²⁴⁸ Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012), 371-432.

²⁴⁹ Wolter, *The Transcendentals and their Function in the Metaphysics of John Duns Scotus*, 100.

implies that goodness, unity, and truth are merely *examples* of coextensive attributes of being. For instance, Scotus says that being “has simple convertible attributes, *such as (sicut)* one, true, and good.”²⁵⁰ Elsewhere, he says that “being contains each attribute of being, *such as* truth, goodness, and unity” (*ut veritatem, bonitatem, et unitatem*).²⁵¹ In book VI of *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, he says that these transcendentals are “quasi-attributes of being, such as true, good, etc.” (*ut verum, bonum, etc.*).²⁵²

Consequently, it’s unclear from these passages whether Scotus means to provide an exhaustive list of coextensive attributes (i.e., only those three) or simply examples—of which goodness, unity, and truth are the most common but not exclusive instances. If these are *merely examples*, then ontological space would be carved out for beauty to function as a coextensive property of being. In any case, demonstrating that beauty *is* in fact a coextensive property of being and thus transcendental requires more convincing evidence beyond the semantic ambiguity contained in ‘*sicut*’ and ‘*ut*.’ In other words, this merely shows that it’s possible Scotus had in mind more attributes of being than he mentions in the text; but it doesn’t show this is actually the case. For that, more confirmation is needed. So I’ll contend that Wolter is correct, but for the wrong reasons. But first, what’s the supposed evidence from Kovach that Scotus takes beauty to be transcendental?

Kovach suggests that there are two groups of texts that lend support for the claim Scotus envisions beauty as one of the transcendentals. First, Kovach enlists texts purporting to show that “Scotus uses terms ‘beauty’ and ‘goodness’ interchangeably or, at least, emphasizes the

²⁵⁰ *Ordinatio I, d.8, pars I, q.3, n.114*. “Ens non tantum passiones simplices convertibiles, sicut unum, verum, et bonum, sed habet aliquas passiones...”

²⁵¹ *Ordinatio II, d.1, q.4-5, n.273*: “Ens contineat quamlibet passionem entis (ut veritatem, bonitatem, et unitatem).”

²⁵² *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis VI, q.3, n.20*.

similarity of their natures.”²⁵³ Most of the work is done in a footnote, but the passages from Scotus supposedly showing that beauty and goodness are interchangeable or similar in nature are as follows:

It can be said that just as beauty is not some *absolute quality* in a corporeal body, but is the *aggregation of all things appropriate to such a body* (such as magnitude, shape, and color), *and the aggregation of all its aspects* (which are all fitting of that body and to each other), so also the moral goodness of an act is a certain *décor* of the act, including the aggregation of proper proportion to all things to which it should be proportioned (such as the potency, the object, the end, the time, the location and the manner), and this specifically as what is dictated by right reason ought to pertain to the act...²⁵⁴

And,

[Moral goodness] has all its goodness from the circumstances, and this goodness is related in the same way that beauty is related to a body. For beauty in a body is not from one quality alone, but from the proportion of many qualities to each other, and to the subject in which they inhere... Therefore beauty is not one absolute quality in a body, just as health is not [one absolute quality], but requires a fittingness or proportion... therefore moral goodness is perfect from a correspondence to right reason according to all of the circumstances...²⁵⁵

According to Kovach, these two texts imply an interchangeability of the terms ‘goodness’ and

²⁵³ Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus’s Philosophy and Theology,” 448.

²⁵⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, p.1, q.2, n.62: “dici potest quod sicut pulchritudo non est aliqua qualitas absoluta in corpore pulchro, sed est aggregatio omnium convenientium tali corpori (puta magnitudinis, figurae, et coloris), et 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...”

²⁵⁵ *Reportatio* II, d.40, q.un, n.2 (Wadding): “...et ista habet universaliolem bonitatem ex circumstantiis, et talis bonitas se habet sicut pulchritudo ad corpus. Pulchritudo enim in corpore non est ex una qualitate tantum, sed ex proportione multarum ad invicem, et ad subiectum in quo sunt, ita quod talis sit ibi, et talis ibi. Pulchritudo igitur nihil unum absolutum est corpore, sicut nec sanitas, sed requirit convenientiam, vel proportionem humorum, et ideo excessus unius causat infirmitatem, et cum iterum reducitur, redit sanitas, idea ad talia non is motus per se, 7. *Physicorum*. Bonitas igitur moralis complete est ex correspondentia ad rationem rectam secundum omnes circumstantias.” I find Kovach’s use of the *Reportatio* account here strange, when the parallel passage in the *Ordinatio* is critically edited. The reason for the omission, I suspect, is that it contradicts Kovach’s argument, for the parallel passage in the *Ordinatio* explicitly says that the type of goodness that beauty is similar to is not the type of goodness that is convertible with being. More on this later!

‘beauty’ and thus they “indicate that Scotus holds a real identity of ‘beauty’ and ‘goodness.’”²⁵⁶

From this, he concludes the following:

In brief, Scotus seems to teach the real identity and the formal or logical distinction between the good and the beautiful. This, in turn, would mean the co-extensiveness of beauty with goodness and, since goodness is one of Scotus’s simple transcendentals, the co-extensiveness of beauty with being.²⁵⁷

Kovach’s argument seems to be something like this:

- (1) Being is transcendental.
- (2) Scotus claims that goodness is a coextensive property of being, and is thus transcendental.
- (3) Scotus claims that goodness and beauty are really identical and formally distinct.
- (4) Therefore, by the transitivity of identity, Scotus must think beauty is a coextensive property of being, and thus transcendental.

Second, Kovach suggests a linguistic argument for postulating beauty as one of the proper attributes coextensive with being. Kovach states that when Scotus refers to the proper attributes that are coextensive with being, “Scotus lists the one, the true, and the good not as the only three simple transcendentals but, instead, as being among those transcendentals or examples of them.”²⁵⁸ He concludes that Scotus must have in mind at least one more “absolute transcendental coextensive with being” and the best candidate is beauty.²⁵⁹ From the two arguments, Kovach reiterates his claim: “In the light of these arguments it is difficult to doubt that, to Scotus, the scope of beauty is identical with the scope of goodness, as both beauty and

²⁵⁶ Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus’s Philosophy and Theology,” 449.

²⁵⁷ Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus’s Philosophy and Theology,” 449.

²⁵⁸ Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus’s Philosophy and Theology,” 450.

²⁵⁹ Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus’s Philosophy and Theology,” 450.

goodness are coextensive with being.”²⁶⁰

Let’s take the second argument first. The ambiguity in Scotus’s description cuts both ways: it neither provides support for the claim that there are no other proper attributes of being, as Wolter surmises; nor does it provide any rational support for the adding of beauty as Kovach suggests. And in all of the authentic texts we have about the proper attributes of being, Scotus never mentions beauty as among these coextensive proper attributes.²⁶¹ So Kovach’s claims are merely speculation, unless evidence can be substantiated for his first argument above.

So, what about that first argument purporting to show the interchangeability of beauty and goodness? Premises (1) and (2) are certainly true, and have been demonstrated in the first three chapters of this dissertation. The crucial question is thus whether premise (3) is true; in other words, whether Scotus really claims that beauty and goodness are really identical and formally distinct. Unfortunately, premise (3) of Kovach’s argument is simply false, for two reasons. First, in the passages enlisted by Kovach above, Scotus nowhere claims that goodness and beauty are coextensive or identical; rather, he merely states that what makes something beautiful and what makes something morally good are similar in the sense that they are both non-absolute qualities that require a harmony of a number of external conditions in order to obtain.

Second, Kovach has not paid enough attention to the Subtle Doctor’s distinction between two disparate types of goodness. As we have seen, Scotus makes a distinction between two types of goodness, only one of which is transcendental. So we need to ask which type of goodness Scotus thinks beauty is similar to: primary goodness, which is transcendental and a

²⁶⁰ Kovach, “Divine and Human Beauty in Duns Scotus’s Philosophy and Theology,” 451.

²⁶¹ See *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1, q.3, n.134; *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars1, q.3, nn.114 and 126; *Ordinatio* I, d.39, q.1-5, n.13 (Appendix A in the Vatican edition vol VI); *Ordinatio* II, d.1, q.4-5, n.273; *Ordinatio* III, d. 8, q. un., n.50; *Reportatio* IIA, d.16, q.un; and *Quaestiones super Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VI, q.3, n.20.

coextensive property of being, or secondary goodness, which is an accidental property of being? Well, as I have shown throughout this chapter, Scotus often links beauty with secondary goodness—the type of goodness that is not transcendental and is not a coextensive property of being. So although Scotus connects beauty and goodness, this connection clearly concerns secondary goodness and not transcendental goodness. Kovach’s argument trades on the ambiguity in the word ‘good,’ since Scotus means two entirely different things by it, and only in one sense is ‘good’ transcendental. So, beauty, like secondary goodness is not a necessarily coextensive property of being and is thus not transcendental.

Conclusion

In closing, I offer two final considerations. First, in Scotus’s terminology, ‘goodness,’ as used indiscriminately between primary and secondary goodness, is an equivocal concept. To see this, consider Scotus’s definition of a univocal concept:

I call a concept univocal, which is so united that its unity is sufficient for a contradiction, by affirming and denying the concept of the same subject; a univocal concept is also sufficient for serving as a middle term in a syllogism, so that the extreme terms are united in the middle as one in such a way that the unity between them can be concluded without the fallacy of equivocation.²⁶²

Let’s consider both of these “tests” for univocity in relation to “goodness.” First, take the following two statements, (A) and (B), about some action C:

- (A) Action C is good.
- (B) Action C is not good.

²⁶² *Ordinatio* I, d.3, pars 1, q.1-2, n.26. “univocum conceptum dico, qui ita est unus quod eius unitas sufficit ad contradictionem, affirmando et negando ipsum de eodem; sufficit etiam pro medio syllogistico, ut extrema unita in medio sic uno sine fallacia aequivocationis concludantur inter se uniri.”

According to Scotus, if goodness is a univocal concept, then the conjunction of (A) and (B) in reference to C would result in a contradiction. While the statements (A) and (B) seem *prima facie* to result in a contradiction, it really depends upon the meaning of ‘good’ in both contexts. As it turns out, (A) and (B) are not contradictory if one takes goodness in the two different senses Scotus has in mind. Let “goodness₁” represent primary goodness and “goodness₂” represent secondary goodness. We can now see why goodness is equivocal rather than univocal; namely, because there is at least one possible state of affairs, such that we can affirm and deny goodness of the same subject. Consider, for example,

(A*) Action C is good₁.

(B*) Action C is not good₂.

Since goodness₁ refers to primary goodness, which is a transcendental property of being, everything that has being will also be good in this sense. Since every act has some amount of being, it will be good in the sense of goodness₁. But not every act is good in terms of goodness₂, for many acts are disordered in some way. For example, let action C be the act of murdering someone. In such a case, action C would be good in the good₁ sense, but not good in a good₂ sense. So the concept of goodness is not univocal, but equivocal, since (A*) and (B*) do not result in a contradiction, when supplied with the appropriate concepts of goodness.

Second, a univocal concept can serve as the middle term in a syllogism without resulting in the fallacy of equivocation. So take the following syllogism:

(1) Every good act is worthy of praise.

(2) Action C is a good act.

(3) Therefore, C is worthy of praise.

If goodness were to have a univocal meaning, then it could serve as the middle term in such a

sylogism. Indeed, as it stands it seems like it's a valid argument. However, as Scotus understands goodness, it cannot serve as a middle term in the above case. For, suppose 'good' in premise (1) is taken in terms of 'goodness₂,' while 'good' in premise (2) is taken in terms of 'goodness₁,' and action C was the act of murdering someone. In such a case, both the premises could be true and the conclusion false, due to the fallacy of equivocation: premise (1) is only true if taken in the secondary sense of goodness, while premise (2) is true for any act whatsoever if taken in the primary sense of goodness.

Therefore, goodness, as used indifferently to mean both primary and secondary goodness, is an equivocal concept: primary goodness is predicated *in quale* of whatever being is predicated *in quid*; secondary goodness accidentally and extrinsically perfects a subject and depends upon the obtainment of a number of external circumstances or conditions. Furthermore, primary goodness is transcendental: it's a necessarily coextensive formal property or perfection of being, such that every act, insofar as it exists as an act, has this ontological goodness. In contrast, secondary goodness isn't transcendental, it doesn't convert with being (it is not a necessarily coextensive property of being), but depends upon a number of factors, and the act in which it ought to inhere could still exist and lack this secondary goodness.

Second, secondary goodness is a kind of suitability or harmony of a thing to something else. Suitability is grounded in the nature of the things that form its basis. If primary goodness supervenes upon substances in accordance with their being, then secondary goodness can also be characterized by a complex supervenience relation. But to see this, we need to look at secondary goodness in terms of an act. The goodness of a moral act will be the aggregation of all things fitting to that act under the guidance of right reason.²⁶³ But Scotus—and the medieval tradition

²⁶³ For example see *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un, n.8.

that preceded him—does not have one type of secondary goodness, but varying levels of supervenient goodness that are added to an act based upon a number of conditions and circumstances. Ultimately, this will result in a threefold hierarchy of secondary goodness in the acts of rational agents: generic, moral, and meritorious goodness. In order to situate Scotus's account in this long and varied history, in the next chapter (chapter 5) I explore this history prior to Scotus. Then in chapter 6 we'll look at Scotus's own account of these three levels of secondary goodness, and finally (chapter 7), Scotus's threefold account of badness that corresponds to this threefold level of goodness.

CHAPTER FIVE:

GENERIC, MORAL, AND MERITORIOUS GOODNESS PRIOR TO SCOTUS

The distinction between primary and secondary goodness wasn't formulated by Scotus in a vacuum. Rather, he expands upon an earlier tradition that distinguished ontological goodness from moral goodness, and then further distinguished various levels of moral goodness: generic, circumstantial, and meritorious. The context for Scotus's claims on the matter is set by a long and convoluted history: it originates with some cryptic phrases of Peter Lombard, distinguishing ontological goodness from moral goodness, and then further distinguishing various levels of moral goodness in order to overcome an Augustinian worry as well as challenge Peter Abelard. Peter of Poitiers, Lombard's student, adds that the circumstances play a role in moral goodness, but does little to explain what role the circumstances actually play. Philip the Chancellor explains *why* an act has generic goodness and distinguishes all three levels of moral goodness—generic, circumstantial, and meritorious. Albert the Great expands upon Philip's threefold account by specifying the various circumstances that make an act circumstantially good. Bonaventure reiterates the traditional account inspired by Lombard, but often calls ontological goodness 'primary goodness,' and moral goodness 'secondary goodness,' as Scotus will also do. In contrast, Aquinas does not distinguish ontological goodness from moral goodness, and so his entire discussion of the metaphysics of goodness differs significantly from the tradition that preceded him. Since little of the recent work on Scotus's metaphysics of

goodness situates it within this long and convoluted history,²⁶⁴ this chapter aims to do just that. As will become clear over the next two chapters, Scotus articulates a more traditional approach to the metaphysics of goodness than Aquinas, and this will result in some surprising conclusions.

Peter Lombard

Peter Lombard's discussion of the moral character of acts in *Sentences* II, d.34-42 forms the basis for later debates on the subject. Like any good medieval topic, Lombard's discussion begins with a distinction: a distinction between ontological goodness and moral goodness,²⁶⁵ and then by further distinguishing levels of moral goodness that will form the basis for later distinctions between generic goodness (*bonum in genere*), moral or circumstantial goodness (*bonum ex circumstantiis*), and meritorious goodness (*bonum ex gratia*).

At the heart of this section in the *Sentences* is the topic of sin and an attempt to reconcile Augustine's claim that "everything that exists is good insofar as it exists"²⁶⁶ with the claim that certain actions are intrinsically evil; in other words, what's at stake concerns the compatibility of

²⁶⁴ For example, Mary Beth Ingham's *The Harmony of Goodness: Mutuality and Moral Living According to John Duns Scotus* (Saint Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012) has an entire chapter devoted to Scotus's account of moral goodness, and yet, not one author other than Scotus himself is mentioned. Again, Thomas Osborne's book, *Human Action in Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014) does a fairly good job of situating Scotus's views of goodness in the context of debates with Aquinas and Ockham, but fails to explain the origin or history of the views in question, which leads to the incongruous conclusion that Scotus transforms the "traditional views" of Aquinas. I will show in the next chapter that this is false, precisely because Osborne does not take into account the history prior to Aquinas. A notable exception is Tobias Hoffmann's article, "Moral Action as Human Action: End and Object in Aquinas in Comparison with Abelard, Lombard, Albert, and Duns Scotus," *The Thomist* 67 (2003), 73-94. The scope of this article, however, is limited to the end and object in this tradition, and not the various types of goodness that result from it.

²⁶⁵ See for example *Sentences* II, d. 34, c.4; *Sentences* II d. 35, c.2. All references from Lombard, *Libri IV Sententiarum* (Bonaventurae, 1916).

²⁶⁶ See Augustine, *Confessions* VII, 12 (18): "Ergo si omni bono privabuntur, omnino nulla erunt: ergo quamdiu sunt, bona sunt. Ergo quaecumque sunt, bona sunt, malumque illud quod quaerebam unde esset non est substantia, quia si substantia esset, bonum est." Augustine, *Confessions Vol. 1: Introduction and Text*, edited by James O'Donnell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 82. See also *Enchiridion*, c11; *De Natura Boni*, i-iii. Lombard, *Sentences* II, d.34, c.4.

[B] with the existence of sinful acts. If every being, in so far as it has being, is good, then every act, insofar as it has being, is good. But if sinful acts are bad, then we seem to be committed to saying either that bad acts are good, or that not every act, in so far as it has being, is good. This first option seems infelicitous; the second denies [B]. Hence neither of these options seems promising. As we saw in the previous chapter, Scotus addressed this issue by distinguishing ontological goodness from moral goodness, and claiming only the former converts with being. As we will see in this chapter, Scotus inherits this solution from Lombard and his followers.

In any case, Abelard's bold claims a century earlier complicated this issue, as he distinguished sharply between the interior act of consent and the exterior, bodily act and emphatically claimed that only the interior act—the intention—matters for the act's moral value.²⁶⁷ On Abelard's account, the exterior act is neutral.²⁶⁸ Consequently, the agent's intent makes an act good or bad, and not the exterior act itself or a conjunction of the interior and exterior acts. Thus, as Lombard and his contemporaries read Abelard, no acts are good or bad in themselves; they gain their moral status solely by the intent of the agent.²⁶⁹

In solving these twin worries, Lombard says Augustinians claim that all wills and actions, *insofar as they are wills and actions*, are good because they exist. While all wills and actions have this ontological or natural goodness because they have being,²⁷⁰ they nevertheless can be

²⁶⁷ Peter Abelard, *Scito Te Impsum, Petri Abaelardi Opera Theologica IV, Corpus Christianorum CXC*, ed. Rainer M. Ilgner (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2001), 9; D.E. Luscombe, *Peter Abelard's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 14-15.

²⁶⁸ Jean Porter, "Action and Intention," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 1, eds. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 507.

²⁶⁹ Whether this accurately reflects Abelard's views is a complicated question, and outside the purview of this dissertation.

²⁷⁰ Once Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics* are reintroduced in the West, this 'ontological goodness' is called 'transcendental goodness,' because it transcends Aristotle's categories: everything that exists, in so far as it exists, necessarily has this goodness.

bad when they are disordered or lack a proper end.²⁷¹ In this context Lombard adds a different kind of goodness—moral goodness:

[Augustinians] say that all actions, that is, insofar as they are (exist), are good by their own essence. But some actions, insofar as they are done inordinately, are sinful. And they add that some actions are not only good by their essence, but are also generically good, such as to feed the hungry, which is an act of the category (*genus*) of works of mercy.²⁷²

Here we see the beginning of the standard formulation of the division in the metaphysics of goodness between the goodness an act has because it has being and the goodness it receives (or doesn't receive) from other factors involved. Acts have an ontological goodness insofar as they exist or have being. In contrast, some acts have an additional type of goodness that Lombard calls “generic.” While Lombard doesn't tell us what actually makes an act generically good, Lombard enlists generic goodness in order to argue against Abelard that some acts have a categorical goodness apart from the agent's intention and so the intent cannot be the sole determinant of an act's moral value.

Furthermore, Lombard says that these (Augustinian) authorities add a further level of goodness to an act beyond its ontological goodness and generic goodness, which he calls “perfect” or “absolute” goodness. An act has perfect goodness when it meets the following conditions: (1) it has ontological goodness from its nature as an act; (2) it is generically good, (3) it has a good cause and a good end.²⁷³ All acts, because they have being, meet (1); that is, all acts have a transcendental or ontological goodness in virtue of their existence. Acts have a

²⁷¹ Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II d. 35, c.2.

²⁷² Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II, d.36, c.6: “qui dicunt, omnes actus essentia sui, id est, in quantum sunt, esse bonos, quosdam vero, in quantum inordinate fiunt, peccata esse. Addunt quoque, quosdam non tantum essentia, sed etiam genere bonos esse, ut reficere esurientem, qui actus est de genere operum misericordiae.” Some manuscripts contain the phrase “in genere” which becomes the standard way of phrasing generic goodness.

²⁷³ *Sentences* II, d.36, c.6: “...quosdam vero actus absolute ac perfecte bonos dicunt, quos non solum essentia vel genus, sed etiam causa et finis commendat, ut sunt illi qui ex voluntate bona proveniunt et bonum finem metiuntur.”

secondary level of goodness when they are generically good, though Lombard provides no account of the conditions that must be met in order for an act to be generically good. Acts have a further level of goodness when they have a good cause (i.e., a good will) and a good end or intention. So while the intention of the act matters, contra Abelard, it is not the only determining factor involved—in fact, generically good acts can have a degree of moral goodness irrespective of their end or intention.²⁷⁴

Lombard’s distinction between the ontological goodness of an act and the moral goodness of an act sets the precedent for future discussion of the metaphysics of goodness in at least two ways. First, Lombard construes moral goodness as accidental to the act, since acts can exist and lack the appropriate moral goodness.²⁷⁵ He contrasts this with the act’s ontological or natural goodness, which is essential to the act: any act, insofar as it exists, has ontological goodness. But not every act is morally good. Moral goodness requires not only the act’s existence, but a good will aimed at a good end added to the act’s generic goodness. Thus **[B]** is not incompatible with sinful acts, so long as we distinguish the act’s ontological goodness in terms of its being, from its sinfulness in terms of its disorder.

Second, although his discussion of the levels of moral goodness—generic and perfect—remains terse, vague, and largely unhelpful, it will nevertheless form the starting point for later discussions. This “perfect goodness,” for example, will subsequently be called “moral goodness,” “virtuous goodness,” or the goodness an act receives from its circumstances (*bonum ex circumstantiis*). When Philip the Chancellor writes his *Summa De Bono*, he glosses

²⁷⁴ Lombard doesn’t specify the role of the end in the metaphysics of the act, and this ambiguity will persist in subsequent authors, and ultimately lead to a divergence of views. On the one hand, Philip the Chancellor, Albert the Great, and Duns Scotus will argue that the end is one of the circumstances of the act, and therefore factors into the act’s circumstantial goodness. In contrast, Aquinas takes the end as the object of the interior act, and so it seems to apply more to an act’s generic goodness.

²⁷⁵ Lombard, *Sentences* II, d.36, c.6.

Lombard's account by adding a third level of goodness—goodness *ex gratia*. Before considering Philip's elaborate approach, let's consider an early disciple of Peter Lombard, Peter of Poitiers, who wrote one of the first commentaries on the *Sentences*, and as Chancellor at Paris, can be credited with the success of incorporating the *Sentences* into the new dialectic method of theology in the schools and the prosperity of the Scholastic movement that was already on the horizon.²⁷⁶

Peter of Poitiers

Like his teacher Peter Lombard, Peter of Poitiers also feels the need, on the one hand, to respond to the problem of how everything that exists is good when clearly bad acts exist,²⁷⁷ and on the other, to respond to Abelardian worries concerning the indifference of every (exterior) act, and Abelard's overemphasis on the intent of the agent.²⁷⁸ In responding to such worries, Peter follows the Augustinian position of his teacher by distinguishing between the ontological goodness an act has simply by existing, and the moral goodness or badness of an act. Peter argues that badness can only exist as a privation of something good, such that the act, because it is an act, is ontologically good, without negating the act's sinfulness.²⁷⁹ If badness had an independent ontological foundation, as the Manicheans thought, then it would mirror the relationship good has to the form of the Good by having a form of the Bad: since things are good by participation in the highest Good, bad things must be bad by participation in the highest Bad.

²⁷⁶ See Philip S. Moore and Marthe Dulong, "Introduction," in *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis I*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1943), v-vii.

²⁷⁷ Peter of Poitiers, *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis II*, ed. Philip S. Moore, Joseph N. Garvin, and Marthe Dulong (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame, 1950), Q.12.

²⁷⁸ *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis II*, QQ.13-16.

²⁷⁹ *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis II*, Q.12, L.76-78: "Ex predictis igitur patet quoniam malum non est nisi in bono et quod peccatum in quantum est actus bonum est."

But some ultimate form of the Bad is impossible. So, evil cannot exist. It must be a privation or corruption of something good.²⁸⁰

But what about bad acts like homicide and adultery? If homicide and adultery are acts, and every act is in some sense from God, then it seems as though God is the author of homicide and adultery. Peter's argument runs something like this:

- (1) For all x, if x exists (i.e., has being), then x is from God.²⁸¹
- (2) Acts exist (i.e., have being).
- (3) Therefore, every act is from God.
- (4) Homicide and adultery are acts.
- (5) Therefore, homicide and adultery are from God.

Peter responds to such a worry with the following distinction: the name of the defect, say, 'homicide,' has a twofold signification; namely, (1) the act, and (2) the deformity or corruption. The act, as an act, is good. But the act is bad in terms of its deformity or corruption. So the sinful act, *qua* act, is good. The sinful act, *qua* disorder, is bad. This allows Peter to claim that acts are entities that exist and therefore have ontological goodness, the foundation of which stems from God, without committing him to the view that the act's badness, as a consequence of its disorder, is caused by God.²⁸² Thus he too staves off the worry about the compatibility of **[B]**

²⁸⁰ *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis* II, Q.12. For his long and complicated argument about this, and why there cannot be a form of badness, see Q.12, L.76-240.

²⁸¹ The phrase "from God" (i.e., "homicidium est a Deo") should be understood in terms of its origin, in the sense that God would be its author. For example, Peter uses the following as an equivalent: "God is the author of homicide." The equivalency is made clear in the context of this argument: "homicidium est actus. Sed omnis actus est a Deo; ergo, homicidium est a Deo; ergo Deus est auctor homicidii."

²⁸² *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis* II, q.12, L.241-254. "Nobis autem hoc fatentibus obiciunt: homicidium est actus. Sed omnis actus est a Deo; ergo, homicidium est a Deo; ergo Deus est auctor homicidii. Ad quod dicendum quod huiusmodi nomina volunt intelligi per reduplicationem sic: adulterium, id est in eo quod est adulterium; similiter, homicidium, id est in eo quod est homicidium. Unde cum dicitur: Homicidium est a deo, intelligitur: in eo quod est homicidium; quod falsum est. Similiter cum dicitur: idolum est corpus, et omne corpus est naturale; ergo idolum est naturale, hoc nomen idolum intelligitur per reduplicationem. Nomina autem vitiorum duo notant, scilicet actum et

with sinful acts.

But what makes an act disordered? According to Peter, the end usually determines this. Some acts, however, are generically or categorically good or bad, given the description of the act. Other acts, acts that are neither unqualifiedly good or nor unqualifiedly bad, become good or bad by their end. In order to see this, we need to attend closely to the two roles the end plays in the metaphysical goodness of an act.

First, in the case of acts that are morally neutral in terms of their genus, the end individuates morally bad acts from good acts. Following Lombard closely, he states,

And so it should be known that some say that every action, insofar as it is, is good. But they distinguish actions as follows: some actions are generically good, such as *feeding the poor*; other actions are generically bad, such as *killing a human*; but some actions are neither good nor bad *simpliciter*, but the end commends or deforms them, such as *wandering through the streets*. For if someone wanders through the streets in order to care for the sick and the poor, such an end commends such an action. But if one wanders through the streets in order to look at women, the end renders the act deformed and reprehensible. In the case of these [neutral] actions, you will have to have some further discussion about which ends make the actions blameworthy or praiseworthy.²⁸³

So according to Peter, some acts are good or bad generically or categorically or *simpliciter*—in these types of actions there is no need to talk about ends at all. They are intrinsically good (*bona est in se*) or intrinsically bad. Other acts, however, are neutral (such as ‘to wander through the streets’). In these cases, the bare act is indifferent to good and bad unless *an end*—the purpose for which the act was done—is added. When the act is neutral, the intent of the agent determines

deformatem sive corruptionem. Actus quidem bonum est, sed corruptio illius, qua ipse deformatur, vitium est et non est aliquid.”

²⁸³ *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis* II, q.13, L.8-19. “Sciendum est itaque quod aliqui dicunt omnem actionem in quantum est bonum esse. Actiones autem ita distinguunt: actionum quedam sunt genere bone, ut reficere pauperes; actionum quedam genere male, ut interficere homines; quedam vero nec bone nec male simpliciter sed eas finis commendat vel deformat, ut circuire plateas. Si enim aliquis circueat plateas ut egros et pauperes reficiat, talis finis talem actionem commendat. Si vero circueat plateas ut videat mulieres, finis actionem reddit deformem et reprehensibilem. De his actionibus agendum erit quas finis vel reprehensibilem vel commendabiles facit.”

how the act should be morally judged. Furthermore, what ends are relevant will depend upon the morally neutral action in question: what makes neutral type X morally praiseworthy or blameworthy may not in fact be the same ends that make neutral type Y praiseworthy or blameworthy. So in the case of morally neutral acts, in order to make a moral judgment about the act in question, one must get specific about which ends make individual acts of different neutral types either praiseworthy or blameworthy. Peter, however, does not provide any guidance about how to determine which ends will make a particular kind of morally neutral act good or bad.

Second, sometimes the end can render an otherwise generically good act bad. For example, if one feeds the hungry in order to boast about it, that act is rendered bad on account of the bad end.²⁸⁴ But can a good end make a generically good act *better* or a bad end make a generically bad act *worse*? In other words, does a good end add another level of goodness to a generically good act, or a bad end another level of badness, as Peter Lombard suggested? It is unclear from Poitiers's account.

Peter does note, however, that one must pay careful attention to the circumstances to fully evaluate an act's moral worth:

For in certain cases the willing is the greater sin, whereas in others the act is the greater sin. For all the circumstances [need to be] considered carefully: by whom something is brought about, namely, whether by a layman or a priest, and what location and what time, and other circumstances of this kind.²⁸⁵

Here Peter identifies a few of the morally relevant circumstances: 'who,' 'where,' and 'when.'

But the role of circumstances in the various levels of goodness (generic and circumstantial) isn't

²⁸⁴ *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis* II, Q.16, L.151: "Ergo si iactantie causa pascitur pauper, illa actio mala est quia malus est finis, et ex hoc ipso peccat homo maledictioni et subiacet."

²⁸⁵ *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis* II, Q.14, L.104-111: In quibusdam enim maius peccatum est voluntas, in quibusdam actus. Attendende enim sunt omnes circumstantie: a quo scilicet aliquid fiat, an a laico an a sacerdote, et quo loco et quo tempore, et huiusmodi.

specified by Peter of Poitiers.²⁸⁶ The mentioning of specific circumstances, however, is an important note picked up by subsequent authors. In order to understand the relationship of circumstances to generic goodness, and the origin and development of the threefold account of accidental goodness—generic, moral, and meritorious—we must consider the works of Philip the Chancellor and Albert the Great.

Philip the Chancellor

Although almost contemporaries, Philip the Chancellor is well aware of Lombard's metaphysics of goodness and relies on the Master at various points in developing his own account.²⁸⁷ Following Lombard, Philip divides the goodness of an act into the natural or ontological goodness that an act has in virtue of its being, and the moral goodness of an act, which Philip further subdivides into various levels or grades reminiscent of Lombard's account, but with greater clarity and thoroughness. On Philip's account, an act can have three levels or grades of goodness depending upon various relevant features: generic goodness, circumstantial goodness, and the goodness of grace:

[T]here is a certain distinction of goodness in an act. For a certain act is called generically good, such as feeding a hungry person; furthermore, [an act] is called good from the circumstances, such as giving to a needy person whatever amount is sufficient for him or however much he needs; and in addition, [an act] is called good by the infusion of grace.²⁸⁸

Philip begins his discussion of generic goodness (*bonum in genere*) by puzzling over the

²⁸⁶ For a history of the role of circumstances in medieval theology before Poitiers, see D.W. Robertson, Jr., "A Note on the Classical Origin of 'Circumstances' in the Medieval Confessional," *Studies in Philology* 43, N.1 (1946): 6-14. See also Stanley B. Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: the Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 63.

²⁸⁷ Philip the Chancellor, *Philippi Cancellarii Summa de bono*, 329, L: 59-68.

²⁸⁸ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 327, L: 4-7: "Primo autem notanda est quedam differentia bonitatis in actione. Dicitur enim quedam actio bona in genere, ut reficere esurientem; dicitur etiam bona ex circumstantia, ut dare isti indigenti quantum ei sufficit vel quanto indiget; dicitur etiam bona ex infusione gratie..."

meaning of ‘genus’ in this moral context. This is a step in the right direction, since previous authors like Lombard and Poitiers used the term without any explication of its meaning. After dismissing various meanings of ‘genus,’ Philip cites Lombard’s cryptic remark about the generic goodness of feeding a hungry person, and then considers whether genus should be taken as a form.

Here Philip uses an analogy of form and matter and asks if either of these is sufficient for generic goodness. In this context, the form of the act represents the *type of act* or category of act. Having sex, for example, is a type or kind of act. Philip argues that the kind of act is not sufficient for an act to have generic goodness, because acts that are generically good and generically bad often share the same form or kind of act. For example, having sex with one’s wife, a single person, or someone else who is not one’s spouse all share the same form: namely, sex. But the latter two examples, according to Philip, are obvious cases of acts that are generically bad. Since generically good and bad actions can share the form (i.e., the kind of act), the form of the act is an insufficient condition for an act’s generic goodness.²⁸⁹

Philip then considers whether an act receives its generic goodness from its matter. Here ‘matter’ can be taken in two ways, either in terms of the matter from which something is made (*materia ex qua*), or the matter with which the act is concerned (*materia circa quam*): namely, its object. The *materia ex qua* is irrelevant to the discussion, since the place of material causes rests in the domain of natural philosophy and hylomorphic composition. What about the object? Is the object sufficient to make an act generically good? Here Philip contends that the object (*materia circa quam*) is a necessary condition for generic goodness, citing Lombard’s example

²⁸⁹ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 329-330, L: 78-82: “Preterea, communicant ad invicem bonum in genere et malum in genere in forma actionis, ut cognoscere coniugatum vel suam et cognoscere solutam vel non suam; communicant enim in eo quod est cognoscere et ita in forma actionis. Ergo forma actionis non dicetur genus, cum illa differant in genere et in forma actionis convenient.”

of feeding a hungry person: feeding is the type of act; a hungry person is the object. But the object alone is not sufficient for generic goodness, according to Philip, because generically good and bad acts often agree in their object. For example, the generically good act of saving a man and the generically bad act of killing a man both have ‘a man’ as their object. So the object alone does not give an act its generic goodness.²⁹⁰

Philip concludes that the generic goodness or badness of acts derives from a combination of the form of the act in conjunction with the object:

And it should be said that a genus is taken in the present case from the conjunction of the form of the act with the matter of the act [the object]; for ‘to feed’ names a certain form, and ‘the hungry’ names the object, and so [generic] goodness is derived from a conjunction of the two.²⁹¹

So the form of the act in conjunction with its object determines the moral genus of the act. But what is the difference between generically good acts and generically bad acts? According to Philip, it depends upon whether the object is appropriate or suitable (*materia debita*) to the type of act.²⁹² Generically good acts have objects suitable to the type of act and the agent. For example, take ‘sex’ as the form or kind of act: having sex with one’s spouse is a generically good

²⁹⁰ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 330, L:83-92: “Neque videtur hic dici genus secundum quod materia dicitur genus. Communicant enim aliquando bonum in genere et malum in genere in materia circa quam, ut salvare hominem et interficere; hoc autem non esset si a bonitate materie diceretur bonum in genere. A materia autem ex qua non videtur dici bonum in genere; cum enim dicitur reficere esurientem, tangitur tantum generis actus et propria materia circa quam est actus et non materia ex qua. Dicitur autem bonum in genere hoc, scilicet reficere esurientem. Ergo non est bonum huiusmodi a materia ex qua, sed potius a materia circa quam. Sed materia non videtur sufficere, quia dictum est una erit materia et tamen unum erit bonum in genere, alterum malum, ut patet in diversis actibus, salvare hominem, interficere hominem.”

²⁹¹ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 330, L: 97-99: “Et est dicendum quod genus accipitur hic ex coniunctione forme actus cum materia actus; reficere enim dicit formam quandam, esurientem dicit materiam, at tamen trahitur bonum ex coniunctione huius ad illud.”

²⁹² Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 333, L: 181-183: “Propter hoc notandum quod genus accipitur pro materia seu pro actu coniuncto cum materia debita. Et sic locum habet bonum in genere in illis, in quibus explicite vel implicite determinatur actus cum materia, ut dictum est.” See also *Summa De Bono*, 330, L: 103-105: “Nam bonum in essentia dicitur quantum ad causam efficientem a qua est esse, bonum autem in genere ex coniunctione generis actus cum genere quod est materia actus cum fuerit materia debita actui vel e converso.” As we will see later, Scotus offers an almost identical account, but prefers *convenientia* instead of *debita materia*.

act, because it has an appropriate object; having sex with another person's spouse would constitute a generically bad act, since the object of the act is inappropriate. Generically good acts are acts conjoined to appropriate objects; generically bad acts are acts conjoined to inappropriate objects.²⁹³

Not only is Philip the first to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for an act's generic goodness, he is also the first to explain the levels of goodness gestured at by Lombard:

But first, it should be noted that there is a certain distinction of goodness in an act. For a certain act is called generically good, such as feeding a hungry person; in addition, [an act] is called good from circumstance, such as giving to a needy person whatever amount is sufficient for him or however much he needs; furthermore, [an act] is called good by the infusion of grace and from an appropriate intention. Actually, goodness from the appropriate intention ought to be placed under the goodness [arising] from the circumstances; for this is good from the end that is intended.²⁹⁴

Notice here that circumstantial goodness, which Philip sometimes calls "moral goodness," adds a level of goodness to the act. Furthermore, Philip only specifies a few of the circumstances that add the further level of goodness: the appropriate intention/end. In the example of circumstantial goodness, however, he claims that giving to a needy person the *amount* he or she needs is a circumstance; that is, while giving any food to a needy person would count as a generically good act, circumstantial goodness adds to the act only when the person and their condition are taken into consideration, since the act accounted for more relevant features of the situation.

For example, suppose I'm hiking in some remote wilderness and come across a severely

²⁹³ Although Philip remains silent on this, it is obvious from his examples that the type of act and the agent will determine which objects are appropriate. For example, if the form of the act was 'sex', then according to Philip, the only appropriate object would be one's spouse. On the other hand, if the form of the act was to feed, and the object was people who are hungry, the act would have a wider scope.

²⁹⁴ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 327, L: 4-9: "Primo autem notanda est quedam differentia bonitatis in actione. Dicitur enim quedam actio bona in genere, ut reficere esurientem; dicitur etiam bona ex circumstantia, ut dare isti indigenti quantum ie sufficit vel quanto indiget; dicitur etiam bona ex infusione gratie et ex debita intentione. Vel collocandum est bonum ex debita intentione sub bono ex circumstantia; hoc est enim bonum ex fine qui intenditur."

dehydrated climber in desperate need of liquid. A generically good act might be to give him something (anything) to drink. But it wouldn't have the further level of circumstantial goodness: circumstantial goodness in an act arises when the agent uses right reason to determine the amount and kind of liquid needed for the given situation. And in this case, the ailing climber needs water and lots of it. So while Philip counts the end/intention and other factors as circumstances that bring about the act's circumstantial goodness, he doesn't name or explain all the various circumstances that might apply; that will be the work of Albert the Great.²⁹⁵

But Philip grounds his three levels of goodness in Lombard's cryptic account by glossing it to support his own more developed stratification of goodness:

So let us take up the previously stated division of the genus and ask about such good actions as giving to the needy and feeding the hungry. For these are called good *in genere*, as the Master says in Book II of the *Sentences* in that chapter (II, d.36, c.6)... For he says "they say that all acts are good by their essence insofar as they are, but some acts are sinful insofar as they are inordinate. And some add that acts are good not only by their essence but also good *in genere*, such as feeding the hungry, which is an act of the genus of a work of mercy; but they say some actions are absolutely or perfectly good, which are not only essentially or generically good, but also the cause and the end commend it, as they are those things which come from a good will and achieve a good end." *In that he touches on both the goodness from circumstances and the goodness from grace.*²⁹⁶

Philip's gloss at the end of the previously discussed passage from Lombard shows two things.

First, that he is well aware of Lombard's account and much indebted to it. Second, while Philip unquestionably moves beyond Lombard by providing specific conditions for generic goodness

²⁹⁵ Later thinkers will name the current circumstance of giving a person the appropriate amount, the 'manner' or 'mode.'

²⁹⁶ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 329, L: 59-68. "Sumamus ergo divisionem generis predictam et queramus de huiusmodi bonis dare indigenti, reficere esurientem; hec enim vocantur bona in genere, sicut dicit Magister in II libro Sententiarum in illo capitulo... Dicit enim "Dicunt omnes actus essentia sui in quantum sunt bonos esse, quosdam vero in quantum inordinate fiunt peccata esse. Addunt quoque, quosdam non tantum essentia, sed in genere bonos esse, ut reficere esurientem, qui actus est de genere operum misericordie; quosdam vero actus absolute ac perfecte bonos esse dicunt, quos non solum essentia vel genus, sed etiam causa et finis commendat, ut sunt illi, qui ex bona voluntate proveniunt et bonum finem metiuntur." In quo tangit et bonum ex circumstantia et bonum ex gratia."

and the threefold stratification only hinted at in Lombard, Philip grounds his account in the work of the Master. In Lombard's vague remarks, Philip sees an opportunity to make a distinction and an elaboration: when Lombard mentions perfect goodness, Lombard was gesturing at the further stratification of circumstantial goodness and the goodness of grace.

Philip's development of Lombard's account deserves further treatment, especially concerning the relationship between circumstantial goodness and generic goodness. What exactly is the role of circumstances in the metaphysics of the act? Here it seems as though Philip offers two distinct roles that circumstances play: (1) to individuate generically good acts; and (2) add a further level of goodness to the act.

Sometimes it seems as though Philip uses generic goodness itself as an abstract genus in which the moral goodness from the circumstances stamp out different species of acts. Taken in such a way, it seems as though generically good acts are broad action-types, which have no directly corresponding act-tokens; in other words, they seem completely abstract, and only become concrete actions when circumstances are added.²⁹⁷ One reason for this interpretation is Philip's insistence that the end is a circumstance that, along with other specifications, adds goodness *ex circumstantia* to an act. So generically good acts don't seem to have an end. But it seems difficult to have a generically good act-token—a concrete act—that doesn't have an end. Without an end, goal, or intention of the agent, the act doesn't seem to be moral, but haphazard.

Consider one of Philip's examples of generically good acts (acts in which the form is conjoined to an appropriate object): conjugal relations. In the case of marital relations, the form of the act is sex, and if it is a generically *good* act, the act ought to have an appropriate object: namely, one's spouse. We can think of all kinds of ends for which a spouse might perform the

²⁹⁷ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 347-348.

act of sex with the appropriate partner: for procreation, for the happiness of the other, for one's own pleasure, the release of stress, in order to bond with one's partner, etc. But it seems odd to claim that there could be a concrete moral action token—an actual act—without such an end. The end could be disordered, no doubt. But performing such an act without an end seems to eradicate it from the category of moral altogether.²⁹⁸

So to put the problem bluntly: if there are generically good act-tokens (concrete acts), they lack circumstances and thus lack ends, since the end is a circumstance. Thus they do not seem like human *moral* acts in which praise or blame may be assigned. So maybe it's best to characterize generically good acts as mere act-types, abstract kinds of acts, that become concrete only when the relevant specifying circumstances—like the end—are added.

That is problematic, however, because Philip often talks as though generically good acts can be concrete act-tokens. First, to see this, we need to consider the second role he assigns circumstances. Circumstances play the role of adding a further level of goodness to a generically good act, and this seems to imply adding levels of goodness to *concrete acts*, and not simply individuating abstract kinds of acts. Circumstances add a further level of goodness for two reasons. First, there is a greater level of specificity when the agent takes into account more data in deciding how to act, in other words, when taking into account the various circumstances or conditions that surround the performing of the act. For example, suppose the generically good act of feeding the hungry was done, but I didn't give the person an amount sufficient to fulfill his or her needs. Giving the person an amount that satisfies his or her needs adds more goodness than simply giving the person some food—but giving the person some food is still a generically good act. And this implies a concrete act at each level.

²⁹⁸ Scotus finds this case altogether plausible. He calls an act that is generically good, but lacks an end altogether a generically good, but morally indifferent act.

Second, Philip associates each level of goodness with a *principium* or source. Generic goodness results from a free choice of an agent performing a kind of act with the *debita materia*—the appropriate object. Circumstantial goodness results from the agent’s right reason connecting the generic goodness with the appropriate circumstances, most notably for Philip, an appropriate intention. For goodness *ex gratia*, the *principium* is God’s grace that enables one to perform such an act from the virtue of charity.²⁹⁹ Since each source can be stratified in terms of its importance, the goodness that results from the *principium* can also be stratified. So the stratification of goodness implies that for each level of goodness a concrete act was performed and not simply an abstract act-type, since each level has a distinct *principium* that accounts for its existence.

Second, the way Philip characterizes generic goodness suggests more than simply abstract action types. This is obvious from the previous discussion about the nature of generic goodness itself, since he claims that generic goodness results from a combination of the form or kind of act with the act’s object (*materia circa quam*). If we take Philip’s form/matter analogy seriously, then kinds of acts are the abstract action types, individuated by their *materia* or objects, in the same way that forms are individuated by matter in hylomorphic composition. Thus generically good acts can’t be merely abstract types of action, but are concrete action-tokens. So if the kind of act is taken as a form, and the act’s object the matter that individuates, as Philip suggests, then we have a generic concrete action-token and not merely an action-type.

If circumstances don’t individuate abstract kinds of acts, then what role is left for them?

²⁹⁹ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 342, L: 11-17: “Triplex erat gradus bonitatis in actionibus: primus erat boni in genere et secundus boni moralis, tertius boni gratie. Bonum quidem nature, de quo opponitur, non pertinet ad operationes; et hee quidem secundum ordinem se habent et similiter principia horum. Erit ergo natura convenienter principium actionis bone in genere, et dico naturam liberum arbitrium, ratio autem recta boni moralis, gratia autem boni gratuiti.”

As stated above, they do much work in Philip's stratification of goodness: they add a level of specificity to the act, and thus when the agent via right reason, takes into account these circumstances in determining how to act, it adds a level of goodness (or badness) to the generic act. And while we should not take circumstances or circumstantial goodness to individuate abstract kinds of acts in the strict sense, I think we can see what Philip means: forms or kinds of acts are principally individuated by their objects (*materia circa quam*), but circumstances can add further differentiations and clarifications within some class of generically good or bad acts. Take the generically good act of feeding someone in need of food: the kind of act is feeding and the object is a person in need. Suppose I come across a hiker who tells me he's in need of food. Handing him a handful of trail mix would constitute a generically good act. But knowing the circumstances surrounding his need provides the opportunity for right reason to judge the appropriate response, and to further differentiate the extent of the need and how good the subsequent act will be: did the hiker simply bonk and needs a bit of energy to make that next hill, or has he been without food for days and in dire straits? Differentiating the conditions or circumstances under which the act is carried out shifts the moral paradigm: surely the urgency and generosity with which I act will diverge when the circumstances differ.

We can see this more clearly, I think, in cases of circumstantial badness. Suppose I simply know that the person on the trail needs food, and I do the generically bad act of withholding my supply from him. Knowing the person has not eaten in days and will surely die soon without sustenance compounds the badness of such an act. Likewise, knowing the hiker just needs a little energy to reach some nearby and non-necessary summit lessens the badness of withholding my food. So circumstances further separate the kind of act, and in doing so, clarify the weightiness of the act and its moral ramifications. In other words, circumstances add a level

of goodness or badness to the act.

Philip's account of goodness is important in a number of respects. First, Philip specifies exactly what makes an act generically good, something heretofore not done. Lombard and Peter of Poitiers use the *term* 'generic goodness,' but never fully explain what they mean by the concept. In contrast, Philip explains that a generically good act occurs when the form or kind of act conjoined with a suitable object (*materia debita*). Second, Philip explains—albeit imperfectly—the role of circumstances and argues that they specify and individuate generically good acts, and thereby add a further degree of goodness. Third, this is the first time all three types of an act's moral goodness are specified together: generic, moral, and meritorious. As we will see, this will become the standard way to evaluate an act's moral worth in the following centuries, culminating in the work of Duns Scotus.

Fourth, Philip explains why each level of goodness adds a further degree of goodness to the act, by linking each type of goodness to its source or *principium*. Generic goodness results from a free choice of an agent performing a kind of act with the *debita materia*—the appropriate object. Circumstantial goodness results from the agent's right reason connecting the generic goodness with the appropriate circumstances, most notably for Philip, an appropriate intention.³⁰⁰ But he doesn't explicate the exact nature of circumstantial goodness: he fails to provide a list of circumstances, and wavers as to where place the end.

Finally, Philip offers an account of how God's grace factors into human action. His Augustinian predecessors, ever wary of the slippery slope into Pelagianism, were often unclear

³⁰⁰ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 327. Although, since for generic goodness, right reason must judge correctly that the *materia* for this act-type is *debita*, and for circumstantial goodness, right reason must judge which circumstances are appropriate, the difference between the *principium* of generic goodness and the *principium* of circumstantial goodness seems blurred.

about the respective human and divine roles.³⁰¹ Philip provides a very nice way of demonstrating how acts can have a greater value when accompanied by grace, and yet, how one can still call the acts of unregenerate persons ‘good,’ even though they do not attain the highest level of goodness possible and thus do not receive merit.

Albert the Great

Albert the Great’s account of moral goodness resembles that of Peter Lombard and Philip the Chancellor; indeed, Albert relies on these illustrious Masters in both his early treatises on goodness—*De Natura Boni* and *De Bono*—as well as his later commentary on the *Sentences*.³⁰² As we will see, Albert’s explication of the various circumstances that specify the act provides a

³⁰¹ An excellent example of this is Bernard of Clairvaux’s (1090-1153) *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, PL 182. Bernard posits three kinds of free choice: freedom of nature, of grace, and of life or glory (C.III). However, he goes on to argue that everything, no matter its cause or type of freedom, is the work of divine grace (C.XIV). Consequently, the previously stated divisions of types of freedom are irrelevant: creation, reformation, and consummation are all the work of divine grace and not of human free choice. He states: “Igitur qui recte sapiunt, triplicem confitentur operationem, non quidem liberi arbitrii, sed divinae gratiae in ipso, sive de ipso. Prima, creatio; secunda, reformatio; tertia est consummatio. Primo namque in Christo creati sumus in libertatem voluntatis; secundo reformamur per Christum in spiritum libertatis; cum Christo deinde consummandi in statum aeternitatis.” For more on this see John Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy (480-1150): An Introduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 143-144. An earlier and more extreme example is found in the works of the infamous Gottschalk of Orbais (808- ~868). Gottschalk argued that without the grace of God, humanity could do nothing good, and only after being made anew by God’s grace, did one have any true sense of free will. Thus every act of an unregenerate human was evil. See Gottschalk of Orbais, *De Praedestinatione*, in *Oeuvres théologiques et grammaticales de Godescalc d’Orbais*, ed. Dom C. Lambot (Leuven, 1945). For a history of the controversy concerning grace and free will between Augustine and the Parisian masters, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth Of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 80-95.

³⁰² Unlike later Masters who often began their writing career by commenting on the *Sentences* of Lombard, Albert the Great writes both of his treatises on goodness—*De Natura Boni* and *De Bono*—before he comments on Lombard’s *Sentences*—well, at least before he comments on books II-IV, since Albert’s *Sentences* II-IV contain numerous references to these earlier treatises. *De Natura Boni* was probably written in the late 1230s; *De Bono* was probably written sometime between 1240 and 1244. For a discussion of the dating, see Stanley B. Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great*, 36-37; *De Natura Boni*, ed. Ephrem Filthaut O.P., in *Alberti Magni Opera Omnia* vol. 25, (Munster: Aschendorff, 1974), Prolegomena, vi; *De Bono*, ed. Henricus Kule, Carolus Feckes, Bernhardus Geyer, and Wilhelmus Kubel, in *Alberti Magni Opera Omnia* vol. 28 (Munster: Aschendorff, 1951), Prolegomena, xi-xiii; O. Lottin, “Nouveaux problèmes concernant la ‘Summa de creaturis’ et le Commentaire des Sentences de saint Albert de Grand,” *Psychologie et Morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, vol.6, 273-84.

substantial contribution to the present discussion.³⁰³

Like his predecessors, Albert distinguishes ontological goodness from moral goodness: ontological or natural goodness converts with being and so is found in every category and is thus a transcendental.³⁰⁴ Albert then further subdivides ontological goodness along Augustinian lines into mode, species, and order.³⁰⁵ In contrast, moral goodness is an accident of the act and is therefore not transcendental.³⁰⁶ Albert then divides moral goodness into two categories: the goodness of habits and the goodness of grace—roughly along the lines of whether the source of the goodness lies within the agent’s natural powers or whether it depends upon supernatural aid. In *De Bono*, the goodness of grace is mentioned, but not discussed. Rather, Albert desires to address a purely natural account of goodness, informed in part from the theological Masters (i.e., Augustine, Philip the Chancellor, and Lombard), and in part from the recently translated corpus of Aristotelian ethical texts and commentaries.³⁰⁷

After dividing moral goodness into the goodness of habits and the goodness of grace,

³⁰³ Since *De Natura Boni* is incomplete, and does not comprise Albert’s mature ideas on the nature of goodness, I will ignore this text in favor of the more systematic, and what scholars believe to be Albert’s most important ethical treatise, *De Bono*, as well as the relevant material from Albert’s commentary on the *Sentences*. See Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great*, 30-37.

³⁰⁴ Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.36, a.7: “Ad ultimum decendum, quod bonum per essentiam, est idem bonum quod convertitur cum ente in quantum est, et non addit super eundem nisi relationem ad finem. Bonum autem in genere dicitur dupliciter, scilicet proportione actus ad materiam debitam, vel a generali forma, sicut patet ex praedictis.” For Albert’s account of transcendental goodness, also see *Sentences* I, d.1, a.20, and *De Bono*, tract.1, q.1, a.6-7.

³⁰⁵ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.4, n.40: “Consequenter quaeritur de divisione boni. Est autem prima divisio in bonum naturae et in bonum moris, et utrumque horum dividitur. Sed primo quaeremus de divisione boni naturalis, quod dividitur in . . . numerum, pondus, et mensuram, et ab Augustino in modum, speciem et ordinem.” See also Augustine, *De Natura Boni*, 3.

³⁰⁶ Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.40, a.1: “Dicendum, quod bonitas et militia accident actioni.”

³⁰⁷ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.4, n.50. In separating goodness of habits from the goodness of grace, Albert uses the Latin word ‘*consuetudo*’ for ‘habit,’ which Cunningham has argued corresponds to the natural virtues in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. He concludes that “‘*Consuetudo*,’ a term found in the *Ethica vetus*, and normally translated as ‘custom,’ ‘practice,’ ‘habit,’ and ‘usage,’ was already used by medieval writers in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries to situate the naturally acquired virtues.” See Stanley B. Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great*, 116-117.

Albert further subdivides the goodness of habits into generic goodness, circumstantial goodness, and political virtue.³⁰⁸ The first two of these concern us here. Albert begins his discussion of generic goodness by alerting the reader that ‘genus’ is used metaphorically here, in a way analogous to matter/form in hylomorphic composition.³⁰⁹ As such, it is a “first potency” in moral matters; in other words, through its individuating circumstances, it can be specified or formed in various ways, just as a genus can through its species in hylomorphic composition.³¹⁰

Like Philip the Chancellor, Albert takes the kind of act as the form. So what exactly is the *materia*? Also like Philip the Chancellor, Albert puzzles over the *materia* in this moral context. Albert says that ‘*materia*’ can be taken in three ways: “the matter from which something is made” (*materia ex qua*), i.e., its material cause, “the matter in which something is” (*materia in qua*), and “the matter concerning which” (*materia circa quam*), i.e., the object. Following Philip, Albert then specifies that ‘*materia*’ should be taken in this third sense, as the object.³¹¹ A generically good act has an *appropriate* object, which Albert takes to mean “the right proportion of the act to the object according to its nature [as an act].”³¹²

So according to Albert, a generically good act is an act with a suitable or appropriate

³⁰⁸ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.4, n.50: “Consequenter, quaerendum est de bono moris. Dividitur autem in bonum consuetudinis et gratiae. Bonum autem consuetudinis consuevit dividi in bonum in genere et in bonum ex circumstantia et in bonum virtutis politicae.” The connection between political virtue and the other two types of natural moral goodness isn’t clearly stated, but I think the connection is obvious: an act of courage that has, say, generic and circumstantial goodness, if repeated over time, will become a virtue, and thus obtain virtuous goodness.

³⁰⁹ Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.36, a.6; *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.5, n.54.

³¹⁰ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.5, n.54: “Dicendum, quod genus sumitur hic pro materia et ad similitudinem generis in natura et species similiter. Et sumitur hic secundum illam diffinitionem: ‘species est, quae abundat a genere.’”

³¹¹ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.4, n.52.

³¹² Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.4, n.52, ad. 8: “Cum enim dicitur actus super debitam materiam, debitum nihil amplius importat quam rectam proportionem actus ad materiam secundum sui naturam, sicut reficere proportionatur esurienti et docere ignoranti et consolari tristanti et sic de aliis. In malo autem in genere indebitum importat priationem huius proportionis.”

object:

It should be said without prejudice, that “good *in genere*” is called such through a metaphor in terms of a genus which is the first subject and first potency: but generic goodness in morals is an act of the will united with an appropriate object according to its nature, such as to ‘feed’ concerning ‘the hungry,’ ‘to give’ concerning ‘the needy,’ and so on.³¹³

Notice how closely Albert’s account of generic goodness resembles Philip’s, in terms of the kind of act united with an appropriate object. In fact, Albert often employs the identical language Philip used to express the concept of an appropriate object; namely, the phrase ‘*debita materia*.’³¹⁴ Furthermore, Albert also follows Philip closely by claiming that the kind or nature of the act matters in determining the suitability of the act to the object.³¹⁵

Albert then distinguishes generic moral goodness from circumstantial moral goodness. Generic goodness results from the kind of act conjoined to the appropriate object. In contrast, circumstantial goodness results from the act and appropriate object *in conjunction with* the specifying/individuating circumstances.³¹⁶ In order for an act to be completely good, all of these conditions must be appropriate to the agent and the act (including the object and the circumstances). Following pseudo-Dionysius, who claimed that “Goodness is derived from one complete cause, but badness results from any particular defect,” Albert claims that any one

³¹³ Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.36, a.6: “Dicendum sine praeiudicio, quod bonum in genere, dicitur per metaphoram ad genus quod est subjectum primum et potential prima: hoc autem in moribus est actus voluntatis comparatus ad materiam circa quam debet esse secundum suam naturam, ut reficere circa esurientem, et dare circa indigentem, et sic de aliis.”

³¹⁴ For example, see Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.36, a.6; *Sentences* II, d.36, a.7; *Sentences* II, d.40, a.2; *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.2, a.4, n.52 (ad.8). Cf. Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 333, L: 181-183: “Propter hoc notandum quod genus accipitur pro materia seu pro actu coniuncto cum material debita. Et sic locum habet bonum in genere in illis, in quibus explicite vel implicite determinatur actus cum materia, ut dictum est. See also 330, L: 103-105: Nam bonum in essentia dicitur quantum ad causam efficientem a qua est esse, bonum autem in genere ex coniunctione generis actus cum genere quod est materia actus cum fuerit materia debita actui vel e converso.” As we will see later, Scotus offers an almost identical account, but prefers *convenientia* instead of *debita materia*. Scotus, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9; *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, pars.1, q.2, n.62; *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un, n.8.

³¹⁵ Albert says, “act of the will united with an appropriate object *according to its nature*.” Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.36, a.6.

³¹⁶ Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.36, a.7.

defect suffices to render the entire act bad.³¹⁷

In *De Bono*, Albert raises the question of whether the circumstances give the act its being. In response, Albert argues that the circumstances do not give an act its being, insofar as it is an act, but give the act its being insofar as it is praiseworthy or blameworthy. As such, while the circumstances are extrinsic to the act itself, they are not extrinsic to making the act praiseworthy or blameworthy.³¹⁸ So the circumstances can be said to *inform* the act, but only in terms of making the act praiseworthy or blameworthy.³¹⁹

At this point Albert unites some older lists of circumstances pertinent to adjudicating blame in a court of law—found in Cicero’s *De Inventione*³²⁰ and Boethius’s *De Differentiis Topicis*³²¹—with the circumstantial goodness of Philip the Chancellor.³²² It’s not that these lists of circumstances were unknown—actually, far from it. But their usage prior to Albert’s theoretical appropriation of them here was more of a practical application, either in terms of judicial proceedings in the realm of rhetoric for Cicero and Boethius, or in terms of canon law and pastoral care for other medieval practitioners.³²³

Following Cicero and Boethius, Albert divides the circumstances into attributes of the

³¹⁷ Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.41, a.2; *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.3, a.1, n.63, ad.6. “Bonum est ex una et tota causa, malum autem ex particularibus defectus.” Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus*, C.4, §31, *Patrologia Graeca* 3.

³¹⁸ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.3, a.1, n.63, ad.1: “Dicimus ergo ad primum, quod ista talia non dant esse actui, in quantum actus est, sed dant esse ei, in quantum honestus vel vituperabilis est, et propter hoc, licet sint extrinseca actui, non tamen sunt extrinseca honesto vel vituperabili.”

³¹⁹ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.3, a.1, n.63.

³²⁰ See Cicero *De Inventione* L.1, c.24-27, nn.34-41.

³²¹ See Boethius, *De Differentiis Topicis* I.4, *Patrologia Latinae* 64 1212D. See also Boethius’s *De topicis differentiis*, trans. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 89-95.

³²² Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.3, a.2, n.64.

³²³ See Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great*, 128. D. W. Robertson Jr., “A Note on the Classical Origin of ‘Circumstances’ in the Medieval Confessional,” *Studies in Philology* 43 (1946), 7.

person and attributes of the action. The circumstance of persons is ‘who,’ while the circumstances of an action are ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ ‘in what way,’ and ‘with what.’ In other words, who did the act, what was done, the intention of the act, the time, the location, the manner, and the means, respectively.³²⁴ At this point Albert transitions to using the circumstances in a manner different from Cicero and Boethius, by applying them to the ontological nature of the act, rather than merely rhetorical devices used in a court of law.³²⁵ After explaining these circumstances in the manner described by Cicero, he states, “But according to us, the appropriate circumstances *make* the act morally virtuous.”³²⁶ As Cunningham explains,

This statement, deceptively simple, signals a major shift in the theoretical focus from the linguistic domain of judgment and statements to the ontology of moral acts: *opus virtutis civilis*. Albert is saying that circumstances are not just words, rhetorical qualifiers, that figure in moral arguments or courtroom exchange: on the contrary, the circumstances will now be treated as formal constituents of concrete moral actions, as elements of moral behavior.³²⁷

So Albert’s novelty is twofold: first, he takes the discussion of circumstances implied (but not explicated) by Philip and fills out an account about which circumstances are relevant to an act’s moral goodness. Second, Albert does so by an appealing, on the one hand, to rhetorical discussions in the court of law by Cicero and Boethius, and linking these with the use of circumstances already in practice in pastoral care, namely, the manner in which one would confess one’s sins to a priest.³²⁸ But Albert takes these circumstances and applies them to the

³²⁴ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.3, a.2, n.64.

³²⁵ Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great*, 130.

³²⁶ Albertus Magnus, *De Bono*, Tract. 1, q.3, a.2, “Secundum nos autem convenienties circumstantiae efficient opus virtutis civilis.”

³²⁷ Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great*, 130.

³²⁸ D. W. Robertson Jr., “A Note on the Classical Origin of ‘Circumstances’ in the Medieval Confessional,” 7.

ontology of the act itself, showing that they specify and individuate generically good acts, with the result of a second level of goodness in acts which take into account these relevant circumstances.

Consequently, Albert's account can be summarized as follows: ontological goodness is a transcendental property of being, distinct from moral goodness, which is an accident of acts. Moral goodness then divides into two broad kinds, deriving from their source or *principium*: the human will or divine grace. The former further subdivides into generically good acts, consisting of the kind of act with an appropriate object, and circumstantially good acts which require not only a fittingness between the act of the will and the object, but also the appropriateness of all the relevant circumstances. Furthermore, Albert conceives the end of the act—the intent—as one of the circumstances of the act.

Bonaventure

Bonaventure's description of the metaphysics of goodness can be summarized rather succinctly, as his account of such matters is only treated briefly in his commentary on the *Sentences* and his *Apologiae Pauperum*, and remains fairly typical in its content. Like Lombard and company, Bonaventure divides goodness into natural or ontological goodness and moral goodness.³²⁹ Natural goodness converts with being and thus is found in every category, and in every act. Bonaventure names this goodness “essential goodness,” a name aptly adopted by Scotus himself.³³⁰ Bonaventure contrasts essential or natural goodness with moral goodness, which he claims is added to an act like an accident is added to a subject. Furthermore, in

³²⁹ Bonaventure, *Sentences II*, d.37, a.2, q.3. *Opera Omnia* vol. 3 (Quaracchi: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1865).

³³⁰ Scotus, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9.

reference to an act, each type of goodness results from different sources: natural goodness results from some power in the agent that brought the act about, whereas moral goodness results from free choice of the will.³³¹

In keeping with previous tradition, the moral goodness of an act remains Bonaventure's primary concern. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Bonaventure divides moral goodness into three types: generic, circumstantial, and perfect. Two things are odd about this topic in the *Sentences*. First, it lacks a discussion about the meaning and nature of each type of goodness. Second, Bonaventure equates perfect goodness with goodness *in se* but says little to nothing about it. Is this a reference to Lombard's perfect goodness, the one that Philip the Chancellor glossed as goodness *ex circumstantia* and goodness *ex gratia*, or something else? In the *Sentences* all of this remains fairly muddled.

In his *Apologiae Pauperum*, Bonaventure elaborates on how an act receives each type of goodness or corresponding badness: an act has generic goodness when the act was carried out with a suitable object in mind.³³² Conversely, an act performed with an inappropriate object makes the act generically bad.³³³ Going to church and giving alms are listed as examples of the former, and killing a human as an example of the latter. While Bonaventure doesn't explain generic goodness in the intricate detail of Philip the Chancellor and Albert the Great, he gestures

³³¹ Bonaventure, *Sentences II*, d.41, a.1, q.1: "Actio deliberativa nata est habere duplicem bonitatem: scilicet bonitatem naturae, in quantum est actio procedens ab aliqua virtute; et bonitatem moris, in quantum est procedens a libero arbitrio, sive voluntate. Cum ergo quaeritur utrum bonitas et malitia circa actionem habeant repugnantiam, ita quod ipsam dividant tanquam membra opposita, dicendum quod hoc non est verum de bono, prout dicitur bonitate essentiali, vel naturali: sic enim bonum non est differentia actionis; imo convertitur cum ente, et reperitur in omni actione."

³³² Bonaventure, *Apologiae Pauperum*, Responsionis Primae, Caput 1, *Opera Omnia* vol. 14 (Quaracchi: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1868). "Bonum namque in genere, est actus transiens super materiam debitam, ut ire ad ecclesiam, dare eleemosynam."

³³³ Bonaventure, *Apologiae Pauperum*, Responsionis Primae, Caput 1. "Malum, inquam, in genere, dicitur actus transiens super materiam indebitum, sicut occidere hominem."

in that direction (*actus transiens super materiam debitam*).³³⁴

Goodness *ex circumstantia* involves performing an action informed by praiseworthy or appropriate circumstances. So take the generically good act of almsgiving: the act has a further level of goodness when an appropriate amount of alms has been given according to the circumstances, such as the persons involved, the location, and the time.³³⁵ In a similar fashion, an act is bad *ex circumstantia* when the act is informed by disordered or inappropriate circumstances, such as “to eat a meal outside the appointed time”—a situation the Minister General of the Franciscans probably dealt with regularly from “unruly” friars.³³⁶ Both generically and circumstantially good acts can be made bad through “other” corruptive circumstances, and primarily through inordinate intentions. For example, acts normally characterized as generically good, such as going (the act) to church (the *debita materia*), fasting, or giving alms, would be generically bad if they were carried out with dubious intentions, such as in order to receive praise or human glory.³³⁷

At this point that Bonaventure clarifies what he meant in the *Sentences* by the third type of goodness, namely, goodness *in se*. Unlike generic and circumstantial goodness, *bonum in se* cannot be bad or be made bad. The reason, according to Bonaventure, is that acts that are good *in se* are acts of virtue proceeding from charity. Given this, I think it’s safe to assume that what

³³⁴ Bonaventure, *Apologiae Pauperum*, Responsionis Primae, Caput 1. Cf. Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.36, a.7: “Bonum autem in genere dicitur dupliciter, scilicet proportione actus ad materiam debitam...”

³³⁵ Bonaventure, *Apologiae Pauperum*, Responsionis Primae, Caput 1. “Bonum ex circumstantia, est actus laudabilibus circumstantiis informatus, sicut dare eleemosynam servatis debitis circumstantiis circa dantem, datum et accipientem, quantum ad loca, tempora et personas.”

³³⁶ Bonaventure, *Apologiae Pauperum*, Responsionis Primae, Caput 1. “Malum ex circumstantia, dicitur actus informatus deordinata circumstantia, ut comedere extra horam.”

³³⁷ Bonaventure, *Apologiae Pauperum*, Responsionis Primae, Caput 1. “Et haec duo bona depravari possunt per alicujus circumstantiae defectum, et maxime propter inordinationem intentionis, utpote si quis in dando eleemosynem, vel jejunando, vel eundo ad ecclesiam, hoc faciat, ut gloriam capiat humanam.”

Bonaventure calls goodness *in se* refers to the same type of goodness as Philip’s goodness *ex gratia*, for two reasons. First, in Book III of the *Sentences*, Bonaventure connects *bonum ex gratia* with the theological virtue of *caritas*.³³⁸ Second, Bonaventure—like the medieval tradition generally—thinks that charity is a theological or infused virtue, and such theological virtues always proceed from grace.³³⁹

So when Bonaventure calls this third type of goodness ‘perfect goodness’ or ‘goodness *in se*,’ and claims that acts proceeding from the virtue of charity (which is infused by God) have this goodness, he has in mind the same third characterization of goodness *ex gratia* as Philip and Albert. This also explains why acts of perfect goodness cannot be made bad: if an act has perfect goodness, the performed act proceeds from the virtue of charity, which God himself infuses efficaciously into one’s will.

Thomas Aquinas: A Different Approach

Instead of *distinguishing* and *contrasting* ontological goodness with moral goodness, and noting that the former is essential to acts and the latter is accidental—as the entire tradition had done—Aquinas emphasizes the *similarity* and *identity* of these two types of goodness by focusing on the convertibility of being and good. In fact, the convertibility of being and good overshadows Aquinas’s entire account of the metaphysics of goodness. First, I’ll briefly reconsider Aquinas’s account of convertibility, and then, how this account applies to the case of

³³⁸ Bonaventure, *Sentences* III, d.28, a.1, q.6. *Opera Omnia* vol. 4 (Quaracchi: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1865).

³³⁹ Bonaventure, *Expositio in Evangelium S. Joannis*, XV. *Opera Omnia* vol.11 (Quaracchi: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1867). “Et ad istud respondendum sine praepudico, quod est loqui de charitate, prout est in diversis subjectis; et sic est major, et minor, secundum quod est major et minor gratia data a Deo. Vel est loqui de charitate in eodem subjecto, et in eadem anima. Et sic est loqui de ipsa simpliciter, vel quantum ad suam essentiam; est enim habitus gratuitus a Deo infuses.”

moral goodness.

The Convertibility of Being and Good

As we saw in chapter 2, Aquinas conceives a necessary connection between being and good: he argues that being and good are convertible because they are the same in reality and differ only in sense.³⁴⁰ Aquinas contends that the *ratio* of goodness is that of desirability. A thing is desirable only insofar as it is perfect, and everything desires its own perfection or completeness. Something is perfect or complete only in so far as it is actual, where actuality implies the fulfillment of a thing's potentialities. But being or existence is what makes something actual; therefore, something is perfect only insofar as it is actual.³⁴¹ Since every being has some degree of actuality, it has a certain amount of perfection and thus has a certain amount of goodness. Hence goodness and being are the same in referent, although the *ratio* of each concept differs; in other words, being and good are conceptually distinct.

The Application of Convertibility to Acts

Instead of contrasting ontological or transcendental goodness which coverts with being with moral goodness, as all of the previous authors discussed have done, Aquinas applies his doctrine of convertibility to the moral realm. In *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.1, Aquinas asks the question of whether every human act is good. He responds by claiming that we ought to say the same thing concerning good and bad *in actions* that we do about good in bad *in things*.³⁴² Since being and good are convertible, each thing has as much goodness as it has being.

³⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.1.

³⁴¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.1. "unde manifestum est quod in tantum est aliquid bonum, in quantum est ens, esse enim est actualitas omnis rei." See also *Summa Theologiae* I, q.3, a.4 and *Summa Theologiae* I, q.4, a.1.

³⁴² The reason, according to Aquinas, is that each thing produces actions that are like the thing itself. This will be important later, since Aquinas wants to focus on the agent who acts, rather than the act isolated from the agent's will and virtue

Naturally, only God alone has the plenitude of his being in a unitary and simple way, and as such, has complete goodness. In contrast, creatures, lacking metaphysical simplicity, have their plenitude or fullness of being through a variety of features. Because of this, things can have some amount of being but lack the fullness of being that would be appropriate for them. In humans, the fullness of being requires a composite of body and soul, which includes having all the powers and instruments of cognition and motion. If there is a deficiency in any of these, that person would lack the fullness appropriate for a human being and so lacks some commensurate goodness. So a blind person has some goodness because he is alive (i.e., has some being), and he has badness because he lacks sight.³⁴³

Aquinas then draws the parallel with actions:

So therefore it should be said that every action, insofar as it has some amount of being, to that extent it will have goodness: but insofar as it lacks some plenitude of being which is appropriate for a human action, it lacks goodness and so is called bad. For example, if it lacks some determinate quality according to reason, or an appropriate location, or other [conditions] of this kind.³⁴⁴

So according to Aquinas, just as goodness in things is proportionate to being, so also in actions, goodness is proportionate to the plenitude of being appropriate for the human action, which is determined primarily by reason. Aquinas describes badness as a lack of fullness of being, in

³⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.1 (Turin: Marietti, 1950). “Respondeo: Dicendum quod de bono et malo in actionibus oportet loqui sicut de bono et malo in rebus: eo quod unaquaeque res talem actionem producit, qualis est ipsa. In rebus autem unumquodque tantum habet de bono, quantum habet de esse: bonum enim et ens convertuntur, ut in Primo dictum est. Solus autem Deus habet totam plenitudinem sui esse secundum aliquid unum et simplex: unaquaeque vero res alia habet plenitudinem essendi sibi convenientem secundum diversa. Unde in aliquibus contingit quod quantum ad aliquid habent esse, et tamen eis aliquid deficit ad plenitudinem essendi eis debitam. Sicut ad plenitudinem esse humani requiritur quod sit quoddam compositum ex anima et corpore, habens omnes potentias et instrumenta cognitionis et motus: unde si aliquid horum deficiat alicui homini deficit ei aliquid de plenitudine sui esse. Quantum igitur habet de esse, tantum habet de bonitate: in quantum vero aliquid ie deficit de plenitudine essendi, intantum deficit a bonitate, et dicitur malum: sicut homo caecus habet de bonitate quod vivit, et malum est ei quod caret visu.”

³⁴⁴ *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.1: “Sic igitur dicendum est quod omnis actio, in quantum habet aliquod de esse, in quantum habet de bonitate: in quantum vero deficit ei aliquid de plenitudine essendi quae debetur actioni humanae, in quantum deficit a bonitate, et sic dicitur mala: puta si deficiat ei vel determinata quantitas secundum rationem, vel debitus locus, vel aliquid huiusmodi.”

terms of what should be judged appropriate by reason for perfecting one's will. Given Aquinas's explicit connection between being and goodness, it seems clear that moral goodness, then, refers to ontological or transcendental goodness applied in the category of action: to the extent the act perfects the agent and thereby actualizes his or her being, the act is good. To the extent that the agent's action fails in doing so, the act is bad. And the determination of whether a certain act perfects the agent's nature is made by right reason. This novelty is unprecedented.

For the tradition starting with Lombard and running through Albert the Great, ontological goodness differs from moral goodness *in kind*: ontological goodness is a transcendental property of being, and as such, is found in every category, including action, such that every action is ontologically good since every action has some amount of being. Moral goodness is an accidental feature of human actions, because many actions exist—have being—and lack such goodness.³⁴⁵ Furthermore, moral goodness results from an act's having generic goodness combined with the appropriate circumstances. So bad actions have ontological goodness and lack moral goodness, because they are disordered in some way. In contrast, no such distinction is found in Aquinas. Disordered human actions lack being or perfection, and so, to that extent lack some ontological goodness (in the category of action). We will see this clearer if we follow Aquinas's account further, as he shows specifically how actions can have or lack the plenitude of being required for moral goodness.

In *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.2, Aquinas asks whether a human action receives its goodness or badness from its object. In reply, he first reiterates that goodness and badness in actions is a matter of their fullness of being, in the same way that goodness and badness in things

³⁴⁵ See Lombard *Sentences* II, d.35, cap. 2, *Sentences* II, d.36, cap. 6; *Sentences* II, d.37, cap. 1; Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.40, a.1 and *Sentences* II d.41, a.1, q.2;

is a matter of their fullness of being. In articles 2-4, Aquinas then specifies three conditions that pertain to bringing about fullness of being—in both actions and things, once again demonstrating the connection. In article 2, Aquinas claims that a thing’s species is the first thing that pertains to its fullness of being. He then draws a further parallel:

Just as a natural thing has its species from its form, so also an action has its species from its object, just as motion from its terminus. And therefore just as the first goodness of a natural thing is derived from its form, which gives it its species, so also the first goodness of a moral action is derived from an appropriate object; and so it is called by some “generic goodness.”³⁴⁶

So in natural things, one thing needed for its fullness of being (and thus goodness) is the appropriate form, and the same is true in actions: an action has its form from its object. Aquinas continues the parallel by claiming that just as the first badness in natural things results when the thing generated doesn’t realize its specific form (such as if a human isn’t generated but something else in its place), so too the first badness in moral actions results from the object. Aquinas goes on to say that taking someone else’s possessions is an example of “generic badness,” and that ‘genus’ means ‘species’ here in the same way that the whole human species is called the “human *genus*.”³⁴⁷

The second condition pertinent to an action’s fullness of being and thus its goodness is the circumstances of the act.³⁴⁸ Once again, Aquinas begins with natural things and then applies

³⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.2: “Sicut autem res naturalis habet speciem ex sua forma, ita action habet speciem ex obiecto; sicut et motus ex termino. Et ideo sicut prima bonitas rei naturalis attenditur ex sua forma, quae dat speciem ei, ita et prima bonitas actus moralis attenditur ex obiecto convenienti; unde et a quibusdam vocatur bonum ex genere....”

³⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.2: “Et sicut in rebus naturalibus primum malum est, si res generata non consequitur formam specificam, puta si non generetur homo, sed aliquid loco hominis; ita primum malum in actionibus moralibus est quod est ex obiecto, sicut accipere aliena. Et dicitur malum ex genere, genere pro specie accepto, eo modo loquendi quo dicimus humanum genus totam humanam speciem.”

³⁴⁸ For Aquinas, the circumstances that add fullness of being is accidental; for the tradition, the goodness itself—informed by the circumstances—is accidental. This is a subtle difference, but as I will show in the next chapter, one with some profound implications.

his findings to acts. In natural things, the total plenitude of being is not determined simply from the natural thing's form that gives the thing its species, but also from accidents supervening on the thing's substantial form. For example, in humans, accidents such as shape and color add to the person's fullness of being. When a human lacks a suitable proportion of these accidents, it results in a lack of fullness that ought to be there and thus a degree of badness. So even though these additional features are outside the essence of the natural thing, they nevertheless add to the thing's fullness of being and thus its goodness.³⁴⁹

According to Aquinas, actions follow the same pattern: the plenitude of being and thus goodness in an action is not only determined by the action's species (i.e., its object), but also by the circumstances pertaining to the act,³⁵⁰ which are like accidents to the act: they are not essential to the act as such, but add some fullness of being (and thus goodness) to the act. And so if anything that is required for the appropriate circumstances is lacking, the act will be bad.³⁵¹

Aquinas is quick to note, however, that circumstances are like *per se* accidents: while circumstances are not contained in the essence of the action itself, they are nevertheless essential to some actions.³⁵² Take the act of 'giving alms to the needy.' A circumstance of the act might be the time or the place of the action. While these factors or conditions are not contained in the description or essence of the act (i.e., 'to give to the needy'), they nevertheless (1) add some fullness of being and thus goodness when the appropriate circumstances are present, and (2) are

³⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.3: "Dicendum quod in rebus naturalibus non invenitur tota plenitudo perfectionis quae debetur rei, ex forma substantiali, quae dat speciem; sed multum superadditur ex supervenientibus accidentibus, sicut in homine ex figura, ex colore, et huiusmodi; quorum si aliquod desit ad decentem habitudinem, consequitur malum."

³⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.7, a.3.

³⁵¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.3: "Ita etiam est in actione. Nam plenitudo bonitatis eius non tota consistit in sua specie, sed aliquid additur ex his quae adveniunt tanquam accidentia quaedam. Et huiusmodi sunt circumstantiae debitae. Unde si aliquid desit quod requiratur ad debitas circumstantias, erit actio malo."

³⁵² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.3, ad.1-2.

essential to the act.

In *ad 3*, Aquinas once again reiterates the applicability of his convertibility thesis to the moral realm: since being and good are convertible, and being is attributed to a thing substantially and accidentally, goodness is also attributed to things according to their essential being and accidental being. He then claims that this is true for both natural things and moral actions.³⁵³ So once again it's clear that Aquinas's view of the convertibility of being and goodness applies not only to natural things, but also to actions—and this is a significant deviation from tradition.

The third condition pertaining to the fullness of being is the end. Once again Aquinas starts with the relationship between things and their being and goodness before considering acts: a thing stands in relation to its goodness in the same way as it stands in relation to its being. Aquinas then distinguishes two types of things: things whose being depends upon something else, and things whose being depends upon themselves alone. In the case of the former, in order to understand their being and subsequent goodness, one must look to the cause upon which their being depends. In the case of the latter, there is no need to reference anything beyond their being considered absolutely. Given this distinction in the way things have being, since being and good are convertible, Aquinas claims that a distinction is needed in the way things have goodness. Since divine persons do not depend upon anything beyond themselves, they do not derive their goodness from an end that they depend on. But in things whose being depends upon another, such as humans, their actions derive some goodness from the end upon which they depend.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.3, ad. 3: “Cum bonum convertatur cum ente, sicut ens dicitur secundum substantiam et secundum accidens, ita bonum attribuitur alicui et secundum esse suum essenziale, et secundum esse accidentale, tam in rebus naturalibus, quam in actionibus moralibus.”

³⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.4. “Respondeo dicendum quod eadem est dispositio rerum in bonitate, et in esse. Sunt enim quaedam quorum esse ex alio non dependet: et in his sufficit considerare ipsum eorum esse absolute. Quaedam vero sunt quorum esse dependet ab alio: unde oportet quod consideretur per considerationem ad causam a qua dependet. Sicut autem esse rei dependet ad agente et forma, ita bonitas rei dependet a fine. Unde in Personis divinis, quae non habent bonitatem dependentem ab alio, non consideratur aliqua ratio bonitatis ex fine.”

Thus in each case, Aquinas draws a direct parallel between the ontological and moral realms, and argues that the relationship between being and goodness is identical in both cases. In the natural realm, a thing's goodness depends upon its being; in the moral realm, a person's moral goodness depends upon this actualization of various potentialities judged by reason to fulfill or complete its rational nature.

Conclusion

Throughout this history, we see two strands of thought developing: the traditional account of the metaphysics of goodness began with Lombard's attempt to reconcile Augustine's claim that "every act is good in so far as it exists" with sinful acts, and to construct an ethic that overcame Abelard's challenges concerning the sole importance of the intent of the agent in determining the act's moral value. This traditional account, rooted in these two concerns, is occasional in nature—written to address specific problems—and so naturally focuses on the substance of the act itself to deal with these worries.³⁵⁵ This approach begins with a distinction between ontological or natural goodness, which converts with being, and moral goodness, which is an accidental feature of (some) acts. Moral goodness and badness are then stratified according to various factors and conditions that add levels of worth to good acts, and levels of blame to bad

³⁵⁵ The Abelardian threat to traditional moral theology was alive and well in Paris and fresh on Lombard's mind when he writes the *Sentences* in the 1150s. Abelard had returned to Paris to write and teach in 1136 and not long after encountered theological opposition from Barnard of Clairvaux—an early supporter and benefactor of Lombard—and William of St. Thierry. About this same time, at the urging of Bernard of Clairvaux, Lombard begins his study under the tutelage of Alberic, a well-known critic of Abelard in the Cathedral School of Reims. After an examination of Abelard's Ethics and other writings, a synod convened to hear the case in 1140. Abelard appealed to Pope Innocent II. In route to Rome, Abelard and his writings were condemned by Innocent II at the behest of Bernard of Clairvaux. Abelard's shocking intentionalist ethic was still a "hot topic" in Paris in 1145 when Lombard accepted the role as canon of Notre Dame, and Abelard's ideas, still on the lips of his students, were still a nuisance 10 years after Abelard's condemnation, about the time Peter Lombard writes his *Sentences*. See Marilyn McCord Adams, "Introduction," in *Peter Abelard: Ethics Writings* trans. Paul Vincent Spade (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), vii-ix; D.E. Luscombe, *Peter Abelard's Ethics*, xxx; Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book I: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010), ix-x; Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, vol.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 16-17.

acts: generic, moral, and meritorious. This traditional approach adequately overcomes both the Augustinian conceptual worry and the Abelardian intentionalist worry. It escapes the Augustinian problem by admitting that every act, in so far as it has being, is in fact good—in the ontological sense, i.e., **[B]**—while at the same time realizing that sinful acts fail to have moral goodness on account of some defect. Thus moral goodness and badness are accidental to acts. Furthermore, it overcomes the Abelardian concern by demonstrating that some acts have a categorical or generic goodness apart from the agent’s intention, and so the intention of the agent is not the sole determinant of an act’s moral value.

Aquinas, in contrast, writing in the heyday of the Aristotelian renaissance, focuses instead on the role of the act in the agent’s perfection. This provenance, along with Aquinas’s transcendental obsession, leads him to posit his convertibility thesis of being and goodness in the moral as well as the metaphysical realm. The tradition before Aquinas conceived acts as a special sort of thing, and the analytical tools we apply to the natural realm were seen as insufficient for analyzing the moral realm—primarily because of the Augustinian worry about sinful acts. In contrast, Aquinas’s naturalism is rather striking and thoroughly pervasive. It seems as though Aquinas’s well-known claim that the domain of grace is in full continuity with the domain of nature has its analogue in the claim that the domain of reason is in complete continuity with domain of sub-rational nature. So while Aquinas sometimes uses the same terminology (e.g., *bonum in genere*, *bonum ex circumstantiis*), he provides a new meaning to these concepts, because the moral goodness of acts converts with being. In other words, genus and species language are not simply helpful metaphors for speaking about various kinds of acts and objects that have an accidental goodness over and above their being; the language actually characterizes their nature *as acts*. As we will see in the next chapter, Scotus prefers the

traditional act-centered account over Aquinas's agent-centered approach. This makes a substantial difference in how we read and understand Scotus's metaethics, and his place in history as a moral philosopher.

CHAPTER SIX:
**SCOTUS ON GENERIC, MORAL,
AND MERITORIOUS GOODNESS**

This chapter extends the previous chapter’s account of generic, moral, and meritorious goodness through Duns Scotus, and draws some conclusions concerning the ways in which Scotus and Aquinas align with tradition. Before I do so, I need to show just how Scotus conceives the relationship between secondary or accidental goodness and moral goodness.

Secondary Natural Goodness

Secondary or accidental goodness, as we saw in chapter 4, does not convert with being, but secondarily and extrinsically perfects its subject. Generally, secondary goodness refers to the harmony or suitability (*convenientia*) of a thing to something else. One type of suitability involves the suitability of the act to its end and agent.³⁵⁶ Not all acts, however, are *rational* acts. Scotus conceives an entire spectrum of acts directed at ends, depending upon the level of cognition in the agent—using ‘acts’ and ‘agents’ loosely. Non-rational entities have a certain suitability of their nature to their end which they are directed towards, thereby obtaining a certain kind of secondary goodness of nature when those ends are reached. Since these non-rational

³⁵⁶ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9. “Actus autem natus est convenire agenti, et etiam habere aliquam conditionem sibi convenientem; utoque igitur modo habens illam potest dici bonus bonitate accidentali. Et hoc verum est generaliter de actu etiam naturali, et per consequens bonitas ista in habendo illud quod sibi convenit, non tantum est bonitas accidentalis, sed naturalis.”

agents lack reason and will, they are unable to judge what acts and ends are suitable given their natures, and so their acts are determined by purely natural causes or—if one wants to identify an intellect or will—by God’s intellect and will (not their own), insofar as he moves everything in creation.³⁵⁷

Even animals, which in some way apprehend the suitability of the end, do so without a conscious judgment of the end as such, and thus, Scotus infers that they do not move beyond a secondary natural goodness.³⁵⁸ Hence secondary natural goodness belongs to natural acts directed at suitable ends in agents that cannot form a judgment of the suitability of the thing’s nature to its connatural end.³⁵⁹ Since the type of cognition of the agent (‘agent’ taken in its broadest sense) determines one’s ability to judge what is suitable, a non-rational agent’s secondary natural goodness can be construed in terms of the fulfillment of potentialities latent within its nature, in line with various levels of Aristotelian “soul.” First, inanimate objects—like a rock—will exhibit secondary natural goodness when it finds rest at the center of the earth,³⁶⁰ an acorn exhibits secondary natural goodness when it “acts” to become a mature oak; and an animal exhibits secondary natural goodness when it acts to survive and procreate.³⁶¹ In each of these

³⁵⁷ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.10: “Aliquod agens, de eo quod convenit actui suo, non iudicat nec illud in potestate sua habet, sicut est agens sine intellectu et voluntate; et ibi, vel ex solis causis mere naturalibus determinatur quid conveniat actui, et ex eis inclinatur agens ad agendum; vel si ultra illud sit iudicium alicuius intellectus et motio alicuius voluntatis, hoc non est nisi ipsius Dei, in quantum est universalis director et motor totius naturae; et ista bonitas in actu agentis sine intellectu erit mere naturalis.”

³⁵⁸ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.11: “et quaedam cum cognitione sensitiva tantum, quae aliquo modo apprehendunt convenientiam obiecti, sive iudicent de convenientia actus sive non, saltem non transcendunt bonitatem naturalem.”

³⁵⁹ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.4. See *Ordinatio* II, D.40, q.un, n.7: “Actus autem naturalis natus est convenire causae suae efficienti, obiecto, fini et formae: tunc igitur bonus est naturaliter, quando habet omnia convenientia, quantum ad ista quae nata sunt concurrere ad ‘esse’ eius.”

³⁶⁰ *Ordinatio* III, d.17, Q.un., n.13.

³⁶¹ By natural goodness, Scotus does not mean the goodness that everything has in virtue of its being—i.e., primary goodness. It is true that Scotus does call primary goodness “natural goodness” at times (see *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 28), leaving Allan Wolter to puzzle about it (Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Mortality*, 212), but in at least one passage Scotus plainly tells us that he has two types of natural goodness: one that is convertible with being, and one that is a secondary perfection in non-rational agents. He says: “I say that just as beauty in a body is derived from the *aggregation of all things fitting to that body and the [relations] between them*, for instance, the size, color,

cases, the suitability (*convenientia*) between the nature of the agent and the appropriate ends that fulfill various potentialities in its nature brings about the thing's secondary natural goodness.

In order for the act to rise above secondary natural goodness, the agent must make a judgment about the act's suitability. Only then is the act considered moral. So secondary goodness concerning acts can be taken as a "quasi-genus" in which there are two species: acts of non-rational agents that are fitting to certain ends consonant with their natures, and acts of rational agents who judge acts suitable to certain ends appropriate to them as rational agents—the former Scotus calls "secondary natural goodness"; the latter he calls "moral goodness" and only concerns those entities who possess a rational soul.³⁶²

Moral Goodness: Regulated by *Recta Ratio*

"The moral goodness of an act," Scotus claims, "consists in the harmony of all those things that the agent's right reason *judges* ought to be appropriate to the act or to the agent acting."³⁶³ So a rational agent's act requires not simply *perceiving* one's end, as non-rational animals often do, but forming *a judgment* about the appropriateness of the act with respect to the end and other conditions. And forming a judgment of this kind involves intellectual cognition.

and shape...so also natural goodness—not that which is convertible with being, but which has badness as its opposite—is a *secondary perfection* of a thing, whose completeness [is derived] from all the things fitting to it and the relations between those things." *Ordinatio* II, d.40: "Dico quod sicut in corpore pulchritudo est ex aggregatione omnium convenientium illa corpori et inter se, puta quantitatis, coloris et figurae...ita bonitatis 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." Marilyn McCord Adams seems to also follow Wolter in this confusion. See Adams, "Duns Scotus and the Goodness of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 488.

³⁶² *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.10.

³⁶³ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.8: "De primo, bonitas moralis actus est integritas eorum omnium, quae recta ratio operantis iudicat debere ipsi actui convenire vel ipsi agenti in suo actu convenire."

Only now, Scotus claims, have we arrived at moral goodness.³⁶⁴ In other words, without the judgment of a rational agent, we have not moved out of the realm of natural.³⁶⁵ Human acts, as characterized distinctively by reason, are thus moral acts. Morally good acts are ones in which the agent *judges* the appropriateness or fittingness (*convenientia*) of the given the act, object, etc.

According to Scotus, a “judgment” is not some vague sense that such an act was appropriate, but a technical term requiring two things. First, it requires not just anyone’s judgment or the potential to make a judgment, but the *actual* judgment of the person doing the action. In this context, Scotus makes a very interesting claim:

But it is not sufficient for [moral goodness], that in the agent there is the potential to adjudicate the appropriateness of his actions, but it is necessary that in acting rightly he makes a judgment concerning the act, and carries out the act in accordance with that judgment. For if one’s own judgment is erroneous, *even if the person acts in conformity with the right judgment of another person*, he is not acting rightly, because such an agent is suited to regulate his own action through his own judgment and [in this case] he does not act according to his judgment, but against it.³⁶⁶

Let’s call Scotus’s first condition for passing judgment “the autonomy clause.” According to Scotus, it is not enough for a person to act in accordance with correct judgment made by someone else; rather, the person acting must make the appropriate judgment *for herself*: she must reason to the appropriateness of the act by her own rational powers.

For example, suppose I’m backcountry snowboarding in a whiteout and lose my sense of direction. It’s getting late, and, as my partner and I have no overnight gear, we have to get back

³⁶⁴ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.11: “Alia agunt ex cognitione intellectiva, quae proprie sola est iudicativa de tali convenientia, et talia nata sunt habere regulam intrinsecam rectitudinis in suo actu, et in solis istis potest esse actus bonus habens bonitatem moralem”

³⁶⁵ For Scotus, natural powers in agents aren’t free powers because they are determined to their natural ends. See *Ordinatio* III, d.17, Q.un., nn.12-18.

³⁶⁶ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.12: “Sed non sufficit ad illam, quod in agente sit potentia iudicativa de convenientia sui actus, sed oportet quod actu recte iudicet de actu et secundum illud iudicium actus fiat. Si enim cognitio propria sit erronea, licet agatur conformiter cognitioni rectae alterius cognoscentis, quia tamen tale agens natum est regulari in suo actu per propriam cognitionem et secundum illam non agit sed contra illam, ideo non recte agit.”

to the car before dark. Furthermore, my partner and I both agree that we need to travel south to reach the car. But in my disoriented state, I wrongly judge that south is directly in front of us—the direction we are currently traveling. Suppose further that I made such a judgment from plausible reasoning: from the direction of the forecasted and now observed wind, and my (unbeknownst to me) faulty digital compass. In such a case, I form a reasonable but nevertheless erroneous judgment about the course of action, namely, which way we should go. Suppose further that after a lengthy discussion (in which I'm still convinced my judgment is correct), I defer to my partner for navigating us back to the car—and she judges that we must turn one hundred and eighty degrees and go in the opposite direction.

Suppose further that she correctly chose the course of action and we make it back safely. In such a case, I have not acted in accordance with my own rational powers, and I've acted against my (albeit) faulty judgment. Scotus says that in cases like this, I didn't act *rightly*.³⁶⁷ But this seems puzzling, for in one sense I clearly acted rightly, since I deferred my judgment to the one who choose the *right* path home! A few lines down Scotus clarifies what he means by not acting rightly: I may have chosen the right or correct action, but I didn't act in such a way that the act can be *evaluated as good*.³⁶⁸ So I might act rightly in one sense, by making the right decision, but not in the sense that my act can be *evaluated as good*, because rational agents are naturally suited to regulate their own actions.³⁶⁹ And so even if one were to act rightly in the

³⁶⁷ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.12 “Si enim cognitio propria sit erronea, licet agatur conformiter cognitioni rectae alterius cognoscentis, quia tamen tale agens natum est regulari in suo actu per propriam cognitionem et secundum illam non agit sed contra illam, ideo non recte agit.”

³⁶⁸ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.12: “Sic igitur patet qualiter bonitas moralis actus est convenientia iudicata secundum rectam rationem operatis.”

³⁶⁹ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.11: “Alia agunt ex cognitione intellectiva, quae proprie sola est iudicativa de tali convenientia, et talia nata sunt habere regulam intrinsecam rectitudinis in suo actu, et in solis istis potest esse actus bonus habens bonitatem moralem.”

sense that the correct outcome was accomplished, if that person failed to pass the judgment for himself, the act cannot be *evaluated* as good, even if the correct choice was made (though the person did not form the judgment that the choice was correct). Each rational agent must pass judgment on the appropriateness of their own actions for those actions to be evaluated as morally good.³⁷⁰ Here we begin to see one of the Subtle Doctor's most important distinctions: the separation of goodness and rightness. Rightness concerns the matter of what we ought to do;³⁷¹ moral goodness is an evaluation of *how well* we do what we ought to do.

Deferring judgment in a storm illustrates the nature of the autonomy clause when that decision is not about something of moral concern. I cannot defer the decision to another, but must pass the appropriate judgment myself on the correct course of action—unless the other provides *rational reasons* accepted or judged by me for the change of plans. But what kind of information must an agent have in order to make autonomous judgments in moral matters? In other words, what kind of judgment is needed for an act to be evaluated as *morally* good?

This leads us to Scotus's second condition. A rational agent's judgment must be derived from certain knowledge the agent has, specifically, knowledge of three relevant factors: (1) the nature of the agent, (2) the causal powers involved in carrying out the act, and (3) the essential nature of the act. Having all three relevant pieces of knowledge in place is thus needed for an agent to pass judgment on the appropriateness of the act.³⁷²

As far as the nature of the agent, Scotus holds the generally Aristotelian view that certain potentialities in our nature direct us towards fulfilling certain ends. Various natures have various

³⁷⁰ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.12: "Sic igitur patet qualiter bonitas moralis actus est convenientia iudicata secundum rectam rationem operantis."

³⁷¹ See for example *Ordinatio* III, d.37.

³⁷² *Quodlibet* 18.1, a.1, n.13.

potencies that enable the fulfilling of such ends, which are good for us because they perfect or complete our natures.³⁷³ Scotus doesn't talk much about all this, but certainly these would include the various levels of soul on an Aristotelian picture: the nutritive, sensitive, and rational souls, and their respective functions, i.e., growth, perception, and thought, respectively.

Natures need powers to fulfill their respective functions and thereby obtain the ends latent within them. Hence Scotus says that in order to pass judgment on an act, the agent must know his or her own causal powers which pertain to the act. So natures have powers that enable them to act to fulfill various functions. If I want to go to the grocery store, it's not in my nature to fly; I must walk. Likewise, it's not in the nature of a dog to use a compass for orienteering—it must use instinct and the senses. As a rational animal, humans use their senses along with rational powers to act.³⁷⁴

Finally, the agent must know the essential nature of the act (*ratio quidditativa actus*).³⁷⁵ By that, Scotus means the type of act or kind of act in question. For example, a sexual act would have certain characteristics or features that make it what it is—and these features or

³⁷³ For Scotus's agreement with this Aristotelian conception of completion, see *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3 (Wadding). "Oportet scire quid bonum significat. Dico quod bonum et perfectum idem sunt 6 Metaph. Perfectum autem dupliciter dicitur: uno modo, cui nihil deest, et hoc intrinsece, et illud est perfectum perfectione essentiali intrinseca, seu perfectione prima; alia modo dicitur perfectum perfectione secunda. Sic igitur bonum duplex est: Primo modo, et secundo. Bonum primo modo non potest habere contrarium, neque privativum in natura, quia contraria nata sunt fieri circa idem; igitur quod non est natum inesse alteri, non habet contrarium, neque privative oppositum; sed bonum seu perfectum perfectione prima, inquantum primum, non est natum alteri inesse. Etsi enim quantum ad id quod est, posset alteri inesse, dicendo quod accidens aliquot modo est perfectum perfectione prima, vel intrinseca perfectine, quia est essentialis, tamen inquantum primum bonum dicit perfectionem in se et ad se. Bonum igitur bonitate prima tantum habet oppositum contradictorie, ut non bonum; bonum autem secundo modo, quod est extrinsecum, habet malum oppositum privative." See also *Ordinatio* IV 31 q. un., n.4; *De Primo Principio*, 3.56. For Scotus's connection between natures, powers, and ends, see *Ordinatio* I, d.1, pars. 1, q.2, n.60.

³⁷⁴ It's not clear to me, however, whether Scotus thinks that rational animals have both kinds of secondary goodness—natural and moral—as distinct evaluations of their actions, or whether the rational nature supersedes and uses these non-rational aspects. The former view has been supported by Thomas Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: A Pseudo-Problem Dissolved," *The Modern Schoolman* 74 (1997): 79. Williams argues that humans can have both a secondary natural goodness that all animals have, and moral goodness that is unique to rational agents.

³⁷⁵ *Quodlibet* 18.1, a.1, n.13.

characteristics would make the act different from other kinds of acts. So in order to pass judgment on the appropriateness of an act, in addition to knowing the agent's own nature and causal powers needed to complete the act, the agent must know what exactly the act involves doing.

Scotus provides the following example in order to explain how an agent might use the relevant knowledge to make a judgment about an appropriate object. From the nature of a human, and the act of eating—an act meant to restore one's energy—one should judge that eating a stone would be an inappropriate object for restoring a human.³⁷⁶ Furthermore, one should judge that some foods, even those appropriate to animals, would be inappropriate for humans. For example, grass or raw meat might be appropriate for satisfying animal hunger and replenishing their energy, but unsuitable for humans. So once we have these conditions—agent's nature, causal powers, and the kind of act—right reason determines an appropriate object. And this appropriate object makes the act generically good.

Here, Scotus follows Lombard and his followers by further subdividing moral goodness into three grades arranged in a hierarchical fashion so that each higher grade of goodness presupposes the lower grade of goodness:

I say that beyond the natural goodness of a willing, which pertains to it insofar as it is something positive, which also pertains to any positive being according to the grade of its being (the more being, the more goodness; the less being, the less goodness)—besides this [natural goodness], there is a threefold moral goodness according to its grade: the first is called generic goodness; the second can be called virtuous goodness or circumstantial goodness; and the third [is called] meritorious goodness or gratuitous goodness, or the goodness ordered to a reward by virtue of divine acceptance.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.14. “Ulterius: Ex rationibus istorum trium concludi potest quid sit obiectum conveniens tali actui, ut est talis agentis; puta de actu comedendi, quod convenienter transeat super cibum restaurativum deperditi, non autem super illud quod non est natum esse nutrimentum, sicut lapis vel aliquid huiusmodi, quod licet alii animali esset nutrimentum non tamen homini.”

³⁷⁷ *Ordinatio* II, d. 7, q. un., n.28. “De primo dico quod ultra bonitatem naturalem volitionis quae competit sibi in quantum est ens positivum, quae etiam competit cuicumque enti positivo secundum gradum suae entitatis (magis et

So every act, because it has being, has natural or transcendental goodness coextensive with its being. Notice, however, that the natural goodness mentioned here is not the same as secondary natural goodness, but rather a form of primary goodness. As we saw in depth in a previous chapter, Scotus contrasts this primary or transcendental goodness with moral goodness as a secondary or accidental goodness that adds varying degrees of goodness to some acts. As we will see, each level of goodness builds upon the lower level, so that virtuous goodness presupposes generic goodness, and meritorious goodness presupposes both generic goodness and virtuous goodness, but not the other way around.

Generic Goodness

Given the agent's nature, causal powers, and the type of act in question, the agent can thereby determine which objects are morally appropriate, for not all acts the agent passes judgment on are moral acts. Rather, the type of object determines whether the act is moral.³⁷⁸ The object sets the boundary of what types of acts are moral acts, and so Scotus calls this "generic goodness," which is the broadest category of moral goodness—something like a genus.³⁷⁹

So like his predecessors, Scotus emphasizes the genus/species relation between these various levels of goodness in a manner similar to matter/form. In various places, Scotus

magis, minus et minus), -- praeter illam, est triplex bonitas moralis, secundum gradum se habens: quarum prima dicitur bonitas ex genere, secunda potest dici bonitas virtuosa sive ex circumstantia, tertia autem bonitas meritoria sive bonitas gratuita sive bonitas ex acceptatione divina in ordine ad praemium."

³⁷⁸ *Ordinatio* III, part 1, q.2; *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.14. See also *Ordinatio* II, d.43, q.un., n.3. There Scotus claims that such acts ought to depend not only on the object, but whether the act and object are fitting (*convenientia*) with the faculty.

³⁷⁹ *Quodlibet* 18.1, a.1, n.14.

describes generic goodness as “quasi-matter,”³⁸⁰ “quasi-formable,”³⁸¹ and “quasi-potential”³⁸² with respect to other aspects of goodness. In doing so, Scotus emphasizes that generic goodness is kind of like a genus that needs specification from various circumstances (resulting in circumstantial or specific goodness). By emphasizing “quasi,” Scotus acknowledges that it’s not a real hylomorphic composition: acts don’t really have a matter/form structure, but the structure of acts in terms of generic and specific goodness provides a nice analogy.

In *Ordinatio* II, Scotus claims that when right reason deems an object appropriate, it moves an act into this generic category of moral goodness.³⁸³ In other words, making a correct judgment about the appropriateness of the object opens up the act for further moral specification and evaluation:

The determination of the object is the first determination pertaining to the category (*genus*) of morals. The nature of the object does not determine the act’s moral species, but only the potential to receive moral determination, because when an act has an object that is fitting (*conveniens*) to the agent and the act, then it is capable of moral determination according to the circumstances. Because of this, an act is said to have generic goodness from its object, because just as a genus is in potential with respect to differences, so also the goodness that results from the object is first in the category (*genus*) of morals...and is capable of specific goodness in the category of morals.³⁸⁴

A generically *good* act has an object appropriate to the act and the agent.³⁸⁵ Scotus provides the common example of giving alms to the poor.³⁸⁶ In this case, the kind of act is ‘giving’ (alms)

³⁸⁰ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.29.

³⁸¹ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.29.

³⁸² *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.14 and *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.29.

³⁸³ *Ordinatio* II, d.7.

³⁸⁴ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.14: “Ista determinatio obiecti est prima determinatio quae pertinet ad genus moris, non tamquam differentia determinans ad aliquid in illo genere, sed tanquam potentiale receptivum determinationis moralis; quia quando actus habens obiectum conveniens agenti et actioni, tunc est capax determinationis moralis secundum circumstantias ordinatas; propter quod dicitur ex obiecto actus habere bonitatem ex genere, quia sicut genus est potentiale respectu differentiarum, sic bonitas ex obiecto est prima in genere moris, praesupponens solam bonitatem naturae, et capax omnis bonitatis specificae in genere moris.”

³⁸⁵ *Ordinatio* II, d.40, n.9.

³⁸⁶ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.32.

and the object is the poor person in need.

Recall that for Philip the Chancellor, generic goodness and badness result from a combination of the form of the act (i.e., the kind of act) in conjunction with the object (*materia circa quam*).³⁸⁷ When the object is appropriate or suitable (*materia debita*) to the kind of act, the act is generically good.³⁸⁸ For Scotus, an act is generically good when the object is appropriate or suitable (*conueniens*) to the kind of act (*ratio quidditativa actus*), the nature of the agent, and the causal powers that brought about the act. So Scotus would agree with Philip that the kind of act and the appropriate object are necessary for the act's generic goodness. However, Scotus augments such a description with a more robust Aristotelian account of action, emphasizing that agents have natures directing them to fulfill certain ends and the appropriate causal powers to do so. I call this an augmentation, rather than transformation, because this information already seems implicit in Philip's own account.³⁸⁹ And while Philip doesn't explicitly claim this, his account is moderately Aristotelian, at a time when Aristotle's moral and metaphysical writings were just being reintroduced into the West. His account shows some familiarity with Aristotelianism, but not on the level and sophistication we see in the thirteenth century. But Philip's account remains basically the same: generic goodness arises when the right kind of act conjoins with a fitting object—tacitly assuming that the nature of the agent and her causal powers facilitate which acts are fitting.

³⁸⁷ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 330, L: 97: "Et est dicendum quod genus accipitur hic ex coniunctione forme actus cum materia actus; reficere enim dicit formam quandam, esurientem dicit materiam, at tamen trahitur bonum ex coniunctione huius ad illud."

³⁸⁸ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 333, L: 181-183: "Propter hoc notandum quod genus accipitur pro materia seu pro actu coniuncto cum materia debita. Et sic locum habet bonum in genere in illis, in quibus explicite vel implicite determinatur actus cum materia, ut dictum est. See also 330, L: 103-105: Nam bonum in essentia dicitur quantum ad causam efficientem a qua est esse, bonum autem in genere ex coniunctione generis actus cum genere quod est materia actus cum fuerit materia debita actui vel e converso."

³⁸⁹ See Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 330fl., L:83-113.

Once an act has generic goodness, it opens the act to further evaluation and specification, because generically good acts are formable through the relevant moral circumstances within the “genus” of morality, because the object is appropriate.³⁹⁰ For example, take the act of “having sex,” and the object as “my wife.” Since my wife is the appropriate object for this act, the act is now brought under the realm of moral (generically good) and can now be evaluated further concerning the circumstances that specify the act’s goodness. If the object was not my wife, but someone else, then the act would be brought under the genus of morally bad (generically bad), to be further evaluated in light of the circumstances in which the bad act was performed.³⁹¹

For both generically good and bad actions, these specifying circumstances can add levels of goodness or badness to the act. For example, the generically bad act of stealing from someone would be worse and hence incur more blame if the “someone” was poor rather than rich, or if I stole a large amount of money rather than a small amount. But in each case, the act remains a generically bad act of stealing.³⁹² As Scotus sees it, all acts have an object, and thus all acts must be either generically good or bad: “There can be no act without an object, and the object must be either appropriate or inappropriate to the act: and so it is necessary that either a fitting object makes the act generically good, or an inappropriate object makes the act generically bad.”³⁹³ This implies that there can be no generically indifferent acts.

³⁹⁰ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 14. *Ordinatio* II, d.7, n.29.

³⁹¹ See the next chapter for Scotus’s account of moral badness.

³⁹² I owe the example to David Gallagher, “Aquinas on Moral Action: Interior and Exterior Acts,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990), 119.

³⁹³ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 36. “quia actus non potest esse quin transeat super obiectum, et illud necessario est conveniens vel disconveniens actui: et ita necessario actus bonus ex genere, ex obiecto conveniente, vel actus malus ex genere, ex obiecto disconveniente.”

Specific Goodness

Once the act is considered a moral act (i.e., once it has generic goodness), it is then open for additional evaluation in light of the circumstances under which the act is performed, and this Scotus labels “specific goodness.”³⁹⁴ Elsewhere, Scotus calls this “circumstantial goodness,”³⁹⁵ “moral goodness”³⁹⁶ or “virtuous goodness.”³⁹⁷ In regard to specific/circumstantial goodness, Scotus emphasizes two things. First, circumstantial goodness contains the moral differences that specify or individuate generically good acts, in the same way that species specify various entities in some genus.³⁹⁸

Second, specific goodness results from choosing the act under the circumstances that right reason dictates.³⁹⁹ In other words, the appropriateness of the object to the agent and the act are insufficient for specific goodness: one must also form a judgment about the appropriateness of the circumstances under which the act is carried out. So while having sex with one’s spouse is a generically good act, doing so at an inopportune time, location, or for the wrong reasons would make the act bad. Partaking in such an act at an appropriate time, location, and for a good end (say, for procreation) would make the act circumstantially or virtuously or specifically good.

According to Scotus, four circumstances are relevant in determining the act’s specific goodness: the end, the manner, the time, and the place. As medieval see things, there are basically two senses of ‘ends’: (1) the end(s) that our nature directs us towards, and (2) the end or goal of a particular act itself. Scotus takes both to be descriptive, normative, and closely

³⁹⁴ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.15; *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.30.

³⁹⁵ *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un., n. 9; *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 28; *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.15.

³⁹⁶ *Reportatio* II, d.41, n.2 (Wadding); *Ordinatio* I, d.17, q.1-2, nn.62-64.

³⁹⁷ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 28.

³⁹⁸ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 30; *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un., n.9.

³⁹⁹ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 30; *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.15-16.

related. In the descriptive sense, natures have certain ends that they actually and naturally pursue. But there is a normative sense of ends: namely, we ought to pursue or fulfill those ends which our nature directs us towards. The use of ‘end of a particular act’ is descriptive in the sense that it describes some actual end or goal of some particular act of an agent. But the latter can be evaluated in terms of how well or poorly it actually aligns with the former, i.e., with those teleological goals established by one’s nature. According to Scotus, the two are intimately connected in evaluating an act’s moral worth, for the end of a particular act gains its moral worth when right reason judges that the end should be carried out given the nature of the agent, the type of act, and the object:

The first goodness [of the circumstances] seems to be from the circumstance of the end, because from the nature of the agent, the action, and the object, it is immediately concluded that such an act ought to be performed by some agent for such an end, and it ought to be chosen and sought after on account of such an end.⁴⁰⁰

So when right reason judges appropriateness of some object, the act would gain generic goodness; when right reason concludes that some end ought to be sought, the action obtains circumstantial goodness (provided that the other relevant circumstances are appropriate and the act was carried out).

In terms of the end of the act, Scotus makes three further points. First, in the context of the ‘end of the act,’ the ‘act’ refers to the interior act. Following tradition, Scotus makes two broad distinctions concerning acts of rational agents: the distinction between natural and moral acts, and the distinction between interior acts and exterior acts. One, as we have seen, Scotus makes the distinction between a natural act and a moral act, the latter being the result of reason and will. Natural acts and moral acts can overlap in terms of having the same object: take the

⁴⁰⁰ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.15: “Prima bonitas videtur esse circumstantia finis, quia ex natura agentis et actionis et obiecti statim concluditur quod talis actus non debet competere tali nisi in ordine ad talem finem, et debet eligi et appeti propter finem talem.”

natural act of cutting someone. In such a case, the end or intent of the agent, along with the object, determines whether that act is a species of good acts or bad acts, depending upon whether I'm cutting someone open in order to save them, say, or whether I'm cutting them open to kill them.⁴⁰¹ In such cases, the natural act remains the same but there would be two moral acts—one good and one bad. Furthermore, since the natural act is *an act*, and every act has some amount of being, that act will have some ontological or primary goodness. Whether the act has additional accidental or secondary goodness of the moral variety will depend upon whether the act has an appropriate object and end, among other things.⁴⁰²

Two, after distinguishing between natural and moral acts, Scotus distinguishes two types of moral acts—interior and exterior. The distinction is most clearly seen in examples: suppose I decide to rob a bank, but my plot is foiled before or during its execution. My choice to rob the bank would be the interior act, and the exterior act would be my bodily powers executing the command made by my will. Or suppose I decide to go to church but am hindered along the way—say, I get a flat tire. In these types of cases, we have interior acts without their corresponding exterior acts; in other words, sometimes we decide to act, but fail to carry out our intended act. The interior act can still be good or bad even if it is not accompanied by the exterior act—intending to go to church and intending to rob a bank are good and bad respectively, even if the intended acts never reach fruition. The exterior act, however, cannot even exist without the interior act.

As Scotus sees it, the two are distinct acts because they are governed by different causal powers: the will directly governs the interior act, whereas the exterior act is governed by some

⁴⁰¹ The example is from Osborne. Thomas M. Osborne Jr., “The Separation of the Interior and Exterior Acts In Scotus and Ockham,” *Mediaeval Studies* 69 (2007): 112.

⁴⁰² *Ordinatio* I, d.17, q.1-2, nn.62-64; *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un, n.28.

other powers external to the will (such as bodily powers) that are commanded by the will.⁴⁰³ We can see the importance of these distinctions by returning to Scotus's discussion of the circumstance of the end. According to Scotus, the circumstance of the end pertains not to the act as actually carried out or not, but only to the act as willed by the subject; in other words, Scotus's discussion about the moral quality of an act in terms of generic and specific goodness belongs to the *interior act* of will—not the exterior act. For Scotus, the interior act—choosing to act in a certain way with the appropriate object for the right end—is good even if the act doesn't succeed.⁴⁰⁴

Second, Scotus insists that even if act has an appropriate end, it is not sufficient for an act's circumstantial goodness without the appropriateness (*convenientia*) of other relevant circumstances.⁴⁰⁵ A few examples will suffice in making Scotus's point. One, take the act of having sex with my wife (appropriate object) in order to procreate (an appropriate end): but suppose I do so in an inappropriate location, say, a crowded room. The end might be good and the object appropriate, but the wrong location or even the right location at the wrong time (when other people are present) negates the act's goodness. Two, take going to church (the act⁴⁰⁶) out

⁴⁰³ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.3: "Ista questio habet maiorem difficultatem de bonitate actus morali, quia de bonitate actus naturali manifestum videtur, quidquid per illam intelegatur, quod ipsa est alia et alia alterius naturae. Patet autem quod alia est natura actus interioris et exterioris; imo isti actus eliciuntur immediate a diversis potentiis: interior a voluntate, exterior a potentia aliqua exteriori, licet per imperium voluntatis."

⁴⁰⁴ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.15: "Et ista circumstantia non est ipsius actus, ut in esse reali positi vel non positi praecise sic, sed est ipsius actus ut voliti et per actum voluntatis ad talem finem relati; imo, non minus est electio bona, quae sit propter finem debitum, esto quod per actum illum elicatum extra non attingatur finis electionis quam si attingeretur."

⁴⁰⁵ *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un., n.10. See also *Ordinatio* I, d.48, q.un., n.5.

⁴⁰⁶ It's unclear in this example what the object of the act is: if 'going' means 'walking,' then the object would be the building or event itself. If 'going to church' is used more in its colloquial sense of attending a church service, then the object could be construed as the building or maybe even God himself. My example presupposes the latter. But medievals often used this example like the former, as in actually walking to church. In one sense, this highlights the ambiguity of these descriptions for the moral realm: precisely how the object is described can alter how the act is evaluated.

of love for God (an appropriate end), but in the wrong way. For example, suppose I went to church out of love for God, but sat on the roof listening to Bad Religion while devouring Lays Potato Chips and imbibing 101-proof Wild Turkey Bourbon, instead of, say, partaking in Mass. In such a case, the manner and the location were inappropriate for the act in question—even if the act had a good end. Finally, take giving alms (the act) to the poor (an appropriate object) out of love for my neighbor (a fitting end), but not giving to him what he needs (incorrect manner): suppose he needs water and I give him a Pabst Blue Ribbon—or suppose he need monetary help and I give him a handful or worthless Confederate dollars.

These examples make two of Scotus's points. First, even when an act has an appropriate end and object, the act might not necessarily be good. In other words, an appropriate end is necessary but not sufficient for an act's circumstantial goodness. So an act cannot be circumstantially good without a good end, but a good end isn't enough to make the act completely good. Second, it only takes one inordinate circumstance to render the entire act bad.⁴⁰⁷ We'll see this in more detail in the next chapter.

Third, sometimes we act for various reasons or ends. For example, I may go to church for all of the following good ends: (1) to fulfill an obligation of justice because I made some sort of vow to go to church; (2) in order to pray and worship God out of love for him; (3) to edify my friend out of love for him or her. All of these disparate ends could count as why I went to church, and all of these ends could make the act morally good, provided the other circumstances were fitting. According to Scotus, the more of these appropriate motives for acting there are, the

⁴⁰⁷ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 16.

better the act is.⁴⁰⁸ So even one of these good ends serves to make the act morally good (again, provided that the other circumstances are fitting), but more of these good motives would make the act even better.⁴⁰⁹

Scotus mentions only briefly the following three circumstances already discussed a bit above: the manner, the time, and the place. As for these three circumstances, Scotus only has a few general points to make. First, these other circumstances are less important than the end for at least two reasons.⁴¹⁰ One, the end concerns the very reason the act was undertaken in the first place, so it rightly plays a more important role in the act's moral goodness or badness. Two, the end is more important because the more good ends, the better the act can be. This is not true for the other circumstances, which are "all or nothing" circumstances: the manner is either good or bad—same with the time and the location. But there can be many good reasons for the act, and "the more the merrier" in determining just how good the act actually is. Hence the end plays the most important role in an act's moral goodness.

The next circumstance is the manner or mode (*modus*) of the act.⁴¹¹ Sometimes Scotus

⁴⁰⁸ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 22: "Ex dicitis sequitur corollarium quod in eodem actu substrato potest esse multiplex bonitas moralis, quia idem actus potest esse recte circumstantionatus, non solum multis circumstantiis particularibus, quae non sunt multae bonitates sed integrant unam bonitatem, sed etiam potest idem actus esse circumstantionatus complete, omnibus circumstantiis pertinentibus ad unum virtutem; et ita secundum dictamina diversa perfecta prudentiae, respectu multorum finium propriorum. Exemplum: vado ad ecclesiam ex iustitia, quia teneor per oboedientiam vel ex voto; vado etiam ex caritate ad Deum, ut orem vel ut exhibeam Deo cultum patriae; et vado etiam ex caritate fraterna, ut aedifidem proximum. Et, breviter, in quocumque actu, sive bono tantum bonitate morali sive ultra bonitate meritoria, quanto concurrunt plura motiva ordinate agendi, tanto melior est."

⁴⁰⁹ As we will see in the next chapter, this is also true for badness too: the more bad motives for an act the worse it would be. For example, say I murdered my neighbor not only because I was having an affair with his wife and wanted her as my wife, but also because I wanted to steal the husband's possessions. This would make the act worse than if I just murdered him for his possessions.

⁴¹⁰ In *Ordinatio* I, d.48, n.5, Scotus flat out states that the end is most important: "Bonitas autem voluntatis non dependet a solo obiecto, sed ab aliis omnibus circumstantiis, et potissime a fine: Propter quod notandum est quod omnis nostra volitio potissime ordinata est ad finem ultimum, qui est *alpha et omega, principium et finis*, cui sit *honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum*. Amen."

⁴¹¹ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.15.

calls this the form of the act.⁴¹² His point here is that *style matters*: acts ought to be carried out in a fitting manner proper to the agent, act, and situation. According to Scotus, all or some of the previous considerations determine how the act should be carried out, i.e., the nature of the agent, the type of act, the agent's causal powers, the object, and the end. From these conditions, the agent determines how to perform the act in an appropriate manner (*debito modo*).

The final two circumstances are more extrinsic to the act than the rest: the time and the location. Scotus says little to nothing about the timing of acts,⁴¹³ other than that an agent should carry out the act only at a time when the act can attain such an end,⁴¹⁴ and admits that the location of the act often plays no role at all.⁴¹⁵ For example, while location might play a role in, say, where I have marital relations with my spouse, it may play no role in where I ought to give alms to those in need.

And here, Scotus once again uses his standard example of giving alms: a generically good act would be giving alms (the act) to the poor (the appropriate object). An example of morally/virtuously/circumstantially/specifically good act would be giving alms (the act) to the poor (the appropriate object) from one's own resources (the appropriate manner or mode), in the appropriate place (the right location) and out of love for my neighbor (an appropriate end).

In order for an act to be perfectly good, that act must be faultless on all of the above

⁴¹² *Ordinatio* II, d. 40, q.un., n. 10.

⁴¹³ One exception to this is his discussion of the fall of the Devil in *Ordinatio* II, d.6, q.2, nn.52-52, where Scotus postulates that happiness with respect to the 'time' condition of specific goodness could have caused Lucifer's fall: right reason failed to form the proper judgment about the timing of happiness, because God wanted Lucifer to be happy at a later time, but Lucifer wanted it immediately.

⁴¹⁴ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 15: "Postea, concludi potest de tempore, quia tali agenti talis actio propter talem finem etiam talem habens modum non debet semper convenire, sed pro tempore pro quo ordinabilis est ad talem finem vel pro quo potest talem finem hebere."

⁴¹⁵ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.15: "Ultima autem omnium videtur circumstantia loci; imo, multi sunt actus quorum etiam bonitas completa moralis non determinat locum."

conditions. Quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, Scotus says that “Goodness derives from one complete cause, but badness results from any particular defect.” Scotus glosses this quote by claiming that by “complete cause,” Pseudo-Dionysius meant “all of the circumstances.”⁴¹⁶ The complete goodness of an act occurs when an agent chooses the act in accordance with right reason’s determination about the appropriateness of the act to the agent, the object, the end, the manner, the time and the place.

Meritorious Goodness

Finally, “meritorious goodness” constitutes the last and highest level of goodness, which Scotus also calls “gratuitous goodness” or the “goodness obtained by an act that is ordered to a reward by reason of divine acceptance.”⁴¹⁷ According to Scotus, meritorious goodness has four conditions or aspects: the preconditions of the act, merit, charity, and divine acceptance. Let’s consider each of these.

First, in order for an act to be meritoriously good, the act must also be generically and specifically/circumstantially/virtuously good. That is to say, the kind of act must be appropriate to the agent, his nature, his causal powers, and be performed with an appropriate object in mind, for one or many good ends, in the right manner, time, and place. So an act must be completely good for it to be meritoriously good, but that is not sufficient.⁴¹⁸ In order for it to be meritoriously good, the act also requires merit, charity, and divine acceptance.

⁴¹⁶ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 16: “Sic, igitur, patet de pluralitate eorum quae recta ratio deat debere convenire actui, quia ad hoc ut sit perfecte bonus, debet habere, secundum descriptionem iam positam, omnium istorum integritatem. Unde Dionysius De divinis nominibus parte 4: ‘Bonum est ex una et tota causa, malum autem ex particularibus defectus’; tota, inquit, causa, hoc est, integra ex omnibus circumstantiis.” See Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus*, C.4, §31, *Patrologia Graeca* (3,732).

⁴¹⁷ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, n. 28.

⁴¹⁸ *Ordiantio* II, d.7, n. 31.

Second, the act must be elicited in conformity with the source of merit (*conformiter principio merendi*), which Scotus identifies as the theological virtue of charity.⁴¹⁹ The difference, then, between an act's simply having specific goodness and its having meritorious goodness stems from the act's right relationship with an appropriate end: namely, God.⁴²⁰ Suppose I give alms (the act) to the poor (the appropriate object) from my own resources (the appropriate manner or mode), in the appropriate place (the right location) and I do it *because* I love God in addition to loving my neighbor (also an appropriate end).⁴²¹ My intention changes the level of the act's goodness. But it does not do so when the act was performed simply from a natural love for God that would have been possible in the state of innocence. I must do so from a special kind of love—*caritas*.⁴²²

Love, or *caritas*, is a habit or disposition that inclines the agent to act in certain ways. In other words, *caritas* is a *virtue*. For medieval theologians, the virtue of charity is not a moral virtue, like prudence or courage, that can be acquired through practice, habituation, and education. In contrast, charity—along with faith and hope—are termed *theological virtues*.⁴²³ These theological virtues are like the moral virtues in that they are habits or dispositions, but differ with the moral virtues because they have God as their end,⁴²⁴ and in the present state are

⁴¹⁹ *Ordiantio* II, d.7, n. 31. “Tertia bonitas competit actui ex hoc quod, praesupposita duplici bonitate iam dicta, ipse eliciter conformiter principio merendi (quod est caritas vel gratia) sive secundum inclinationem caritatis.”

⁴²⁰ *Ordinatio* II, d.41, q. un., n.9: “meritum videtur esse ex relatione ad finem debitum, quae relatio fit a charitate in existente.”

⁴²¹ *Ordiantio* II, d.7, q. un., n. 32.

⁴²² *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q. un., n.32. “Exemplum de tertio: istud opus facere non tantum ex inclinatione naturali, sicut potuit fieri in statu innocentiae (vel forte adhuc modo posset fieri a peccatore, si adhuc peccator existens et non poenitens ex pietate naturali moveretur ad proximum), sed ex charitate, ex qua faciens est amicus Dei, in quantum respicit opera eius.”

⁴²³ See *Ordinatio* III, d.26.

⁴²⁴ While Aquinas would say that the theological virtues have God as their *object* rather than *end* (see *Summa Theologiae* I-II, Q.62, a.1), it is clear from his other discussions that for an interior act, the object of the act is the end itself (See for example *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.19, a.9).

acquired by God supernaturally infusing them in us.⁴²⁵

Is the theological virtue of charity necessary for an act's meritorious goodness? And if so, are meritorious acts then caused by the will of the person acting, or by the disposition of charity infused in the person by God, or both? These are difficult questions that Scotus spends much time on.⁴²⁶ In *Lectura* I, d.17 and *Ordinatio* I, d.17, Scotus outlines and rejects a number of positions of others in the context of providing his own answers to these questions. Let's consider a few of these views here, as it will aid in seeing the context of Scotus's own position.

Henry of Ghent⁴²⁷ argues that since theological virtues are virtues, they are dispositions similar in nature to the natural virtues.⁴²⁸ This much Scotus agrees with.⁴²⁹ However, Henry argues that because they are supernatural in nature, they are more effective at eliciting a response than a natural virtue—so much so that the supernatural virtue of charity *in itself* suffices for bringing it about that the agent acts in such a way that he or she loves God.⁴³⁰ Scotus rejects this view for obvious reasons: one, it seems to make the virtue its own sort of willing or causal power over and above the agent's will—a little will of its own (*potentia volitiva*). Unfortunately, virtues are dispositions, whereas the will is a power. They are thus distinct types of things, and

⁴²⁵ See Scotus, *Lectura* I, d. 17, pars.1, q. un, n.75. “Sed licet caritas sit habitus supernaturalis, non tamen mutat rationem habitus...”

⁴²⁶ See *Lectura* I, d.17, pars. 1, q. un; *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars. 1. See also A. Vos et al., *Duns Scotus on Divine Love: Texts and Commentary on Goodness and Freedom, God and Humans* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 108-129.

⁴²⁷ Those familiar with Scotus's writings may find it peculiar that Henry of Ghent is only now making an appearance in the dissertation. Henry is, after all, Scotus's primary theological sparring partner. I offer two reasons for Henry's absence. First, unlike his peers, Henry never composed a commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, which is where much of the medieval debates about the metaphysics of goodness appear. Second, while Henry started to compose a *Summa*, the part dealing with moral theology was left unwritten when he died. So unlike many issues, Henry didn't write much on moral theology, and thus, Scotus doesn't mention him as much as he does on other controversial topics of the day. He did, however, write on the virtue of charity, which explains his inclusion here.

⁴²⁸ For Henry's view, see Henrici De Gandavo, *Quodlibet* IV, q.10, nn.15-290. In *Henrici De Gandavo Opera Omnia VIII*, eds. Gordon A. Wilson and Girard J. Etzkorn (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011).

⁴²⁹ *Lectura* I, d. 17, pars.1, q. un, n.75.

⁴³⁰ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.45.

Henry's view muddles the two.⁴³¹ Two, this seems to put all of the causality on the divine agent and none on the human agent. If we have a part to play in meriting the goodness of an act, Henry's view leaves no room for it. Thus no human willing of a meritorious act will be free.⁴³² Furthermore, Henry's view produces the unwanted conclusion that a person with the virtue of charity can never sin.⁴³³ But this is false. So according to Scotus, Henry's view is obviously wrong.

In contrast, Godfrey of Fontaines argues that a supernatural habit doesn't give the act its causality, but its intensity.⁴³⁴ So the act, *qua* act, derives from the will as its cause; but the act receives its intensity from the disposition of charity. So according to Godfrey, each has a distinct role in bringing about the act's meritoriousness. The 'intensity' of an act concerns how passionate one feels in the act. So if the end of the act were 'loving God,' the intensity would concern how much one loves God in doing the act.

The discussion of the intensity of an act—what scholastics called the intension and

⁴³¹ *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n. 22; *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.45.

⁴³² *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.24: "Praeterea, operatio non elicitur libere, cuius principium activum est mere naturale; sed habitus cum non sit formaliter voluntas, nec per consequens formaliter liber, si est principium activum erit mere naturale; ergo, operatio eius non erit mere libera, et ita nullum 'velle' erit liberum si elicitur ab habitu ut a totali principio activo."

⁴³³ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.50: "Si caritas det voluntati esse supernaturale et agere, numquam poterit voluntas habere actum meritorium nisi prius caritas habeat actum, quia non poterit tunc voluntas sic agere nisi praeagente caritate, quae est causa quasi superior et principium eius operandi meritorie; igitur voluntas in actu suo sequitur inclinationem caritatis; cum igitur caritas supernaturaliter et modo naturali inclinatur in bonum postquam est, voluntas tunc numquam poterit in actum malum inclinari; igitur semel habens caritatem, numquam peccabit!"

Ordinatio I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.25: "Praeterea, tunc homo semel habens caritatem, nunquam posset peccare mortaliter, quod est inconveniens. Probatio consequentiae, quia habens formam aliquam activam praedominantem sibi, nunquam potest moveri contra inclinationem illius formae praedominantis, sicut numquam corpus mixtum grave potest ascendere contra inclinationem terrae dominantis; sed caritas—si est totale principium activum—praedominatur ipsi voluntati, quae non potest in actum illum; ergo voluntas sequitur semper inclinationem caritatis in agendo, et ita numquam peccabit."

⁴³⁴ See Godfrey of Fontaines, *Quodlibet* XI, q.4. In *Les Quodlibets onze-quatorze De Godefroid De Fontaines. Les Philosophes Belges, Tome V, Fascicules I-II*, ed. J. Hoffmans (Louvain: Editiones de L'institut Supérieur De Philosophie, 1932). Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.27; *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.51.

remission of forms—has its normal setting in the domain of natural philosophy. There, medievals puzzled about the whether the numerically identical form could vary in its intensity. For example, consider an amount of warmth and a shade of color. When water is heated, as it warms up, must we posit multiple forms at varying temperatures to account for the change, or is there simply one form that intensifies when heated and remits as it cools back down? Or take the color white. Is there simply one form of whiteness or many forms of whiteness for each of the varying degrees of brightness that are possible? Scotus rejects the need to posit multiple forms to account for such differences. Rather, some forms come in degrees.⁴³⁵ In such cases, Scotus posits a modal distinction between the form and its degree of intensity. As Peter King puts it, “two different degrees of heat seem to differ not in kind but in degree.”⁴³⁶ As modally distinct, the form and its intensity are really identical but vary in degree.

Drawing upon his notion of grades of intensity in forms and the modal distinction, Scotus advances a number of arguments against Godfrey’s position. First, Scotus argues that Godfrey’s proposal of an aggregation of the potency and the virtue of charity derives from extrinsically distinct sources in an act and thus produces merely an accidental unity between the potency (the will) and the virtue (charity). But intension and remission are not extrinsic differences in the act, but are intrinsic grades within the same act, such that the grade of intensity in an act requires an essential unity within the act itself. Therefore, an act’s intensity must be produced by the will itself and not some external or extrinsic source.⁴³⁷ Second, Scotus argues that if the virtue of

⁴³⁵ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.2, q.1, nn.140-143; *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.28.

⁴³⁶ Peter King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 32.

⁴³⁷ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.52. “Intensio et remissio in actu non sunt differentiae extrinsecae in actu, sed sunt gradus intrinseci in eodem actu, et utrumque est ‘per se unum,’ ita quod gradus intensus est quid unum simpliciter sicut gradus remissus; igitur sicut sunt distincta et per se faciunt unum cum actu, ita habent principia distincta et per se entia. Actus igitur intensus habebit principium, quod est ens per se unum; sed aggregatum ex caritate et potentia non est unum nisi per accidens; ergo, etc.”

charity produces the intensity in the act of the will, then we would always have an equal intensity in the act of loving God—which is simply false, because we do not always love God with an equal intensity.⁴³⁸

Third, Scotus argues that in the case of God, the infinite will without any habit produces an infinite grade in its act, so that each act is infinitely intense. Since the intensity derives from the infinite will in such a case, why should it be different for finite agents? The intensity possible for finite agents ought to conform to one's nature and ability to act, as was true for God. So the intensity of the power stems from the nature of the agent acting—the more perfect the will, the greater the intensity possible. He concludes,

A finite power, in every grade of its perfection, can provide to an act only the intensity compossible with the act, so that the intension and remission in the act is derived from a more perfect or less perfect will, and not from the habit, just as an infinite act's intensity is from the infinite will without any habit producing the degree [of intensity].⁴³⁹

In short, Scotus thinks that intensity is a *circumstance* of the act, under the category of manner/mode, and thus originates solely by the agent's own causal powers. Consequently, an act's intensity more directly concerns moral goodness than how an act receives meritorious goodness.⁴⁴⁰

Given that a meritorious act requires the theological virtue of charity, and yet charity doesn't produce the intensity of the act, nor does it solely determine one to love God by causing

Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.28: "Contra istud arguo, quia intensio actus non est aliquod extrinsecum, accidens actui, sed gradus intrinsecus actui, ita quod actus intensus est quoddam 'per se unum' sicut huiusmodi individuum in specie. Non ergo potest esse aliud principium substantiae huiusmodi actus, et intensionis suae, quia a quo est hoc individuum, ab eodem est gradus intrinsecus proprius huic individuo: non enim post recipere naturam ab aliquo, et 'hanc naturam' signatam, quin recipiat eam in certo gradu."

⁴³⁸ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.53. *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.29.

⁴³⁹ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.55. "Igitur, potentia finita, in quocunque gradu perfecta, potest dare actui tantum intensionem compossibilem actui, ita quod intensio et remissio in actu sit ex voluntate perfectioniore vel minus perfecta, non ex habitu, sicut actus infinitus ex infinita voluntate sine omni habitu dante gradum." Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.31.

⁴⁴⁰ For Scotus's claim that the intensity of the act is a circumstance of the act, see *Ordinatio* I, d.48, q.un., n.4.

the agent's affection, what role does charity play in a meritorious act? Perhaps, Scotus suggests, the will alone causes the act's meritoriousness, but its acceptance by God results from the disposition of charity in the agent. Such a disposition, then, would be a kind of "ornament of the soul."⁴⁴¹ For example, suppose someone who loves God petitions God by a natural cause, and God accepts the act on account of her inner beauty as one who loves God. In such a case, Scotus says, "when charity is an ornament of the soul and beautifies the soul, so also the act is heard and accepted by God loving the soul on account of the beauty of the virtue."⁴⁴²

In some ways, this suggests the opposite Henry of Ghent's view, because it places the will as the cause of the act's meritoriousness, even if it is only accepted by God because the agent has the virtue of charity. Scotus finds this proposal problematic because if this were the case, then no act could be indifferent and there would be no venial sins, since God accepts the act. And divine acceptation implies a sin-free act. But people who merit eternal life do in fact have venial sins. So Scotus concludes this proposal doesn't take this into account.⁴⁴³

In light of this discussion, Scotus concludes that neither the act alone nor the virtue of charity alone causes a meritorious act, but that both the act and the virtue of charity concur to bring about the act's meritoriousness.⁴⁴⁴ In order to show this, Scotus examines the "act as an act," and the "nature of a meritorious act," in turn. By "act as an act" Scotus means to examine

⁴⁴¹ *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.58: "Et forte videri quod sola voluntas sit causa actus meritorii, ut tamen est sub habitu, quia habitus quamvis non habet causalitatem respectu actus meritorii, est tamen ornatus animae et facit eam acceptam deo, et actum similiter, tamen voluntas est causa actus."

⁴⁴² *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.59: "Exemplum: sicut petition, a sola natura causata, acceptatur propter pulchritudinem eam, et actus eius ex hoc exauditur et acceptatur a Deo diligente animam propter pulchritudinem virtutis."

⁴⁴³ *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.60: "Si ita esset, nullum esset peccatum veniale: quia dicitur 'si habet habitum caritatis, eius actus acceptatur,' nullum erit peccatum veniale, nec etiam actus indifferens. Et ideo ponitur caritas-habitus respectu actus meritorii, et non respectu actus indifferens."

⁴⁴⁴ *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.61. Cf. *Ordinatio I*, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, nn.32, 69, and 73.

not only the essence of the act, but also those other aspects of the act, excluding only what makes it meritorious. In other words, the “act as an act” will also include discussions of the intensity of the act, its moral aspects (*ratio moris*), and others of this kind.⁴⁴⁵ I take ‘moral aspects’ to include those things discussed above concerning moral goodness, since those were previously stated preconditions for the act’s meritoriousness.

Scotus argues that the will and the virtue of charity conquer as two partial agents in eliciting an act of love, resulting in its meritoriousness. According to Scotus, each cause is perfect in itself as a cause, and so both causes are independent of the other. However, one of the “agents” *in the act* is more perfect and the principal agent, while the other is less perfect and less principal.⁴⁴⁶ Even though *caritas* is a *supernatural* disposition, it is still a disposition, and so it behaves accordingly. Scotus argues that dispositions cannot use a power, but a power which has a disposition uses that disposition. Thus the will—as the operative power—is not moved by the disposition to love.⁴⁴⁷ Thus Scotus concludes that the principal mover or agent is the will, while the disposition to love is the second and less principal cause in the act, but nevertheless makes the act more perfect than it would have been with merely the will acting.⁴⁴⁸ Scotus concludes:

It is said that charity is “the weight of the will,” for the will is free and it has charity as a certain kind of weight, which is in itself naturally inclining it to love God; but [charity] is not the total cause of an act of loving God, but presupposes that the act of the will of the agent is free, so that however much a will elicits a perfect act, charity causes more

⁴⁴⁵ *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.69. Cf. *Ordinatio I*, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.142.

⁴⁴⁶ *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.71:”Et dico ad primum quod voluntas cum habitu caritatis concurrunt ut duo agentia partialia ad actum diligendi eliciendum qui est meritorius. Et concurrunt ut duo agentia perfecta in causalitatibus suis, ita quod causalitas unius non est ab alia, nec unum est perfectio alterius in agendo secundum causalitatem suam; sed tamen sunt duo agentia quorum unum est perfectius et principale, et secundum imperfectius et minus principale.”

⁴⁴⁷ *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.75.

⁴⁴⁸ *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.76-80. As we will see, the reason why the act is *accepted* by God will be the reverse: primarily because the act was done in accordance with a disposition of charity, and secondarily because of the agent’s will.

perfection in that act.⁴⁴⁹

So while the act's cause is primarily due to the will and the agent's freedom, the act is better (more perfect/complete) if it is also accompanied by the disposition of charity.

But what exactly makes the act meritorious? Here, Scotus claims that while the act's *cause* derives more from the will, the act's *being meritorious* and accepted by God results more from the virtue of charity than the will.⁴⁵⁰ In other words, the causes of the agent's acts are reversed in importance: the act's meritoriousness stems more from the act's being accompanied by the virtue of charity and secondarily because the act is freely elicited:

I say that the will is determined to the meritorious feature of the act more from charity than from itself. And so what is meritorious of the act is more from charity than from the will, and therefore in eliciting a meritorious act as it is meritorious, the will is the follower, but not in eliciting the act absolutely. And hence with respect to the act that is meritorious, the will is the principal cause; but the acceptance of the act by the divine will, on account of which is it called "meritorious," is more because of the virtue of charity than on account of the will.⁴⁵¹

One final aspect of a meritorious goodness needs consideration: divine acceptance.

According to Scotus, an act is meritorious not simply because it was brought about by the co-causes of will and charity, but because of the act's being related to the right end, namely God—

⁴⁴⁹ *Lectura* I, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n.87. "Sic in proposition dicitur quod caritas est 'pondus voluntas,' nam voluntas libera est et habet caritatem ut pondus quoddam, quae quantum est ex parte sui naturaliter inclinatur ad diligendum Deum; sed non est tota causa actionis libere, ita quod quantumcumque voluntas elicit actum perfectum, adhuc caritas causet maiorem perfectionem in actu illo."

⁴⁵⁰ *Lectura* I, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n. 94. Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, nn.130, 146-147, 151-152.

⁴⁵¹ *Lectura* I, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n. 94. "Dico quod voluntas determinatur ad esse meritorium in actu a caritate magis quam a se. Unde quod sit meritorius actus, magis est caritate quam a voluntate, et ideo in eliciendo actum meritorium ut meritorius, voluntas est pedissequa, sed non in eliciendo actum absolute. Unde voluntas respectu actus qui est meritorius, est causa principalis; sed acceptation istius actus a voluntate divina, propter quam dicitur actus meritorius, magis est propter habitum caritatis quam propter voluntatem."

Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, nn. 151-152: "Sed accipiendo actum secundum rationem meritorii, potest dici quod ista condicio principaliter competit actui ab habitu et minus principaliter a voluntate: magis enim acceptatur actus ut dignus praemio quia est elicited a caritate, quam quia est a voluntate libere elicited, quamvis utrumque necessario requiratur."

and God's accepting it as such.⁴⁵² In other words, the divine will plays a central role in conferring merit (and thus meritorious goodness) on an act. So the act must be done in a way that satisfies the conditions of generic and specific goodness, and furthermore, the act must be done for the sake of, or out of love for, the end—God himself—and from the concurrence of the will and charity. But, God must also accept the act as such.⁴⁵³

Must God accept any and all acts that fall under these conditions, or is he free to reject such actions? And can an act that lacks said conditions be accepted by God for merit? At first it seems hard to say. On the one hand, Scotus states that freely willed acts performed with God as the end and with the virtue of charity are the ones in which God will grant as meritorious. But on the other hand, Scotus's voluntaristic tendencies abound, and even here, "God's granting" seems to play a central role:

I say that the meritorious act is one acceptable to God in a special way, viz., as worthy of reward. I say "in a special way" because God accepts all acts with a general acceptation. He loves them according to the measure of their goodness and orders them to himself as their last end. A meritorious act, however, he accepts with reference to some good which ought to be justly rewarded it. "Meritorious," then, implies two additional relations in the act, one to the accepting will, the other to the reward that the will has assigned to the act.⁴⁵⁴

He goes on to claim that these two relations "arise solely through the act of the will accepting it."⁴⁵⁵ This has caused some confusion on the part of scholars,⁴⁵⁶ since, in conjunction with these strong voluntaristic claims, Scotus says things like "if God were to accept that someone's lifting

⁴⁵² *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n. 90.

⁴⁵³ *Ordinatio I*, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.129.

⁴⁵⁴ Scotus, *Quodlibet 17*, a.2, n.6. In *John Duns Scotus: God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 389. Cf. *Ordinatio I*, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.129.

⁴⁵⁵ Scotus, *Quodlibet 17*, a.2, n.6.

⁴⁵⁶ For more discussion on this, See Andrew S. Yang, "Scotus's Voluntarist Approach to the Atonement Reconsidered," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009), 421-440.

a straw, that would be a meritorious act.”⁴⁵⁷ And here it seems like the nature of the act itself has no importance, and only the divine will matters.

In order to understand these confusing and seemingly contradictory claims, we must examine Scotus’s well-worn distinction between God’s absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) and his ordained power (*potentia ordinata*). According to Scotus, the distinction runs as follows: God’s absolute power concerns what God can do in the strongest sense of the term, ‘can.’ By God’s absolute power, God can do anything that doesn’t involve some type of contradiction. So God can’t square the circle or bring about the state of affairs that *married bachelors exist*. But other than restrictions of logic, God can literally do anything in terms of his absolute power. By God’s ordained power, Scotus means what God can do in keeping with the laws and ordinances he has already established.⁴⁵⁸

For example, suppose God ordains that humanity is saved only by the merit of Christ and good works. *Could* God save someone via some other means? Well, according to Scotus, that depends upon whether we’re talking about God’s ordained power or absolute power. By God’s absolute power, Scotus would say, ‘yes,’ God could save someone through some means other than Christ.⁴⁵⁹ By his absolute power, for example, God could have saved someone by having

⁴⁵⁷ *Lectura* I, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n. 89. “Unde si Deus acceptasset quod quis levaret festucam, hoc esset meritorium.”

⁴⁵⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.7. “Deus ergo, agere potens secundum illas rectas leges ut praefixae sunt ad eo, dicitur agere secundum potentiam ordinatum; ut autem potest multa agere quae non sunt secundum illas iam praefixas, sed praeter illas, dicitur eius potential absoluta: quia enim Deus quodlibet potest agere quod non includit contradictionem, et omni modo potest agere qui non includit contradictionem (et tales sunt multi modi alii), ideo dicitur tunc agere secundum potentiam absolutam.”

⁴⁵⁹ This example commits one to a rejection on Anselm’s view that Christ’s death was necessary for atonement. But it seems as though Scotus rejects such a view anyways, and in the 13th century, a rejection of Anselm’s view was commonplace: Bonaventure and Aquinas also agree with Scotus against Anselm. See Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 129-132, and Douglas C. Langston, “Scotus’s Departure from Anselm’s Theory of the Atonement,” *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medieval* 50 (1983), 227-241. For Anselm’s view, see Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia* ed. P Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (Munster: Verlag Der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936). See also Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 213-239; Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 188-198; and Paul Helm, in *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),

them lick the moss on the north side of pine trees on Wednesdays. But given God's pre-established plan, God could not save someone via some other means in terms of his ordained power. In other words, what God can do vis-à-vis his ordained power is limited by his previous decisions for how he wants the world to operate.

Scotus applies this same distinction to the question of whether human volition accompanied by charity is necessary for a meritorious act, and whether the divine acceptance alone is sufficient. By God's absolute power, God could in principle accept any act and assign it for merit—even an act as mundane as lifting a straw.⁴⁶⁰ But given God's ordained power, since God has decided to assign for merit only those acts done with him as the end and through the co-causes of a free will and charity, God cannot accept some other act as meritorious. So while God initially determines which acts will be assigned for merit, namely, those done with God as the end and from a free will acting with the virtue of charity, once God established this, he's not going to change it. If he were to change it, it would no longer be part of his absolute power, but of some newly established ordained power.⁴⁶¹ But in the current "dispensation," God has decided to accept only these acts as meritorious. Scotus concludes:

Furthermore, it ought to be known that, although in terms of God's ordained power, the will can only have a meritorious act if it is informed by charity, it nevertheless can have a meritorious act in virtue of God's absolute power, because he predestined that soul before it had the virtue of charity; and hence, he first wills the beatitude of the soul, and in virtue of this—after that—he wills it to have the virtue of charity by which it can obtain beatitude, just as a doctor first wills the health [of the patient] before willing the potion that induces health. Therefore, since this ordering is not necessary for the end in an absolute sense, just as if the doctor could make someone healthy in some other way than through the potion,

163-195. For Aquinas's views, see *Summa Theologiae* III, q.1., a.1-4; qq.46-49; *Sentences* III, d.19-20; Eleonore Stump, "Atonement According to Aquinas," In *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, edited by T.V. Morris, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 61-69. For Bonaventure, see *Sentences* III, d.18-20.

⁴⁶⁰ *Lectura* I, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n. 89. Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.160.

⁴⁶¹ See *Lectura* I, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, n. 89. Scotus provides an actual example of this change, when he claims that in the Old Testament Law, sacrificing animals to God was meritorious, because at the time God accepted such acts. But now such acts are not meritorious because they are no longer accepted by God.

God can accept the soul for beatitude according to its own nature even though he did not give the soul the virtue of charity.

But even so, in terms of God's ordained power, the will and charity concur to elicit a meritorious act accepted by God.⁴⁶²

Thus while God could in principle have chosen a different means to save humanity, he has ordained that it should come about through the concurrence of the will and charity, and thus accepts such acts for merit and reward.

Finally, each of these three types of goodness has distinct *principia*: free choice (generic), right reason (specific) and God's grace (meritorious). *Principia* in the medieval tradition are kind of like causes; in fact, causes are one sort of *principium*. So, the reason or cause of each type of goodness stems from the way in which it was brought about. Generic goodness has its source in free choice judging the object appropriate given the nature of the agent, moral/circumstantial goodness has its source in the agent's right reason judging that various circumstances ought to be appropriate or fitting for the act and the agent; meritorious goodness has its source in God granting that the act is meritorious, given that its more immediate source stems from the agent's free will acting in conjunction with the virtue of charity (which is infused in the agent by God).

⁴⁶² *Lectura I*, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, nn.102-103. "Ulterius est sciendum quod, licet de potentia ordinata voluntas non habeat actum meritorium nisi informetur caritate, potest tamen de potentia Dei absoluta, quia prius praedestinavit ipsam animam quam ipsam habere habitum caritatis; unde primo vult animae beatitudinem, et propter hoc vult sibi—post—habitum caritatis, quo potest pervenire ad beatitudinem, sicut medicus prius vult sanitatem quam potionem inducentem sanitatem igitur cum iste ordo non sit necessarius ad finem necessitate absoluta, sicut si medicus alio modo quam per potionem posset inducer sanitatem; Deus potest acceptare animam secundum naturam suam ad beatitudinem licet non det sibi habitum caritas.

Verumtamen de potentia ordinata voluntas et caritas concurrunt ad eliciendum actum meritorium et Deo acceptum."

Cf. Cf. *Ordinatio I*, d.17, pars.1, q.1-2, n.164: "Quantum ergo ad istum articulum, non est necessarium ponere habitum supernaturalem gratificantem, loquendo de necessitate respiciente potentiam Dei absolutam (praecipue cum posset dare beatitudinem sine omni merito praecedente), licet tamen hoc sit necessarium loquendo de necessitate quae respicit potentiam Dei ordinatam, quem ordinem colligimus in Scriptura et ex dictis sanctorum, ubi habemus quod peccator non est dignus vita aeterna et iustus est dignus."

Implications

As I see it, we can draw a number of interesting conclusions from Scotus's metaphysics of goodness. First, in certain postmodern circles of philosophy, it is often assumed that Scotus is the progenitor of the transformation in the tradition, in regard to being, in terms of ethics, and a whole host of related issues,⁴⁶³ and in some ways this is certainly true. But on the metaphysics of goodness, Aquinas and not Scotus transforms the tradition. Aquinas is so focused on the agent of the act and her perfection, that the moral goodness of the act is treated within the context of the perfection of the agent's being, and consequently, its convertibility with being. In contrast, Scotus remains fairly traditional on the metaphysics of goodness. It is the connection to rightness and God's law where Scotus departs, as we will see in a few chapters. Surprisingly, we can see that in some ways Aquinas transforms the tradition, and in other ways Scotus is less "voluntaristic" than Aquinas.

One, if we consider the distinction between act-centered and agent-centered accounts of ethics, where the former focuses on "the morality of specific willed actions," while the latter emphasizes the agent's moral character,⁴⁶⁴ we can easily see how Aquinas's moral philosophy differs from the tradition. Aquinas is wholeheartedly committed to Aristotelian virtue picture and the moral perfection of the agent rather than an in depth analysis of the act—and when the act is treated, it is done in the context of the agent and her perfection. While it is true that Aquinas is concerned about the act itself, as Dave Horner has recently shown,⁴⁶⁵ it is mainly in

⁴⁶³ This is mainly the case in the Radical Orthodoxy movement, who see Scotus's position on (univocity of) being and its relationship to goodness and other divine attributes as fundamentally flawed and completely detrimental to the theological enterprise. For example, See Catherine Pickstock, "Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance," *Modern Theology* 21:4 (2005): 543-574; Matthew Levering, *Participatory Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 17-35.

⁴⁶⁴ See John Laird, "Act-Ethics and Agent-Ethics," *Mind* 55 (1946), 113.

⁴⁶⁵ David A. Horner, "Is Aquinas an Act-Ethicist or an Agent-Ethicist?" *The Thomist* 70 (2006), 237-265.

the context of the agent and the role of the act in the agent's perfection.⁴⁶⁶ So the act of the agent is only important insofar as the act works towards fulfilling the potentialities in the agent. In fact, that is the sole way Aquinas evaluates moral acts.⁴⁶⁷

Two, Aquinas differs from the tradition on his account of moral goodness. For Aquinas, moral goodness converts with being. On the traditional account, moral goodness is an accident added over and above the goodness an act has in virtue of its being.⁴⁶⁸ Aquinas is unambiguous about this: at almost every conceivable point in his discussion about moral goodness, Aquinas goes out of his way to state that actions have their goodness in the same way that things have their goodness—that is, according to their respective amount of being.⁴⁶⁹ Thus Aquinas conceives moral goodness as some species of transcendental goodness. In contrast, Scotus—following the tradition of Peter Lombard, Philip the Chancellor, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure—distinguishes an act's ontological goodness from its accidental goodness, since many acts have ontological goodness and lack moral goodness.

We can see this difference from the direction of absolute and relative qualities. According to Scotus, every variety of secondary goodness is a non-absolute quality.⁴⁷⁰ Recall that absolute qualities necessarily characterize their subject without the need to reference something beyond the nature of the subject itself. Relative or non-absolute qualities, on the other

⁴⁶⁶ As Gallagher says, "A good action is good not merely for the good it produces in the world, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, for the good or perfection it causes in the agent himself." See David Gallagher, "Aquinas on Moral Action: Interior and Exterior Acts," 124.

⁴⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.1.

⁴⁶⁸ See for example, Lombard *Sentences* II, d.35, cap. 2, *Sentences* II, d.36, cap. 6; *Sentences* II, d.37, cap. 1; Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.40, a.1 and *Sentences* II d.41, a.1, q.2; Bonaventure, *Sentences II*, d.37, a.2, q.3, Scotus, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1,

⁴⁶⁹ See for example, Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.1, a.2, a.3, a.4, a.10.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un, n.8: "De secundo, dico quod bonitas actus moralis est ex aggregatione omnium convenientium actui, non absolute ex natura actus, sed quae convenient ei secundum rationem rectam."

hand, necessarily refer to, and depend upon, something beyond the nature of the thing which they characterize. Whiteness, for example, would be an absolute quality of a snowflake, whereas *larger-than-some-other-snowflake* would be a relative quality of the flake in question. As we have seen, Scotus naturally applies this distinction to primary (transcendental) and secondary (accidental) goodness, such that primary goodness is an absolute quality that necessarily characterizes its subject depending upon the amount of being that subject has,⁴⁷¹ while secondary goodness is non-absolute quality of the act itself, and depends upon the act's relationship to a number of external factors or conditions, such as the agent's nature and causal powers, the object, end, and other circumstances.⁴⁷² And this seems true for the tradition before Scotus as well, since they argue that moral goodness differs in kind from ontological goodness of the act.⁴⁷³

For Aquinas, however, moral goodness must be an absolute quality—if it converts with being—since being is an absolute quality and only differs conceptually from goodness. In fact, Aquinas speaks of moral goodness in terms of the being it provides the act. For example, in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.1, he explicitly makes this connection by claiming that “the same thing should be said about good and bad actions as it is said for good and bad in things” and that in things, “each thing has as much goodness as it has being, because good and being are convertible.” He goes on to claim:

⁴⁷¹ See chapters 2-4.

⁴⁷² *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, p.1, q.2, n.62: “dici potest quod sicut pulchritudo non est aliqua qualitas absoluta in corpore pulchro, sed est aggregatio omnium convenientium tali corpori (puta magnitudinis, figurae, et coloris), et 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...”

⁴⁷³ See Lombard, *Sentences* II, d.36, c.6, 334; q.13; Peter of Poitiers, *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis* II, L.8-19; Philip the Chancellor, *Summa De Bono*, 5-8, L: 1-80; Bonaventure, *Sentences II*, d.37, a.2, q.3; Albertus Magnus, *Sentences* II, d.40, a.1 and *Sentences* II d.41, a.1, q.2.

So therefore it should be said that every action, insofar as it has some amount of being, to that extent it will have goodness: but insofar as it lacks some plenitude of being which is appropriate for a human action, it lacks goodness and so is called bad. For example, if it lacks some determinate quality according to reason, or an appropriate location, or other [conditions] of this kind.⁴⁷⁴

Thus moral goodness is an absolute quality, and the same in kind as transcendental goodness—or more precisely, moral goodness is transcendental goodness in the category of (human) action.

This radical transformation of the traditional account is tied to his agent-centered approach to the metaphysics of morals: for Aquinas, the Aristotelian notion of perfection (i.e., completion) of the agent's potentialities is central to his understanding of goodness: something is good to the extent that it perfects its nature as the kind of thing that it is. And the more perfect something is, the more being it has. Scotus (and the tradition) would agree about the centrality of the agent's nature, but the order of importance seems to be reversed and its role reduced: the nature of the agent is only one of the many considerations the agent must consider when determining whether some act is morally good.

Three, while Aquinas and tradition agree that the object sets the bounds for what's moral, they differ on two important points: first, for interior acts, Aquinas thinks the object is the end,⁴⁷⁵ whereas the tradition claims the object is "matter of the act," or the person or thing that the act is directed towards (i.e., one's wife, neighbor, God, etc.). Second, the 'end' on the traditional account is ambiguous, but it is most often treated as a circumstance added to the act. In other words, the end does not concern the essence of the act, but does add or detract from the act's circumstantial goodness. So the end and object are identical for interior acts of will, according to

⁴⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.1: "Sic igitur dicendum est quod omnis action, in quantum habet aliquod de esse, in quantum habet de bonitate: in quantum vero deficit ei aliquid de plenitudine essendi quae debetur actioni humanae, in quantum deficit a bonitate, et sic dicitur mala: puta si deficiat ei vel determinata quantitas secundum rationem, vel debitus locus, vel aliquid huiusmodi."

⁴⁷⁵ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.19, a.1, ad.1.

Aquinas, but not for the traditional account.

What difference does all this make? Well, for the tradition, excluding Aquinas and including Scotus, the same kinds of acts will have the same amount of being and thus same amount of goodness: so killing a human will have the same amount of natural or ontological goodness in every case, whether it's a good or bad action—since it will have the same amount of being. The difference between justified killing and unjustified killing results from other factors, and those factors will determine if some further accidental goodness or badness will be added to the act. According to Aquinas, however, the same kinds of acts can have different amounts of being and thus different amounts of goodness, depending upon whether the act perfects, completes, or actualizes one's nature. So homicide and self-defense will have differing amounts of being, even though it is the same kind of act.

Second, another surprising conclusion emerges when we ask the following question in light of the preceding discussion: is willing in conformity with the divine will sufficient for an act's moral goodness? At first glance, given Scotus's proclivity toward theological voluntarism, it seems that Scotus would unequivocally answer in the affirmative, while Aquinas, given his insistence on natural law and the role human nature plays in establishing moral norms, would answer negatively. Ironically, the opposite is true: Scotus denies that conformity of an act of will with the divine will suffices for the moral goodness of an act, while Aquinas affirms it. And the reasons for each respective position stems from the discussions in these last two chapters.

Aquinas examines this topic in an article under the question concerning interior acts of willing.⁴⁷⁶ According to Aquinas, there are two kinds of voluntary acts (interior and exterior)

⁴⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.19, a.9. Question 18 of *Summa Theologiae* I-II examines the goodness and badness of acts in general; question 19 examines the interior act of the will; question 20 examines the exterior act of the will. Article 9 of question 19 asks, "Whether goodness of the will depends upon conformity to the divine will."

and each has its own object.⁴⁷⁷ For the interior act of the will, Aquinas says that the end is the object. In contrast, the object of the exterior act is “what the act has to do with.” According to him, whether or not an act is moral depends upon the object. As Martin Rhonheimer explains,

The object of an act must therefore be understood as *the end of an act of will*, and thus as a practical good, presented by reason to the will. Consequently, in the moral context, no opposition exists between the notions of “object” and “end.” The object is, precisely, a *particular type* of end, that is, that toward which, primarily and fundamentally, the act of the will from which an action originates tends.⁴⁷⁸

So the end of the interior act of the will and the object are the same. But since the ultimate end of the human will is the supreme good, God himself, an interior act of the will is morally good according to Aquinas, when it wills in conformity with the divine will.⁴⁷⁹ Aquinas argues as follows:

The goodness of the will depends upon the intention of the end. But the ultimate end of the human will is the highest good, which is God, as it has been said above. Therefore the goodness of the human will requires that it is ordered to the highest good, which is God. But this good is primarily and essentially compared to the divine will as its proper object. But that which is the first in any category is the measure and rule of all those things which are in that category. But everything is right and good insofar as it attains to its proper measure. Therefore, in order for the human will to be good, it must be conformed to the divine will.⁴⁸⁰

In contrast, Scotus answers negatively to the initial question: willing in conformity to with the divine will is insufficient for an act’s moral goodness. As we have seen, an act’s

⁴⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.6.

⁴⁷⁸ Martin Rhonheimer, “The Perspective of the Acting Person and the Nature of Practical Reason: ‘The Object of the Human Act’ in Thomistic Anthropology of Action,” in *The Perspectives of the Acting Person: Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy* ed. William F Murphy Jr. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 196.

⁴⁷⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.19, a.9.

⁴⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.19, a.9: “Bonitas voluntatis dependet ex intentione finis. Finis autem ultimus voluntatis humanae est summum bonum, quod est Deus, ut supra dictum est. Requiritur ergo ad bonitatem humanae voluntatis, quod ordinetur ad summum bonum, quod est Deus. Hoc autem bonum primo quidem et per se comparator ad voluntatem divinam ut obiectum proprium eius. Illud autem quod est primum in quodlibet genere, est mensura et ratio omnium quae sunt illius generis. Unumquodque autem rectum et bonum est, in quantum attingit ad propriam mensuram. Ergo ad hoc quod voluntas hominis sit bona, requiritur quod conformetur voluntati divinae.”

complete moral goodness depends not only on the type of object (which makes an act generically good), but also on the various circumstances that specify the act.⁴⁸¹ So in answering the current question, Scotus first insists that an act's complete goodness stems from all of the circumstances being appropriate to the agent and the act.⁴⁸²

Next, Scotus offers a “conformity of wills” thought experiment aimed at showing that willing in conformity with the divine will is insufficient for an act's moral goodness. Scotus asks us to imagine a finite intellectual being conformed to the divine will involving all the circumstances having to do with moral goodness. Scotus argues that even if the created will conformed in every respect, so that the two wills willed the same thing in the same manner, and so on for all the other circumstances, the created will would still not be good in the way that the uncreated will is good, because where the agents' natures differ, the circumstances proper to their respective actions differ.⁴⁸³

Why is this so? Recall that in forming a judgment via right reason about which actions are appropriate, Scotus insists that rational agents must know three certain things: the nature of the agent acting, the agent's causal powers, and the essential nature of the act. And in knowing these, the agent forms a judgment about which objects are appropriate, and so on. But in forming such a judgment, the agent should realize the intensity needed for the act. And here is

⁴⁸¹ See for example *Ordinatio* II, d.40; *Quodlibet* 18, a.1.

⁴⁸² *Ordinatio* I, d.48, q.un., n.3: “Secundum Dionysium De divinis nominibus 4 cap., bonum est ex causa integra, et secundum Philosophum II Ethicorum oportet simul omnes circumstantias concurrere in actu quocumque morali, ad hoc quod sit bonus moraliter; sufficit tamen defectus unius et cuiuscumque circumstantiae, ad hoc quod sit malus moraliter.”

⁴⁸³ *Ordinatio* I, d.48, n.4: “Voluntas ergo create, conformis voluntati divinae in substantia actus, sive in substantia ut circumstantionata quacumque una circumstantia, sive sit conformis sibi in omnibus circumstantiis pertinentibus ad bonitatem moris (et forte si esset sibi conformis in omnibus circumstantiis, puta quod propter idem vellent et eodem modo, et sic de omnibus aliis circumstantiis), adhuc non oporteret eam esse bonum, sicut voluntas increata est bona, quia non congruunt eadem circumstantiae actui ut actus est diversorum agentium. Non enim voluntati createe congruit ita intense velle aliquod bonum, sicut voluntati increatae, et intensio actus respectu obiecti in agente creato et increato, est differens multum in eis.”

where the difference lies: suppose God loves some appropriate object. God, by nature, is an infinite being and so his causal powers are also infinite. So the intensity of God's actions, therefore, are also infinite—since only a modal distinction exists between God's willing and the act's respective intensity. So all of God's actions are done with an equally infinite intensity; hence, whatever object God loves, he loves it with an infinitely intense affection.

But a created will is not suited to love an object as intensely as the uncreated will. In fact, it's impossible for any finite creature to have an infinitely intense willing, since such a creature would lack the respective mode of being necessary for an infinitely intense action.⁴⁸⁴ So if all of the circumstances must be appropriate to the agent and the act, and the divine will wills with an infinite intensity, it would not be appropriate for a finite rational agent to will such an act—any act—with an infinite intensity. Elsewhere, Scotus bolsters this claim by arguing that well-ordered volitions (i.e., those willed in accordance with right reason) depend not only on their object, but also on the appropriateness (*convenientia*) of the act and the object to the respective nature that has that power (i.e., the faculty), such that some acts concerning some objects might be appropriate for one will, but inappropriate for another.⁴⁸⁵ Thus the nature of the will of the agent determines which objects and circumstances are fitting to that agent.

Therefore the goodness of an act for any creature cannot simply be conformity with the divine will: appropriate circumstances for the divine will are inappropriate for any created will.

⁴⁸⁴ Recall that Scotus holds the being is predicated univocally of everything that exists—both God and creatures. Before being is divided into the ten categories, it is 'quantified' under two modes, infinite and finite. Finite being is then divided into Aristotle's ten categories which represent finite modes of being. Finite and infinite are modes of being. See *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars 1, q.3, n.113. "Ens prius dividitur in infinitum et finitum quam in decem praedicamenta, quia alterum istorum, scilicet 'finitum', est commune ad decem genera." See also *Lectura* I, D.8, pars 1, q.3 n.107.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ordinatio* II, D.43, q.un, n.3: "Quia ordinatum 'velle' non est ex solo obiecto, sed ex convenientia actus et obiecti circa illam potentiam: potest enim convenire uni voluntari aliquis actus circa aliquod obiectum, qui non convenit alii." It is clear from the context of this passage that Scotus has in mind a created nature and God.

In short, it's impossible for an agent to act in conformity with the divine will in such a way that could make his or her act morally good. Moral goodness is indexed to the agent's nature and causal powers in such a way that determines how one ought to act. Thus moral goodness cannot be reduced to willing in conformity with the divine will. So on the question of moral goodness, Aquinas is more "voluntaristic" than Scotus.

This kind of problem haunts almost every contemporary discussion of thirteenth-century philosophy: when one begins the discussion of moral goodness with Aquinas, and then considers what Scotus says, it seems as though Scotus is the progenitor of the transformation in the tradition.⁴⁸⁶ But when one places the discussion within the larger context—extending back to its origin in Peter Lombard and his followers—Scotus seems rather traditional on how an act receives its goodness, while Aquinas is the odd man out, focusing more on the agent rather than the act, and claiming that moral goodness converts with being.

Furthermore, Scotus does not seem to be a theological voluntarist about goodness at all; i.e., he is not an *axiological* voluntarist—he is not a voluntarist about *value*. Value does not directly depend upon the divine will, but derives from the complex interchange between an agent's nature and causal powers, on the one hand, the ends and circumstances right reason dictates ought to accompany an act. As we will see in a later chapter, I will argue that Scotus is a quasi-theological voluntarist about other aspects of the moral realm, most notably, contingent moral laws. But before I address that topic, one final aspect of goodness needs consideration in the next chapter: the various ways in which creatures can fall short of secondary goodness.

⁴⁸⁶ A perfect example of this is Thomas M. Osborne Jr.'s recent book, *Human Action in Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014). As Thomas Williams notes in his review of Osborne's book, "Moreover, the fact that every discussion begins with Aquinas tends to make Aquinas's views seem like the default, any deviation from which requires explanation—and explanation, inevitably, in (or over against) the terms that Aquinas himself sets." Reviewed by Thomas Williams, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 7-16-2014.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

BADNESS

As we have seen in chapters 2-6, Scotus provides a long and complex taxonomy of the various kinds of goodness. Since goodness and badness are in some sense contraries, we should expect to find an equally multifaceted account of badness that plots along the same trajectory as goodness, but as a mirror opposite. In that vein, we'll first consider the possibility of primary badness, followed by secondary badness. Because Scotus conceives of two kinds of secondary goodness—secondary natural goodness and secondary moral goodness—we should expect to find two kinds of secondary badness; namely, natural and moral. With respect to moral badness, Scotus envisions two different ways some entity can lack the appropriate suitability—contrarily and privatively. With these distinctions in mind, we can then see how some rational agent can go astray with respect to generic, moral, and meritorious goodness.

Badness and Primary Goodness

Recall that primary goodness intrinsically and essentially characterizes the thing in which it inheres; that is, as an absolute quality of a thing, there is no need to reference something outside the thing's being to explain its goodness. As such, primary goodness is a necessarily coextensive property of being, formally distinct from it. So everything that has being will have

this corresponding goodness.⁴⁸⁷ Because of this, primary goodness cannot have a privation or contrary in reality.⁴⁸⁸ As Thomas Williams explains,

Primary goodness, unlike an accident, is not something that an entity has; it is what the entity is. Whiteness (for example) is present in a white thing. Consequently, it is possible for the thing to continue to exist but to receive a contrary form. Thus, non-white can exist in reality. But primary goodness neither is present in nor bears some relation to any other thing. Therefore, there cannot be any non-good in reality. To put this point more simply, nothing can be without primary goodness, since to be without primary goodness is not to be at all.⁴⁸⁹

In other words, ontological badness does not exist. Thus there can be no contrary of primary goodness other than lack of being, and consequently, lack of existence.⁴⁹⁰

Badness and Secondary Goodness

In contrast to primary goodness, which intrinsically perfects a subject and converts with being, secondary goodness is an accidental quality, does not convert with being, and extrinsically perfects its subject.⁴⁹¹ Generally, attributions of secondary goodness refer to the suitability (*convenientia*) of a thing to something else. Consequently, (secondary) badness turns out to be lack of suitability.

Secondary Natural Badness

Badness applies to anything which lacks the suitability that ought to be there, but since

⁴⁸⁷ See *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.9; *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3.

⁴⁸⁸ *Reportatio* II, d.34, n.3 (Wadding).

⁴⁸⁹ Thomas Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: A Pseudo-Problem Dissolved," *The Modern Schoolman* 74 (1997), 75.

⁴⁹⁰ As we saw in chapter 1, this line of thinking was the well-entrenched philosophical position on the metaphysics of badness since Augustine. His argument, grounded in his privation view of evil, runs as follows: if natures were deprived of every good, they would not exist at all. But if they exist and are in principle corruptible, then they must have some degree of goodness left to be corrupted. If not, they would not exist. Since they do exist, they must be good. Hence ontological badness has no existential import. See Augustine, *Confessions* VII.2.

⁴⁹¹ *Lectura* I, d.1, pars 1, q.2, n.63; *Ordinatio* I, d. 1, q.2; *Ordinatio* II, d.40.

there are two kinds of suitability depending upon the agent's cognition (non-rational and rational), there can be two kinds of badness – natural and moral. Non-rational entities have a certain suitability of their nature to their end which they are directed towards, thereby obtaining a certain kind of secondary goodness of nature when those ends are reached.⁴⁹² When these non-rational agents fail to obtain the ends that their natures direct them towards, their “acts” would be considered secondarily naturally bad, since they lack the suitability necessary for their acts to be deemed secondarily naturally good. For example, when an acorn fails to become an oak, it would be secondarily naturally bad. Scotus does not explicitly speak of this kind of badness, but it is an obvious deduction from what he does say about secondary natural goodness, and what makes an act bad. Scotus's focus, however, concerns secondary moral badness, that is, the various ways in which rational agents' acts fall short of moral goodness.

Secondary Moral Badness

Scotus begins his account of moral badness with a distinction. He states that just as moral goodness results from the presence of suitability (between the agent, the act, the object, the end, etc.), so also moral badness results from lack of suitability. However, moral badness can be opposed to the moral goodness of an act in two distinct ways: namely, privatively and contrarily. Privative badness, according to Scotus, is the lack of something that ought to be present for the appropriate suitability. In contrast, badness as a contrary concerns the presence of something incompatible with suitability.⁴⁹³ Thomas Williams formalizes the distinction as follows:

x is privatively bad=df. for any positive property f that x has, (i) it is possible that (x has f & x is good), and (ii) x is not good.

⁴⁹² *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, nn.9-10.

⁴⁹³ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.21: “Breviter igitur: sicut bonitas moralis est integra convenientia, sic malitia moralis est disconvenientia et malitia quidem privativa disconvenientia privativa, hoc est, carentia convenientiae debitae; malitia autem contraria est disconvenientia contraria, hoc est conditio aliqua repugnans convenientiae.”

x is contrarily bad=df. there is some positive property f such that x has f, and it is not possible that (x has f & x is good).⁴⁹⁴

So according to Scotus, a human would be privatively bad if he or she lacks some goodness he or she ought to have, even without having some corresponding vice. On the other hand, a human would be contrarily bad if he or she not only lacked some perfection pertaining to suitability, but contained some imperfection incompatible with suitability itself—such as a vice.⁴⁹⁵

Scotus applies this distinction to moral acts in the following way. Recall that for an act to have complete moral goodness, the agent, her act, and her causal powers must be suitable with all of the appropriate circumstances: the end, the manner, the time, and the place. An act would be privatively bad if the act was performed in such a way that one (or some) of the circumstances were not unfitting or unsuitable, but simply lacking when they should be present. Consider a case where some moral act was performed but directed at neither a good or bad end. For example, suppose I give alms to the poor, but I don't do it for one of the many appropriate or suitable reasons, such as out of love for God or pity for the poor. But suppose further that I didn't give alms for some bad end, like vainglory. In such a case, the act would be privatively but not contrarily bad: the act would lack something needed for (circumstantial) moral goodness, but the act would not have some positive character or condition that made the act incompatible with such goodness.⁴⁹⁶ So when Pseudo-Dionysius claims that the absence of one circumstance

⁴⁹⁴ Thomas Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: A Pseudo-Problem Resolved?" 81.

⁴⁹⁵ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.18: "Uno modo, potest malitia opponi privative bonitati in actu; alio modo, contrarie; sicut enim homo dicitur malus contrarie quando habet habitum vitiosum, qui est habitus quidem positivus licet cum privatione perfectionis debita; alio modo dicitur malus privative tantum, scilicet quia caret bonitate quam deberet habere, licet non habeat habitum vitiosum contrarium positivum."

⁴⁹⁶ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 20: "Potest autem aliquis agere non cum circumstantia debita, et tamen non cum circumstantia indebita; puta quando non ordinat actum ad finem debitum, nec tamen ipsum ordinat ad finem indebitum; tunc ille actus est malus privative, non contrarie, sicut ille qui ordinatur ad finem indebitum, et ex multis talibus actibus generatur habitus consimilis in malitia, scilicet privativa, non contraria. Exemplum huius: dare eleemosynam non propter finem bonum, scilicet amorem Dei vel subventionem proximi, non tamen propter malum finem, puta vanam gloriam vel nocumentum alicuius, est actus malus privative, non tamen contrarie."

suffices to make the act bad, Scotus interprets this as pertaining to privative badness.⁴⁹⁷

In contrast, an act is contrarily bad when the act has some feature or condition that is incompatible with the required suitability. In this case, the act has some positive feature or circumstance that involves a deformity, making it impossible for the act to be suitable. For example, suppose I give alms to the poor for a bad end: I give alms to the poor because I want people to see what a generous person I am, and I want them to praise me for it. If so, I have not only performed an act that lacks a suitable end; I've performed an act for an inappropriate end—vainglory.⁴⁹⁸

Thus moral acts can go awry in two distinct ways, either by lacking some suitable feature needed to make the act completely good, or by having some feature incompatible with the act's being suitable. With this distinction in mind, we are now in position to see how moral acts at each of the corresponding levels—generic, moral (circumstantial), and meritorious—can be bad.

Generic Badness. Generic goodness, as we have seen, results when the proper suitability relation obtains between the agent, the act, and the proper object. When the object is appropriate (*conveniens*) to the agent, his causal powers, and the type of act, the act is generically good; when the object is inappropriate, the act is generically bad. According to Scotus, every act has an object, and thus every act must be either generically good or generically bad: “There can be no act without an object, and the object must be either appropriate or inappropriate to the act: and so it is necessary that either a fitting object makes the act generically

⁴⁹⁷ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 20: “De malitia privativa loquitur Dionysius quod quicumque defectus particularis cuiuscumque circumstantiae necessario requisitae reddit actum sic malum.”

⁴⁹⁸ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 20: “Sed malus contrarie non est nisi habeat circumstantiam positivam habentem aliquam deformitatem.”

good, or an inappropriate object makes the act generically bad.”⁴⁹⁹

Given Scotus’s insistence that every act has either an appropriate or inappropriate object, it is easy to see why there can be no merely *privately* bad generic acts, but only contrarily bad generic acts: in order for a generic act to be privately bad, it would have to lack an object, which Scotus sees as impossible. If an act has an object, it’s going to be either appropriate or inappropriate; if the latter, then it is not merely privately bad, but contrarily bad. And so there can be no middle ground.⁵⁰⁰ Thus every *moral* act will either be generically good or contrarily bad. In other words, no generic act can be indifferent.

In some cases it’s fairly easy to see Scotus’s point. Take the act of having sex: given who I am as the agent acting, and the type of act, the appropriate object is initially obvious—my wife. And since I’ve promised fidelity to her through a sacred act of marriage, Scotus suggests that all other objects for the act in question would be inappropriate. In other words, there is no middle ground: the act of sex is either generically good—when the object is my wife—or generically bad—when the object is anyone else. If good, the act can be further evaluated in light of the circumstances in which the act was carried out—and the same if it were bad.

But in other cases, it’s hard to see how this could be true. Take the act of eating, whose nature is meant to restore energy: when the object of the act is healthy food, such as a piece of fruit, there seems to be no problem. And when the object is a rock, it’s obvious that the object is unsuitable. But what about cases where the object is in fact food, but a type of food that at least occasionally seems unsuitable, such as cake or a bag of potato chips? One cannot say that such

⁴⁹⁹ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 36. “quia actus non potest esse quin transeat super obiectum, et illud necessario est conveniens vel disconveniens actui: et ita necessario actus bonus ex genere, ex obiecto conveniente, vel actus malus ex genere, ex obiecto disconveniente.”

⁵⁰⁰ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n. 36: “Sed malitia ex genere, contrarie accepta et privative, convertuntur, et ideo sicut inter privationem et habitum immediatum non est medium, ita bonum ex genere et malum ex genere sunt contraria immediate.”

acts are neither suitable nor unsuitable, since Scotus explicitly ruled out that possibility because all acts have objects and every object must be suitable or unsuitable. But in certain cases, this seems difficult to substantiate: take some junk food, that at certain times seems suitable and at other times unsuitable. How can we find Scotus's claims plausible? I see three possible ways.

One possibility would be to limit the scope of moral acts and thus moral objects in such a way as to rule out the possibility of objects that seem neither fitting nor unfitting. This solution does have some support in Scotus, as he does state that not every act is a moral act. For an act to be moral, it will depend on the *type* of object.⁵⁰¹ So tying one's shoes would be an act (with an end), but not a *moral* act—since 'one's shoes' isn't a moral object. Here, the object doesn't seem to involve morality at all.⁵⁰² In any case, some objects bring an act under the heading of moral, but others do not. So all acts have an object, but some objects may make the act non-moral, and thus Scotus's claim that every object is either fitting or unfitting would not apply.

At first glance, this seems to stave off the initial worry about all generic acts having either suitable or unsuitable objects, since some objects do not bring the act into the moral realm. And at least initially, eating seems to be a non-moral example. So eating cake seems to be non-moral, and thus Scotus's claim about all objects being either suitable or unsuitable (and thus all acts being generically good or bad) seems to make sense, but only applies to those objects that make the act a moral act. But what about overeating? Or obsessively tying and retying one's shoes three hundred times a day? It seems like any act could be evaluated morally if the object and act are done in some inordinate manner.

Another plausible suggestion comes from Thomas Williams. He suggests that junk food

⁵⁰¹ *Ordinatio* II, d.43, q.un., n.3; *Ordinatio* III, part 1, q.2; and *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.14.

⁵⁰² We should also distinguish non-moral acts from non-human acts; where the latter are not done in conjunction of reason and will, such as scratching one's beard or blinking.

is sometimes a suitable object (e.g., birthday cake on one's birthday), and at other times unsuitable (say, when one is morbidly obese and it's not a special occasion). He infers from this that "*convenientia* corresponds roughly to permissibility" of the object; namely, when some object is *suitable*, it is *permissible* for one to partake in it.⁵⁰³ However, permissibility seems too weak, since Scotus emphatically states that every object is either suitable or unsuitable, and Scotus's use of 'suitable' implies some object *should* be pursued. Suitability, as I have argued in a previous chapter, is a normative relation between two entities, so that they *ought* to be conjoined in that way, rather than merely the permissibility or possibility that the two entities may go together, i.e., that they are compatible. So reducing suitability to permission and unsuitability to impermissibility seems too weak to capture all that Scotus means by 'suitable.' However, Williams's suggestion that certain foods would be sometimes suitable and at other times unsuitable seems right. The question concerns *how* we could derive this from the conditions present in a generically good act: the nature of the act, the agent's causal powers, the type of act, and the object. That leads us to our third possibility.

Finally, if we take Scotus's claims about the suitability of the agent's *nature* with the act a bit more broadly than simply its *prima facie* reading—i.e., an Aristotelian notion of secondary substance⁵⁰⁴—but extend the account to include the agent's personal history as an agent, or we take "the object" a bit more narrowly construed, then this might help explain the seemingly tough cases. For instance, if an agent has an overall high fitness level, is in good shape, the object of a slice of pizza might be an appropriate object for him; whereas if the agent was morbidly obese, even a slice of pizza might be an inappropriate object. So in this type of case,

⁵⁰³ Thomas Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: A Pseudo-Problem Resolved?" 81-83.

⁵⁰⁴ See J. Ackrill, *Aristotle: Categories and De Interpretatione* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 74-76 for the prominent interpretation of a substance as a nature or essence.

every object could be construed as morally appropriate or inappropriate—if enough background detail about the acting agent is taken into consideration.

It's unclear to me, however, whether Scotus might have had something like this in mind. On the one hand, when medievals use the term 'nature,' it is almost always a technical term referring to the *kind* of thing something is. Thus to broaden the concept to include one's personal history as a moral agent, seems to be taking too much liberty on the notion of "nature." This is especially true of Scotus, who as far as I can tell, always uses 'nature of the agent' in the moral context to differentiate various species of entities and what follows from their respective natures: non-rational, human, angelic, and divine, respectively.⁵⁰⁵

On the other hand, however, precedent for this sort of thing can be found in Aristotle's discussion of the virtues. Virtues, according to Aristotle, are states of character. Their role: avoid both excess and deficiency in the passions. How does one accomplish this? Reason identifies the mean between the excess and deficiency—*a mean that is relative to the individual and the situation*.⁵⁰⁶ Ed Viesturs climbing of Everest without supplemental oxygen, for example, requires a mean consisting in a much higher caloric intake than my average Saturday watching The University of South Florida lose its regionally uninteresting college football game. So what's an excess to me is a deficiency to Ed. So given Ed's nature as a world-class mountaineer, pizza (and lots of it) may be appropriate to restore his energy, but inappropriate to restore mine because I'm too fat and don't exercise enough. So while there is precedent for this sort of thing, Scotus doesn't cite Aristotle as support, nor does he ever gesture in this direction.

Instead, medievals—including Scotus—often used the description of the *object* to take

⁵⁰⁵ See for example, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.8-14; *Ordinatio* I, d.48, n.4; *Ordinatio* II, D.43, q.un, n.3; *Ordinatio* II d.6 q.2, nn.52-52.

⁵⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, 1106a24-1106b6.

such particular features into account; in other words, they would describe the object in such a way that its description includes enough particular details in order to overcome these types of problems. So take the morally bad act of having sex: the morally inappropriate object would not be “a woman,” but more narrowly described as “someone who is not *my* spouse.” This seems to escape the worry, when we define objects with enough specific details so as to make every one of them appropriate or inappropriate. For instance, cake could be an appropriate object when described in more detail, such as ‘a *slice* of birthday cake.’ In contrast, cake would be an inappropriate object when the description included other details, such as ‘an *entire* cake’ or ‘my fourth slice of cake.’

But then the problem seems to concern the determination of which details become morally relevant without deciding such in an *ad hoc* fashion; for instance, why does “one who is not my spouse” morally matter as an inappropriate object of sex, rather than “a hot redhead”? What facts do we include, and which ones should be left out? In one sense, this highlights the ambiguity of these descriptions for the moral realm: precisely how one describes the object can alter the act’s evaluation. This isn’t merely a problem for Scotus, but actually haunts every medieval discussion of the object. In any case, Scotus sees no room for morally indifferent generic acts: either the object is appropriate or inappropriate. Why he thinks this is the case is somewhat peculiar. His focus, however, is more appropriately on moral and meritorious actions—good and bad.

Moral Badness. In the case of moral/circumstantial/specific goodness, Scotus says that these acts can be either privatively or contrarily bad. Acts are privatively morally (circumstantially) bad when the act has generic goodness, but lacks some of the circumstances right reason dictates ought to be present for the act’s complete goodness. Suppose I give alms to

the poor (a generically good act), and I give the person an appropriate amount, and at an appropriate time, but I do so for neither an appropriate or inappropriate end.

For example, suppose I'm walking down the street, deep in thought about univocity of being and the shortcomings of Radical Orthodoxy. I'm so caught up in whether being can be predicated univocally of God and creatures (and whether Scotus's view on the matter actually ruined the world as we know it), that I hear a poor person asking for help, but I'm not truly paying attention to her. In my quandary about the meaning of Milbank's latest tirade against onto-theology, I hand the penurious person twenty bucks and continue merrily on my way. In such a case, I did not give her money for an appropriate end—say, because I felt pity on her or because I love God. But I also didn't give her money for a bad end, like vainglory. In fact, neither an appropriate nor inappropriate end ever factored into my consideration.⁵⁰⁷ In these types of cases, the act in question is privatively bad.

In contrast, an act is contrarily morally (circumstantially) bad when the act has certain circumstances or conditions that are incompatible with the act's being suitable, like when the act has a bad end, or manner, or time, or location. Consider the example of giving alms to the poor for the sake of vainglory: the end or goal of my act would be incompatible with what right reason ought to judge appropriate, namely, doing such an act for a good end, like pity for a fellow human, or love for God. But 'ends' are not the only circumstances that can make an otherwise generically good act contrarily morally bad. Recall the example from the previous chapter: the

⁵⁰⁷ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.37: "Malitia privative accepta in secundo modo, et contrarie, non convertuntur. Potest enim aliquis actus carere circumstantia requisita, ad perfectionem actus virtuosum, et tamen non elici cum circumstantia repugnante, quae redderet illum actum 'viciosum': puta, si det eleemosynam pauperi non ex circumstantia finis (quia non considerat), nec secundum alias circumstantias requisitas ad actum virtuosum; iste tamen actus non est bonus vel virtuosus moraliter, nec tamen malus contrarie, quia non ordinatur in finem indebitum, sicut faceret qui daret eleemosynam pauperi propter vanam gloriam vel propter aliquem alium finem indebitum."

act of going to church (generically good act) out of love for God (an appropriate end), but I did so by drinking bourbon, eating chips, and listening to Bad Religion on the roof, rather than partaking in Mass. In this case, I not only lack some circumstance needed to make the act (morally) circumstantially good, such as being inside the church and consuming the transubstantiated body and blood of Christ, but the act has characteristics that are fundamentally contrary to that act—like being on the roof and drinking bourbon. In this case, my act is contrarily bad.

What do we call a generically good act—such as giving alms—that is privatively bad; that is, a generically good act that lacks some circumstances needed for moral/circumstantial goodness? According to Scotus, this is the definition of an indifferent moral act: while it is in the genus or category of morals, it lacks the individuating circumstances that stamp out differences between good and bad into its various moral species (as is the case when an act has a good end or a bad end).⁵⁰⁸ So acts of this kind are generically good, privatively bad, and morally indifferent.

Collapsing privative badness and morally indifferent acts, however, seems to be a misstep on Scotus's part. By equating privative badness with morally indifferent acts, Scotus seems to be saying that these kinds of acts are in the genus of a morally good act, but lack some specifying circumstances to make them completely morally good, and so they are *neither* morally good nor morally bad. But why not simply say that in lacking some of the requisite circumstances (being privatively bad), the act is morally good but not completely so: for example, suppose I give alms to the poor (generically good) in such a way that all of the circumstances right reason dictates were met, save for one: suppose I give the poor person money, but not enough of it. In this case,

⁵⁰⁸ Thomas Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: A Pseudo-Problem Resolved?" 73-94.

my act lacks an appropriate manner. Assume for example, the amount of money to suffice right reason's demand concerning the manner of this particular act is twenty dollars, but I only offer the poor person fifteen. In cases like this, Scotus says that the act is a morally evaluable act, in the genus of good acts, and yet is neither morally good nor morally bad—it's indifferent or neutral.

A more plausible explanation would be that the act is in fact *morally* good—since it is giving alms—but just not *completely* morally good, because the manner in which it was elicited was lacking what was appropriate. Scotus, however, insists that acts of this kind are morally neutral, rather than partially morally good. Yet given the complexities of human action and the circumstances that surround them, and the fact the humans rarely fulfill such a high standard for moral goodness (i.e., all of the circumstances being perfectly met), in reducing privately bad actions to indifferent actions, Scotus's position seems to transfer an entire swath of human action into the realm of indifferent; i.e., into the realm where acts cannot be evaluated as morally good or morally bad, nor can such acts be praised or blamed. Indeed, on such a model, it seems like most human acts turn out to be morally indifferent, since it's rarely the case that we meet right reason's stringent standards for perfect moral goodness. Thus a reduction of private badness to moral indifference makes too many human acts neither morally good nor bad.

But even so, it may be helpful to contrast Scotus's account of moral indifference with Aquinas. According to Scotus, a morally indifferent act is a particular act that lacks some necessary circumstance to make the act completely good, such as an end. In contrast, Aquinas rejects the view that individual or particular (i.e., concrete) acts can be morally indifferent. For without an end, Aquinas doesn't think the act is properly human and thus morally evaluable. On Aquinas's account, while it is possible for *kinds* of acts to be indifferent, it is impossible for

particular concrete acts to be so. The difference stems primarily from Aquinas's insistence that every human act has an end.⁵⁰⁹ So consider once again the otherwise good act giving alms to the poor: suppose I performed such an act in a way that met all of right reason's demands, save for one—the end. Suppose I gave alms to a poor person but I didn't deliberate about why I gave alms. I just instinctively responded to the request for aid. In these types of cases, Scotus surmises that the (particular) act was generically good and morally indifferent because I didn't act for the sake of a suitable end.

In contrast, Aquinas would deny the possibility of the entire situation, and thus deny the possibility of particular moral act's being neutral, mainly because he thinks that every human act is chosen for an end that is either reasonable or unreasonable.⁵¹⁰ In contrast, Scotus argues that humans can act in morally evaluable ways, even when failing to deliberate fully on the appropriate course of action—and one way to fail at a fully deliberate action would be to fail to deliberate about the end.⁵¹¹ Thus Scotus accepts that moral acts can be “neutral, singular [particular], and indifferent,”⁵¹² while Aquinas denies the possibility and only recognizes the

⁵⁰⁹ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.8-9; *Sentences II*, d.40, q.1, a.5; *De Malo*, q.2, a.4-5.

⁵¹⁰ See Osborne Jr., *Human Action in Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, & William of Ockham*, 192-193. Aquinas emphatically makes this claim in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.18, a.9: “Dicendum quod contingit quanoque aliquem actum esse indifferentem secundum speciem, qui tamen est bonus vel malus in individuo consideratus. Et hoc idea, quia actus moralis, sicut dictum est, non solum habet bonitatem ex obiecto, a quo habet speciem; sed etiam ex circumstantiis, quae sunt quasi quaedam accidentia; sicut aliquod convenit individuo hominis secundum accidentia individualia, quod non convenit homini secundum rationem speciei. Et oportet quod quilibet individualis actus habeat aliquam circumstantiam per quam trahatur ad bonum vel malum, ad minus ex parte intentionis finis. Cum enim rationis sit ordinare, actus a ratione deliberativa procedens, si non sit ad debitum finem ordinatus, ex hoc ipso repugnat rationi, et habet rationem mali. Si vero ordinetur ad debitum finem, convenit cum ordine rationis: unde habet rationem boni. Necessae est autem quod vel ordinetur, vel non ordinetur ad debitum finem. Unde necesse est omnem actum hominis a deliberativa rationem procedentem, in individuo consideratum, bonum esse vel malum.”

Si autem non procedit a ratione deliberativa, sed ex quadam imaginatione, sicut cum aliquis fricat barbam, vel movet manum aut pedem; talis actus non est, proprie loquendo, moralis vel humanus; cum hoc habeat actus a ratione. Et sic erit indifferens, quasi extra genus moralium actuum existens.”

⁵¹¹ See *Lectura II*, d.41, q.un., n.10 and *Reportatio II*, d.41, q.un, n.2 (Wadding).

⁵¹² *Reportatio II*, d.41, q.un, n.2 (Wadding).

existence of indifferent acts in terms of abstract kinds of acts (e.g., having sex, giving alms, etc.). To further complicate things, Scotus would agree that *abstract* kinds of acts could be indifferent, but as soon as an act is conjoined with an object, resulting in a particular concrete generic act, that act must be generically good or bad, because every object is either suitable or unsuitable, and thus no generic act can be indifferent. So while every act must be generically good or bad, particular moral acts could be morally indifferent, according to Scotus.

Meritorious Badness. For an act to be meritoriously good, recall that the act must first be generically and morally good, but also must be elicited with the principle of merit—charity—and accepted by God as deserving of reward. How might an act go bad here? First and foremost, because of the hierarchical structure of moral acts in which each grade of goodness presupposes the previous grade, we should expect to see the same thing with badness, so that, any generically or circumstantially bad act is sinful, and thus will be a meritoriously bad act—i.e., God assigns the act for demerit. So any act that is contrarily bad at the generic or circumstantial levels will be meritoriously bad as well.⁵¹³

But what about acts that are generically and circumstantially morally good? How might they fall short of meritorious goodness? According to Scotus, an act that is morally (circumstantially) good can be *privatively* meritoriously bad when the act meets the conditions for moral goodness (i.e., the kind of act is in fact appropriate to the agent, his nature, his causal powers, and be performed with an appropriate object in mind, for one or many good ends, in the right manner, time, and place), but that act wasn't elicited from the virtue of charity. In such a case, the act would be generically and morally good, but privately meritoriously bad—in other

⁵¹³ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.39: “Si habet actum malum secundo modo, planum est quod ille est demeritorius (semper enim malitia prior infert secundam, non e converso, et secunda tertiam, non e converso). Si autem est malus, et habet actum malum secundo modo, peccat illo actu.”

words, the act would be indifferent to merit, since it wasn't chosen in some way that contradicts merit either.⁵¹⁴

For example, suppose someone gave alms to the poor in such a way that all of the circumstances were appropriate—say, the correct amount, at the right time and place, and out of pity for the poor person (an appropriate end), but he didn't elicit the act from the theological virtue of charity. In this case, the act is indifferent to meritorious goodness since the act lacks the appropriate conditions for merit. This situation differs from the same act done for an end that is incompatible with charity itself—say, hatred of God. In the latter case, the act would be *contrarily* meritoriously bad rather than *privately* meritoriously bad, because it not only wasn't elicited from *caritas*, but was chosen from a state incompatible with it. In the case of the former, the morally good act lacks charity privately but not contrarily, and so these types of acts can be indifferent at the meritorious level.

Scotus also notes another way a class of acts could be neutral with respect to merit and demerit: namely, those acts elicited in the state of innocence. In a state where grace is unnecessary, a person could have acted in such a manner that fulfills all of the requirements for moral (circumstantial) goodness, and yet act in a way that was neither contrary to merit nor in accordance with it:

Similarly, not only on account of neutrality of the act in the second way can an act be neutral in the third way (that is, neither good nor bad taken as contraries), but on account of the disposition or state of the agent. For example, if someone in a state of innocence were to act rightly without grace, such an act would have been perfectly good in the second way [i.e., morally good], and not in the third way [i.e., meritoriously good], because the person

⁵¹⁴ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.38: “Malitia vero tertio modo, contrarie et privative accepta, non convertuntur, quia actus potest esse malus privative (ita quod non eliciatur ex gratia), et tamen non esset demeritorius: quod patet ex secundo modo membro, quia actus qui est bonus simpliciter in genere moris, non est meritorius, et tamen non omnis talis actus est demeritorius et ita tam in secundo membro quam hic, videtur poni ‘actus indifferens’, qui licet sit malus privative, non tamen contrarie (quia indifferens), et de hac indifferentia dicetur alias.”

did not have the principle of merit [i.e., charity], but neither was the act contrarily bad.⁵¹⁵ However, Scotus is quick to suggest that in our present state—post fall—only one kind of neutral act exists between meritorious goodness and badness: namely, circumstantially good acts that were not elicited in accordance with the virtue of charity. Scotus grounds this claim in the following reasoning: each person is either in a state of grace or a state of sin. If in a state of grace, and the act is morally (circumstantially) good, then Scotus surmises that grace will also incline the agent to elicit the act in question, and so, the act will not only be morally good, but meritoriously so. If however, a person in a state of grace performs a morally bad action, then the act is also meritoriously bad (since contrary badness in the moral grade results in badness and the meritorious grade).⁵¹⁶

On the other hand, if a person in a state of sin performs a morally (circumstantially) bad act, the act will be sinful and thus meritoriously bad as well. In contrast, if a person in a state of sin performs an act that is morally (circumstantially) good, such an act would be privatively meritoriously bad, but not contrarily so, and thus neutral to merit and demerit—and consequently a meritoriously indifferent act. So in this passage (*Ordinatio* II, d.7), Scotus suggests that the only meritoriously indifferent act results from a person outside a state of grace who performs a morally (circumstantially) good act, because such an act is privatively meritoriously bad—it lacks elicitation in accordance with the principle of merit, but isn't incompatible with it. Hence

⁵¹⁵ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.38: “Similiter, non solum propter neutritatem actus in secundo modo, potest esse neuter in tertio modo (id est nec bonus nec malus, accipiendo ista contrarie), sed propter dispositionem ipsius operantis: puta, si in statu innocentiae—absque gratia—aliquis recte egisset, fuisset quidem ille actus perfecte bonus secundo modo et non bonus tertio modo, quia non habuit principium merendi nec fuit malus contrarie.”

⁵¹⁶ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.39: “Forte tamen in statu isto non est aliquis actus neuter inter bonum et malum sumpta tertio modo, nisi in uno casu, quando scilicet actus est bonus ex circumstantia, ad quem tamen non inclinatur caritas. Et ratio est, quia modo quilibet vel est in gratia vel in peccato. Si in gratia, et habet actum bonum secundo modo, ergo gratia inclinatur ad illud et ita est meritorius; si habet actum malum secundo modo, planum est quod ille est demeritorius (semper enim malitia prior infert secundam, non e converso, et secunda tertiam, non e converso).”

only persons in a state of sin that perform a morally good act can elicit an act indifferent with respect to meritorious goodness.⁵¹⁷ In the case of people either in a state of grace or sin who perform a contrarily morally bad act, failure at the moral level results in blame at the meritorious level.

All of this makes sense, save for one claim: namely, that persons in a state of grace who perform morally good actions always do so in accordance with the principle of merit—charity—and thus receive merit. Isn't it possible, however, for someone in a state of grace, who has the theological virtue of charity, to perform a morally (circumstantially) good act that wasn't elicited from the principle of merit, but also wasn't contrary to such a principle? In such a case, it seems possible for someone in a state of grace to perform a meritoriously indifferent act. In this passage, Scotus seems to discount that possibility: the presence of charity as a virtue in someone in a state of grace who performs a morally good act will ensure the performance of an act that merits reward.

In other passages, however, where he specifically addresses the topic of indifferent acts, Scotus provides an answer that seems to suggest a person in a state of grace can perform a morally good act that is privatively but not contrarily bad, and thus perform a meritoriously indifferent act. For example, in *Ordinatio* II, d. 41, Scotus first argues that merit results from a proper relationship with an end that stems from charity in the agent. As Scotus conceives it, an act can be referred to an end through the virtue of charity in three distinct ways: actually, virtually, and habitually. An act is referred to an end through charity 'actually' when the agent is actually thinking of the end charity directs one toward, and loves it. Charity 'virtually' refers an

⁵¹⁷ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un., n.39: "Si autem est malus [in peccato], et habet actum bonum secundo modo, ille non est bonus tertio modo nec malus tertio modo: igitur neuter, quantum ad bonum et malum ut sunt 'contraria' tertio modo, nec tamen neuter loquendo de secundo modo."

act to an end when from knowledge of, and love for the end, the agent wills some means to achieve the end—even if the agent no longer thinks about the final end that the means were willed for. An agent ‘habitually’ is referred to an end through charity when virtue remains in the agent as a habit, even if the agent is not acting upon it.⁵¹⁸

According to Scotus, when charity in the will actually refers the act to the end, the act is meritoriously good. When charity in the will virtually refers the act to the end, as when some means is chosen for that end, it is sufficiently probable the act is meritoriously good.⁵¹⁹ In the third case however, Scotus admits the possibility of someone in a state of grace (i.e., a person who has the theological virtue of charity) acting in such a way that his action is morally good and yet not meritoriously so, because one didn’t act on the virtue of charity.

For example, suppose that I’m in a state of grace and thus have the theological virtue of charity. Furthermore, suppose I once again go out for a walk in order to ponder univocity of being, when I encounter someone begging for money. I’m fairly caught up—and fed up—with Radical Orthodoxy, such that my thinking isn’t as clear as normal. But I see the person in need, and quickly taking into account the various circumstances, I give the person twenty bucks and continue on my way. But suppose this time, in the midst of my quandary about Milbank, I see the sad look on the beggars’ face and feel pity on her. In that moment, I act for the sake of a morally good end—pity for my fellow humanity. While such an act is morally (circumstantially)

⁵¹⁸ *Ordinatio* II, d.41, q.un., n.10: “Potest autem actus referri ex caritate in finem debitum, tripliciter: uno modo actualiter, sicut cogitans actualiter de fine, diligit illum et vult aliquid propter illum; alio modo virtualiter, sicut ex cognitione et dilectione finis deventum est ad volitionem huius entis ad finem, puta ex cognitione et dilectione Dei, pertinente ad portionem superiorem, portio inferior condiderat talem actum (puta poenitentiae) esse assumendum, et postea illum exsequitur volendo, non tamen tunc referendo in finem, quia nec tunc actualiter cognoscitur nec diligitur; tertio modo habitualiter, puta si omnis actus referibilis in finem, manens cum caritate quae est principium referendi, dicatur referri habitualiter.” See also *Quodlibet* 17, a.2, n.[5] 12.

⁵¹⁹ *Ordinatio* II, d.41, q.un., n.12: “De duobus primis, certum est quod primus actus est meritorius et satis probabile est de secundo.”

good, I did not act from the co-causes of free choice and charity, but only from the former, and so my act was not directed at God. In other words, I did not act on the virtue of charity and out of love for God as one of my reasons for giving alms. Instead, I did it out of pity. But notice that the act wasn't elicited from some dubious motive, nor did it contain circumstances contrary to it being a morally good act.

In this type of case—where the person is in a state of grace and has the virtue of charity and doesn't act on it, but nevertheless acts in a morally upright manner—Scotus sees the possibility for a meritoriously indifferent act. The reason for this, according to Scotus, is twofold. First, the act wasn't sinful. Second, God does not require every act by a person in a state of grace to be directed at him, actually or virtually. But without being directed at God actually or virtually by means of charity, the act cannot be meritoriously good.⁵²⁰ Hence it is a meritoriously indifferent act. So this latter passage seems to suggest, contra Scotus's account in *Ordinatio* II, d.7, that individuals in a state of grace can elicit meritoriously indifferent acts (which would be privatively but not contrarily meritoriously bad).

Conclusion

Scotus's account of badness can be summarized succinctly as follows: since primary goodness converts with being, anything that has being has primary goodness. Thus ontological badness cannot exist. Since Scotus defines secondary goodness as suitability, secondary badness reduces to unsuitability, both natural and moral. In the natural realm, when some entity fails to

⁵²⁰ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, d.41, q.un., n.14: "Secundum dictum modum probabile videtur ponere tales actus indifferentes, quia non habent sufficientem rationem malitiae pertinentem ad peccatum veniale, quia possibile est nullam deordinationem esse in eis quae sufficiat ad rationem peccati; non enim tenetur homo, nec tentione necessitates (contra quam sit peccatum mortale), semper referre omnem actum suum in Deum actualiter vel virtualiter, quia Deus non obligavit nos ad hoc."

obtain those suitable ends latent within their natures, they would have a secondary natural badness.

In contrast, rational agents are suited to judge which acts and objects are appropriate to them as rational agents. Agents can fail to do so in two ways, contrarily and privately. Since generically good acts are ones in which the agent judges the object as appropriate, generically bad acts are acts with an inappropriate object. Since every act has an object, every act is either generically good or generically bad—in the contrary sense. Acts of rational agents are privatively morally bad when they lack a circumstance needed for them to be suitable; acts are contrarily morally bad when they include some inordinate circumstance incompatible with suitability. Morally indifferent acts are generically good acts that are privately bad.

Finally, acts are meritoriously bad in the contrary sense when either (1) they are morally bad or (2) when they contain some feature that is incompatible with the principle of merit—such as hatred of God. Acts are privatively meritoriously bad when they are morally good, but not elicited by the virtue of charity, either because the agent is not in a state of grace, or because the agent is in a state of grace but didn't act upon the infused virtue. As such, this latter possibility allows for a class of acts that are morally good but meritoriously indifferent.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
**DIVINE COMMANDS, NATURAL LAW,
AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MORAL NORMS**

I begin this chapter with a question: was Duns Scotus a theological voluntarist? Well, that seems to depend upon who one asks. On the one hand, some scholars place him securely within the divine command tradition. For example, Anthony Quinton summarizes Scotus's ethics as follows: "Things are good because God wills them and not vice versa."⁵²¹ According to Quinton, Scotus believes that God does not command something because it already has intrinsic moral value, but rather moral value derives solely from the command of God itself.⁵²²

On the other hand, some scholars find *no* voluntaristic tendencies in Scotus's ethics. Efreem Bettoni, for example, rightly notes that many aspects of Scotus's thought have been misinterpreted, especially the "relationship between the divine will and created things."⁵²³ This misconception centers upon the belief that Scotus thought that the divine will arbitrarily and capriciously determined moral value: God can will whatever he wants, and whatever he wills is right, true, and good, etc. In response, Bettoni offers a fundamental principle of Scotus's philosophy: *Deus est rationabilissime et ordinatissime volens*: "God wills in a most reasonable

⁵²¹ Anthony Quinton, "British Philosophy," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, 1967), 1:373.

⁵²² For a similar approach, see also Janine Marie Idziak, *Divine Commands and Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1979), 51-54.

⁵²³ Efreem Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1961), 160.

and orderly manner.” Because of this well-attested principle, God never wills capriciously, since *operari sequitur esse* (action flows out of essence). Consequently, Bettoni argues that God’s nature determines moral value, and as such, God’s *will* never determines what is good or right. Rather, things are willed by God because of their goodness grounded in divine goodness.

Mary Beth Ingham and Allan Wolter also conclude that Scotus is not a theological voluntarist.⁵²⁴ They come to this conclusion by focusing on the role right reason plays in the moral goodness of acts: since moral goodness involves a complex relationship between the agent, the act, right reason’s judgment, the object, and the various circumstances that specify the act, the act’s moral worth clearly does not derive from some divine willing or command.

Suffice it to say, antithetical interpretations of Scotus’s ethics exist. On the one hand, Quinton offers strong divine command theory or theological voluntarism—whereby God’s willing or commanding grounds the value of actions. On the other hand, Bettoni, Ingham, and Wolter offer a non-voluntaristic interpretation of Scotus’s ethics. One problem, I suspect, in adjudicating the conflict between these rival interpretations, is that various scholars have not been clear on what they mean by the various terms, and specifically how those terms relate to Scotus’s moral theory. So, let’s begin with some clarificatory remarks.

Divine Dependence

At its most basic level, a theological voluntarist theory of ethics claims that *morality* in some sense *depends* upon some type of *divine act*. According to Philip Quinn, the general claim that morality depends upon God must address three issues:

⁵²⁴ See Thomas M. Osborne Jr., *Love of Self and Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 174; Mary Beth Ingham, “Scotus and the Moral Order,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 67 (1993): 127-150, “Letting Scotus Speak for Himself,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 173-216; Allan B. Wolter, “Introduction,” *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 3-29.

(DC) Moral status M stands in dependency relation D to divine act A .⁵²⁵

Let's call this the 'Dependency Claim' (DC). All forms of theological voluntarism accept (DC). Yet differing solutions to M , D , and A in our above schema generate different ethical theories, depending upon what exactly M ranges over, in what way M depends upon A , and the nature of A itself. Let's consider each of these briefly, as clarity about these various distinctions should illuminate the nature and extent of Scotus's voluntarism.

How shall we understand moral status M in our above schema? There are two options: either M ranges over the entire class of moral statuses, or M ranges over only a subset of moral statuses. Let us say that a theory is an unrestricted DC (U-DC) if and only if *all* moral statuses fall under M . On the other hand, a theory is a restricted version of DC (R-DC) if and only if M only ranges over a subset of the class of moral statuses. Thus a U-DC claims that *all* moral statuses M stand in dependency relation D to A ; while the R-DC makes the more modest claim that only a subset of evaluative/moral notions fall under dependency relation D to A .⁵²⁶ One prominent way to restrict DC usually involves the restriction to only obligation-type properties.⁵²⁷ If M ranges over only a subset of moral statuses, then we'll need to specify which

⁵²⁵ Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, 2nd edition, ed. Hugh LaFollette (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 82.

⁵²⁶ Mark Murphy, "Theological Voluntarism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/>>.

⁵²⁷ See Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Commands and the Social Nature of Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987), 262-275; *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231-276 (esp. 250-251); Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory," in Janine Marie Idziak, *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 305-325. I should note that while both Adams and Quinn wish to restrict morality to obligation type properties, Adams provides a metaethical account, while Quinn rejects a metaethical divine command theory in favor of a normative divine command theory. At one time, Quinn also defended an axiological account, where moral goodness and badness also depended upon God. See Philip L. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 67-73.

ones and why. As I'll argue below, this is crucial to understanding Scotus's theological voluntarism.

Supposing morality depends upon some divine act A , I see two relevant options for the type of act: divine willing and divine commanding.⁵²⁸ One might initially protest that these two options amount to the same thing; however, it seems at least initially possible that God might will something he doesn't command (e.g., a supererogatory act), or even command something he doesn't will (e.g., Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac). So let's keep these types of divine acts separate. Let us say that some moral status M stands in dependency relation D to a divine command if and only if the divine command necessarily determines the moral status of M . So, if M were unrestricted, then all moral concepts would depend for their value on whether or not God commands such. If M were restricted, then whatever that subset of moral concepts M contains, that set would depend for its value on God's command. In either case, God's commands could be construed along the lines of speech-acts that do not merely express God's intentions but are performative utterances that create an obligation on the part of the hearer. In contrast, let us say that some moral status M stands in dependency relation D to a divine willing if and only if the divine will necessarily determines the moral status of M . If M were unrestricted, then all moral statuses would depend for their value on the divine will. If M were restricted, then whatever that subset of moral statuses M contains, that set would depend for its value on God's will deciding.

Finally, in what relation D does moral status M stand to the divine act A ? In other words, what sort of dependence does the moral realm (or some subset of it) bear to God? In recent

⁵²⁸ Robert M. Adams is a prominent defender of a (restricted) divine command interpretation, while Mark C. Murphy and Philip Quinn favor a divine will interpretation. See Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 258-270; and "Divine Commands and the Social Nature of Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987), 262-275; Murphy, "Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (1998), 3-27. Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," 82-85.

literature on theological voluntarism, there have been a number of interesting and divergent proposals: causal, supervenience, analysis, and reduction.⁵²⁹ According to the causal view, the obtaining of certain (or all) deontological states of affairs⁵³⁰ (i.e., that *p* ought to be done; that *p* ought not to be done, that *p* is permissible but not obligatory) necessarily depends upon God's choosing or causing such states of affairs to have the moral status that they in fact have:

obligatory, prohibited, and permissible.⁵³¹ A second type of dependence is supervenience: moral facts or states of affairs supervene on divine commands, such that, there could be no difference at the moral level without a difference in the commands/willing, which function as the moral realm's "quasi-base properties." On this view, the commands do not function as the cause of the moral facts, but the moral facts themselves are neither reduced to commands nor explained in terms of commands, but rather in some way supervene upon commands.⁵³²

By contrast, an analysis view attempts to analyze deontological states of affairs in terms of God's commands (or will).⁵³³ Robert Adams held this view in his earlier works, as seen in the following passage:

I could say that by "X is ethically wrong" I mean "X is contrary to the commands of a *loving* God" (i.e., "There is a *loving* God and X is contrary to his commands") and by "X is ethically permitted" I mean "X is in accord with the commands of a *loving* God" (i.e.,

⁵²⁹ I am generally following Mark Murphy's excellent overview of these positions. Mark Murphy, "Theological Voluntarism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/>>.

⁵³⁰ I shall talk in terms of 'states of affairs' obtaining or not obtaining in this section because many of the prominent defenders of divine command theories choose to cash out their positions in this way. But these theories could just as easily be cashed out in terms of deontological propositions and truth value. As we will see, the latter will be the preferred method for Scotus.

⁵³¹ This view has been primarily articulated and defended by Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory," 305-325; "An Argument for Divine Command Ethics," in Michael D. Beatty, *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1990), 289-302; and "Divine Command Theory," 82-85.

⁵³² John E. Hare gestures in that direction in *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

⁵³³ See Robert M. Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Conception of Ethical Wrongness," in *Religion and Morality* ed. G. Outka and J.P. Reeder (Doubleday: Garden City, 1973), 318-347.

“There is a *loving* God and X is not contrary to His commands).”⁵³⁴

So on this view, moral terms (such as ‘wrong’) are defined in terms of theological terms (such as ‘contrary to the commands of a loving God’).⁵³⁵ Finally, a reduction view seeks to reduce deontological states of affairs to theological states of affairs, such that ‘being morally obligatory’ is identical with the property of ‘being commanded by a (loving) God,’ and ‘being morally wrong’ is identical with the property of ‘being prohibited by a (loving) God.’⁵³⁶

For our purpose here, we need not worry about the respective merits of each option at each junction. Rather, we ought to recognize that there are various ways in which morality (or some subset of it) may depend upon some divine act, and differing solutions produce differing versions of theological voluntarism. Thus we ought to keep these distinctions in mind when discussing Scotus’s account, lest we simply assume he holds a particular formulation of it. In what follows, I will attempt to situate Scotus’s account into this contemporary discussion by demonstrating how Scotus would answer each aspect of (DC). I shall argue that Scotus holds a restricted-causal-will-theory, where (only) contingent deontological propositions depend upon God’s will for their moral status/truth value as obligatory, prohibited, or permissible.

Unrestricted and Restricted Divine Command Theories

A U-DC will claim that for any *M*, *M* has no intrinsic moral value apart from some divine act (such as the will of God or a divine command). This can be articulated as follows,

- (1) *M* is morally good/right if and only if God commands/wills *M*.

⁵³⁴ Robert M. Adams, “A Modified Divine Command Conception of Ethical Wrongness,” 323.

⁵³⁵ See Quinn for a criticism of this view, which he thinks amounts to the (super)naturalistic fallacy akin to Moore’s naturalistic fallacy. Quinn, “Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory,” 306-308.

⁵³⁶ Robert M. Adams, “Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again,” in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 133-142; *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 252-258. I place ‘loving’ in parenthesis, because this iteration of the view is particular to Adams’s account.

Consequently, a *necessary* condition for the goodness or rightness of any action, moral property, moral obligation, etc., rests solely on God commanding/willing it.⁵³⁷

Why accept this thesis? One significant motivation is its alleged entailment from God's aseity, which I'll define as the conjunction of two propositions:

(2) God does not depend on anything distinct from himself to be what he is,
and,

(3) Every entity distinct from God depends upon God to be what it is.

It seems (3) is the relevant premise here. If (3) is accepted, along with (4), that

(4) Actions, moral properties, etc., have their moral value intrinsically
then the following problem is generated: if God commands/wills *M* because *M* has intrinsic moral value independently of God, then God's aseity is compromised with respect to the moral status of those actions, moral properties, etc. In short, (3) must be rejected. Since the denial of (3) compromises an important belief for the theist (God's aseity), U-DC argues a rejection of (4) is the appropriate alternative. And a denial of (4) is just to say that no action, moral property, moral obligation, etc., has moral value intrinsically, but that value is conferred upon it extrinsically. For U-DC, this is expressed in terms of (1), either in virtue of God's commands or the divine will. And lest we have some recalcitrant moral concept whose moral status floats free of God's will, *M* must range over the entire class of moral concepts. So an unrestricted DC will accept something like the following:

(5) An action, moral property, etc., has moral value *V* only if God commands/wills that action, moral property, etc., have *V*.

Scotus would reject (5) for at least two reasons. First, it is obvious from the previous

⁵³⁷ Proposition (1) is actually a necessary and sufficient condition (for a U-DC), but for the present purpose, the focus shall be on (1) as a necessary condition.

discussions of goodness that Scotus restricts *M* in (DC) to exclude goodness from depending directly upon divine commands, and thus Scotus cannot be characterized as a proponent of U-DC: moral goodness derives from the complex interchange between an agent's nature and causal powers on the one hand, the ends and circumstances right reason dictates ought to accompany an act, on the other.⁵³⁸ Hence what is good in no way depends directly upon a divine command or willing for its moral value.

Thus Anthony Quinton's statements concerning God's relation to morality are simply false. Unfortunately, Quinton's bold claims have "poisoned the well" with respect to *how* the question of God's relationship to morality is discussed regarding Scotus's ethics. As we saw, Quinton states that *goodness* depends upon divine commands, and thus, when critics (Bettoni, Wolter, Ingham) react to such claims, they tend to focus exclusively on goodness, and accurately emphasize that Scotus is not a voluntarist about value.⁵³⁹ Unfortunately, in disposing of the claim that Scotus isn't a voluntarist about goodness (i.e., an axiological voluntarist), they seem to draw the incorrect inference that Scotus isn't a voluntarist about moral matters *tout court*. In other words, they have not paid attention to the various ways the Subtle Doctor believes certain aspects of the moral realm do in fact depend upon God.

Since goodness does not depend upon any divine act, the most we can say (so far) about Scotus's "voluntarism" is that he restricts *M* in (DC) to *exclude* goodness. So value-type properties do not depend upon some divine act.⁵⁴⁰ In what follows, I shall argue that Scotus restricts *M* in (DC) to only include only contingent deontological propositions—specifically,

⁵³⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, p.1, q.2, n.62.

⁵³⁹ See especially Allan B. Wolter, "Introduction," *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, 3-29.

⁵⁴⁰ I focus here explicitly on goodness as the token value-type property, but the same would apply for beauty, since Scotus conceives of beauty and secondary goodness as similar in nature. See chapter 4.

propositions about our obligations we have toward one another.

That Scotus's moral theory is not a version of U-DC is also evident in the Subtle Doctor's rejection of (5) for a second reason:

- (6) Some moral truths are necessarily true—and their corresponding actions are right—independently of the divine will.

This is crucial to the Subtle Doctor's rejection of (5), but in order to see this, we need to understand Scotus's conception of natural law. According to Scotus, natural law strictly pertains only to those [moral] propositions whose truth value is known from their terms alone (*veritas nota ex terminis*), or conclusions that necessarily follow from them.⁵⁴¹ Scotus identifies these necessary, *a priori* moral truths with the following principle: "If God exists, then he alone ought to be loved as God."⁵⁴² For Scotus, the content of the First Table of the Decalogue in the Ten Commandments follows directly from this principle: namely, those commandments and prohibitions pertaining to our relationship with God, or as Scotus puts it, those precepts that have God as their immediate object.⁵⁴³ According to Scotus, the commands and prohibitions contained in the First Table—natural law in the strict sense—have their respective truth values prior to any decision on the part of the divine will, and thus are independent of God's will or commands.⁵⁴⁴ He claims that natural law principles like these are "necessarily true," and that

⁵⁴¹ See *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.16; *Ordinatio* IV, d.17, q.un, n.19; *Ordinatio* IV, d. 33, q.1, n.22.

⁵⁴² *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n. 20: "Si est Deus, est amandus ut Deus solus." The first two commandments, in the form of prohibitions ('you shall have no other gods,' and 'you shall not show irreverence for God') follow from this principle.

⁵⁴³ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n. 19.

⁵⁴⁴ See *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.14, 20. As Williams explains, "Notice that Scotus's preferred formulation of moral precepts is as indicative sentences using the gerundive, represented in English by sentences of the form "Φ is [not] to be done," rather than as imperatives. Accordingly, Scotus's moral precepts are propositions, which are either true or false, rather than commands, which do not have truth values." See Thomas Williams, "The Franciscans," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 2013), 177, n.19.

“not even God could make them false.”⁵⁴⁵ Nor can God make a dispensation from these precepts, in such a way that someone could rightly will the opposite of what these precepts command or prohibit.⁵⁴⁶ So these precepts are always obligatory and no exception can be made—not even by God himself.

And so we see a second way in which Scotus would restrict *M* in (DC): Since necessary moral truths have their value independently of any divine willing or commanding, they cannot be included into the way that morality depends upon God—at least in so far as it would depend upon some divine act. Thus our obligation to love and obey God, to make him our ultimate end and most treasured object of our worship stems not from God’s willing or commanding that it be such, but is a necessary moral truth, as part of the fabric of the universe. In other words, our obligations to God have intrinsic moral worth. I should point out that just because Scotus denies that necessary moral truths are grounded in God’s will or commands, does not mean that such truths are not grounded in God *at all*. As we will see below, Scotus grounds them in God’s infinite goodness. In any case, this sets Scotus apart from most forms of theological voluntarism, as some morally right actions are right independently of divine commands and thus their rightness is outside of God’s control.

In contrast, Scotus argues that the Second Table of the Decalogue—the commandments involving human beings’ relationships toward each other—is only a part of natural law in a “broad” sense. These commandments and prohibitions (e.g., do not murder, do not steal, etc.) are not necessary, *a priori* truths, like the First Table, nor do they follow necessarily from

⁵⁴⁵ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un, n. 3. “Quae sunt de lege naturae, vel sunt principia practica nota ex terminis, vel sunt conclusiones necessario sequentes ex talibus principiis; sive sic sive sic, habent veritatem necessariam; ergo non potest Deus facere eas esse falsas.” While these statements appear in the initial *pro* and *con* arguments, it’s clear from the context (see n.40) that Scotus accepts this opinion, and the arguments made there support his overall viewpoint.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.20.

them.⁵⁴⁷ Scotus argues that God could make a dispensation from them. For example, in arguing against the position that all the commandments in the Decalogue belong to natural law in the strict sense (Aquinas's view⁵⁴⁸), Scotus makes the following claim:

I ask therefore, whether leaving all the circumstances in the act of 'killing a human' the same, except the one circumstance of whether the act is prohibited or not prohibited, can God bring it about that that very act, which with those same circumstances is prohibited and illicit at one time, would be not prohibited and licit at another time? If so, then God can make a dispensation without qualification, in the same way he changed the Old Law—with respect to the ceremonial laws—when he gave the New Law. Indeed, he did not bring it about that the precepts of the ceremonial law remained binding but were not to be observed, but he made it the case that the act remained the same, but people were no longer obligated to it as they had previously been. And so this is how any legislator makes an unqualified dispensation: when he revokes a precept of his own positive law, namely, by making it the case that the prohibited or illicit act remains the same in its nature, but the feature of it being prohibited or illicit is removed, and the act is made licit. Yet if God cannot bring it about that this act, which, with such circumstances was prohibited, with the same circumstances as when it was prohibited is no longer prohibited, then God cannot make it the case that 'to kill' is not prohibited—But it is obvious that God did make it that case that 'to kill' was not prohibited with Abraham and others.⁵⁴⁹

Scotus's point is twofold: first, since natural laws (strictly considered) are necessary moral truths that cannot be changed or dispensed with, and since God has made a dispensation with respect to the various precepts of the Second Table in the Ten Commandments, then contra Aquinas, not every one of the Ten Commandments belongs necessarily to the natural law. Second, and more importantly, God has the ability to make the same act—under the same

⁵⁴⁷ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.18, 25.

⁵⁴⁸ For Aquinas's view, see *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.100, a.1 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.100, a.8.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.13: "Quaero ergo an stantibus omnibus circumstantiis eisdem in isto actu 'occidere hominem', ista circumstantia sola variata 'prohibitum et non-prohibitum', possit Deus facere quod iste actus, qui cum eisdem circumstantiis aliis aliquando est prohibitus et illicitus, alias esset non-prohibitus sed licitus? –Si sic, simpliciter potest dispensare, quemadmodum mutavit Legem Veterem quando dedit Novam, et hoc quantum ad caerimonialia; non quidem faciens quod, stante praecepto de caerimonialibus, non essent illa servanda, sed faciens quod actu illo manente eodem, non tenebatur quis ad illum sicut prius (ita etiam dispensat quicumque legislator simpliciter, quando revocat praeceptum iuris positum ab eo, faciendo scilicet quod—actu prohibito vel praecepto manente eodem secundum se—auferatur ratio prohibiti vel illiciti et fiat licitum); tamen non potest facere Deus de isto actu, qui cum talibus circumstantiis erat prohibitus, quod manentibus eisdem circumstantiis prioribus prohibitione non sit prohibitus, cuius oppositum manifeste patet de Abraham et multis aliis."

circumstances—either obligatory or prohibited, simply by divine fiat. Thus acts of the Second Table (i.e., acts pertaining to our relationship with others) depend upon God’s will for their moral worth—and so they lack any intrinsic moral value, since the very same act could be prohibited or obligatory simply by God’s choice. Thus nothing concerning the intrinsic features of the act within a certain context makes it right or wrong.

However, Scotus does note that while these precepts in the Second Table of the Decalogue are not logical deductions following necessarily from the First Table, they are nevertheless “highly consonant” with it.⁵⁵⁰ This “consonance” passage has created serious disparity among Scotus scholars, and no one entirely knows what he means by this, since Scotus nowhere gives a precise account of what he means by saying that the precepts of the Second Table are “highly consonant” with the natural law in the strict sense. He is clear that consonance is something weaker than entailment, since such precepts do not necessarily follow from our obligations to God; he is also clear that such consonance does not require God to prescribe the exact laws he did in fact prescribe. But these claims only tell us what consonance is not. What is the positive content of the claim that the precepts of the Second Table are “highly consonant” with the law of nature in the strict sense?

As I see it, there are three broad approaches to what I’ll call the “Consonance Problem”: teleologist, aesthetic, reductionist. The teleologist approach attempts to explain consonance in terms of features that fit our natures and our appropriate ends; the aesthetic approach argues that God has aesthetic rather than moral reasons for choosing specific Second Table precepts; the reductionist reduces consonance to the role the Second Table precepts play in fulfilling our

⁵⁵⁰ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n. 25-26: “Alio modo dicuntur aliqua esse de lege naturae, quia multum consona illi legi, licet non necessario consequantur ex primis principiis practicis, quae nota sunt ex terminis et omni intellectui necessario nota. Et hoc modo certum est omnia praecepta—etiam secundae tabulae—esse de lege naturae, quia eorum rectitudo valde consonant primis principiis practicis necessario notis.”

obligation to the First Table (loving God). Let's consider the merits of each in turn.

Some have desired to soften Scotus's claims about morality and God's dispensations by focusing on the Second Table's precepts being "highly consonant" and concluding that Scotus is not really a voluntarist about it, but instead some type of crypto-Aristotelian teleologist, and that morality is intimately tied to our nature as humans, even though God has sometimes made a dispensation from such laws. For example, Allan Wolter writes:

Scotus maintains...that while the second table represents what is "valde consonans" with natural law, certain aspects of the second table of the decalogue can be dispensed with according to right reason, when their observation would do more harm than good. But God could obviously not dispense from all its precepts at once, for this would be equivalent to creating man in one way and obligating him in an entirely different fashion, something contrary to what he "owes to human nature in virtue of his generosity."⁵⁵¹

So on this interpretation, the Second Table precepts are intimately linked with human nature and are only dispensed with in special circumstances. But in general, Second Table precepts align with the teleological direction human nature provides.

Three important points that Scotus *explicitly* makes about these precepts and divine willing weigh heavily against this option. First, Scotus clearly states that God can make what was illicit at one time licit—without changing the nature of the act, without changing the circumstances under which the act was performed. He could do so simply by divine fiat.⁵⁵² If so, then it's hard to see how the consonance of certain precepts of the Second Table with the First really matter for God's determination of some act's moral worth, or how they could be connected to human nature, since God has willed some precepts and their opposites at various points in history. And even if one option might be more consonant than another, Scotus still insists that God could have chosen otherwise—there is nothing morally or logically binding on

⁵⁵¹ Allan B. Wolter, *Scotus on the Will and Morality*, 24.

⁵⁵² *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.13.

God to establish the precept the way in fact he has currently established it. In other words, God doesn't have any moral obligation or moral reason to make some precept of the Second Table obligatory or prohibited, and he especially does not have to do so on the basis of human nature.

Second, when we consider Scotus's claims about divine justice, he explicitly states that God is not bound to anything but his own goodness and those necessary moral truths, and that everything else God could have rightly and justly willed otherwise than he did. For example, after defining justice in one sense along Anselmian lines as "rectitude of the will preserved for its own sake,"⁵⁵³ Scotus remarks that God not only has this rectitude of will, but that His will cannot even be slanted (*inobliquabilem*). Why? Because God's will is the chief standard or norm itself.⁵⁵⁴ In order for there to be a deviation from some norm, there must first be a distinction between that norm and the will which deviates from it. But this is impossible in the case of God, because his will provides the basis for moral norms themselves: what God wills *is* right, and hence no deviation by the divine will is possible.⁵⁵⁵

But if we consider justice in the Aristotelian sense of a virtue or habit which naturally inclines the will to rectitude, then the divine will does not have any rectitude that inclines it deterministically to anything other than its own goodness. The divine will, Scotus claims, is related to every object other than itself only contingently, and so could be equally inclined to it and its opposite. Scotus concludes that God has only one justice—the justice that inclines him to

⁵⁵³ Anselm, *De Veritate* 12. *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Friedrich Fromann Verlag, 1968).

⁵⁵⁴ *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, n.10: "Primo modo habet enim rectitudinem voluntatis, immo voluntatem inobliquabilem, quia prima regula est 'et servata propter se.'

⁵⁵⁵ See also *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, n.25. "Quod autem dicitur quod quandoque non potest agere praeter 'secundam,' non videtur probabile, quia quidquid non includit contradictionem potest simpliciter agere, et ita velle; sed non potest aliquid velle quod non posset recte velle, quia voluntas sua est prima regula; ergo quidquid non includit contradictionem potest Deus recte velle. Et ita, cum ista iustitia secunda determinet ad aliquid cuius oppositum non includit contradictionem, potest Deus velle et recte velle, et agere praeter istam iustitiam secundam."

render what's due to his own goodness.⁵⁵⁶ Scotus further elaborates that the divine will is not inclined deterministically to anything in such a manner that it can't be justly inclined to the opposite of that thing. In fact, God could *justly* will the opposite.⁵⁵⁷

In *Ordinatio* I, d.44, Scotus applies his distinction between God's absolute power and his ordained power to the moral realm. According to Scotus, by God's absolute power, God can act in any manner not involving a contradiction.⁵⁵⁸ He goes on to claim:

Accordingly, I say that there are many other things he can do ordinately; and when the correctness of the law according to which someone is said to act rightly and ordinately is in the power of the agent himself, there is no contradiction involved in the claim that many things other than those that are made in conformity with these laws can be made ordinately. Therefore, just as he can act otherwise, *so also can he establish a different law*; and if that law were established by God, *it would be correct, because no law is correct except insofar as it established by the divine will's acceptance.*⁵⁵⁹

In this passage Scotus unapologetically and emphatically suggests that not only *could* God establish a different set of laws than he actually did, but that if he did so, those laws would be right or correct. Divine acceptance—and not human nature—establishes a law *as right*.

Third, Scotus explicitly states that the Second Table precepts are not connected to human nature in the way that the First Table precepts are, and that God could create a human being directed at the ultimate end without requiring that God establish contingent moral precepts in any

⁵⁵⁶ *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, n.29: "Primum declaratur, quia cum iustitia proprie sit rectitudo voluntatis habitatae, et per consequens quasi naturaliter inclinans ad alterum vel 'ad se quasi ad alterum', et voluntas divina non habeat aliquam rectitudinem inclinantem determinate ad aliquid nisi ad suam bonitatem quasi ad alterum, (nam ad quodcumque aliud obiectum mere contingenter se habet, ita quod aequae potest in hoc et in eius oppositum), sequitur quod nullam iustitiam habet nisi ad reddendum bonitati suae illud quod condecet eam."

⁵⁵⁷ *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, n. 32: "Sed ad nullum obiectum secundarium ita determinate inclinatur voluntas divina per aliquid in ipsa, ut repugnet sibi iuste inclinari ad oppositum illius, quia sicut sine contradictione potest oppositum velle, ita potest iuste velle, alioquin posset velle absolute et non iuste, quod est inconveniens."

⁵⁵⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.7.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.8. Translated by Thomas Williams, *John Duns Scotus: Ethical Writings* (Forthcoming, Oxford University Press). Emphasis mine.

one way rather than another.⁵⁶⁰ Thus there can be no deduction from human nature to the ends we ought to pursue, other than the ultimate end. In order to see this point clearly, let's compare Scotus's conception of natural law with that of Aquinas.

Aquinas's teleologically driven natural-law eudaimonism requires an intimate correlation between human nature and the end(s) for which humanity was created: human nature grounds and directs the way in which we reach both harmony with one another and the final end, God himself. There are (at least) two connected reasons for this. The first reason stems from Aquinas's conception of natural law. Aquinas generally defines law as "An ordinance of reason for the common good, promulgated by him who has the care of community."⁵⁶¹ According to Aquinas, there are three types of law: positive, eternal, and natural. Positive laws pertain to the state and its various rules and sanctions; eternal laws pertain to God's secondary direction, moving all entities to the various ends for which they were created.⁵⁶² Natural law contains various divine laws implanted in our nature for our direction toward the ends distinctive of our natures.

According to Aquinas, natural laws are grounded in the first practical principle for action, which he defines as "Good ought to be done and pursued, and evil avoided."⁵⁶³ This necessary, *a priori* principle, is the fundamental precept of the law of nature and directs action towards

⁵⁶⁰ *Ordinatio* III, d. 37, q. un., n. 18. "Et non est sic, loquendo universaliter de omnibus praeceptis secundae tabulae, quia de ratione eorum quae ibi praecipuntur vel prohibentur, non sunt principia practica simpliciter necessaria, nec conclusiones simpliciter necessariae. Non enim est necessaria bonitas, in iis quae ibi praecipuntur, ad bonitatem finis ultimi; nec in iis quae prohibentur, malitia necessario avertens a fine ultimo, quin—si istud bonum non esset praeceptum—posset finis ultimus attingi et amari; et si illud malum non esset prohibitum, staret cum illo acquisitio finis ultimi."

⁵⁶¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.90, a.4: "Et sic ex quatuor praedictis potest colligi definitio legis, quae nihil est aliud quam quaedam rationis ordinatio ad bonum commune, ad eo qui curam communitatis habet, promulgata."

⁵⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.93, a.1.

⁵⁶³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.94, a.2. "Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum."

various ends latent within an entity, in conjunction with various levels of existence. Thus with all existent substances, we seek the goodness of preservation of our existence. With animals, we seek animal goods—procreation and childrearing. Finally, we seek *human* goods—goods that are unique to us as *rational animals*. Here, Aquinas sees two goods as ends that are distinctive of our rational natures: know God and be sociable.⁵⁶⁴ Virtues, on this model, perfect our natures with respect to our various ends: the theological virtues perfect our nature with respect to God, while the moral virtues perfect our nature with respect to others—they enable us to be sociable, flourish, and live life in harmony with one another. So what we ought to do as humans follows directly from our nature and the first practical principle of action implanted in our nature. Consequently, the distinction between the First Table of the Decalogue and the Second easily fit Aquinas’s twofold structure of the ends as goods appropriate to our rational natures: the former is thus expressed in the First Table of the Decalogue, and the latter expressed in the Second Table.

Second, according to Aquinas, the commands in the Decalogue are not merely expressions of the divine will, but further reveal what our natures already direct us toward. So moral norms are directly tied to our natures and what it means for God to create a human being—with certain powers and capacities, on the one hand, and ends or goals on the other. It’s a package deal: creating humans with their particular natures necessitates certain moral norms which govern and direct their behavior as rational animals.

As Dave Horner explains,

Traditional Christian [natural law theory] views maintain that God’s will is expressed, first of all, in his creation—in his creating humans with the natures that they have. He could have created very different kinds of things, with very different natures and conditions for

⁵⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.94, a.2. I should note that for Aquinas, even though we share certain ends and goods with animals, such as procreation, since we are rational animals, our reason must direct the manner in which we fulfill the end of procreation.

flourishing. But having created humans with the nature that they do have, he has thereby established the moral constraints within which their moral world can legitimately operate, and his subsequent divine commands are thus constrained by those creational powers.⁵⁶⁵

Consequently, Aquinas thinks that all of the commandments in the Decalogue belong to the law of nature in the “strict sense.”⁵⁶⁶ In creating humans, Aquinas’s God is bound to establish certain moral parameters in virtue of the types of beings he creates. And since these laws are tied to our natures and the natural law implanted there, we can infer from human nature what ends or goals we ought to pursue and what obligations we have toward one another.

Scotus repudiates this account at both junctures. First, the first practical principle for action is not “do good,” but “love God.” I see two important implications of this: one, Scotus’s version of the first practical principle of action does not more generally direct us toward both finite and infinite goods, as Aquinas’s account does. Indeed, for Scotus, the natural law implanted in our nature to order and inform our actions contains *no reference* to how we ought to treat our fellow humanity whatsoever: contingent divine commands supply that content and not necessary, *a priori* principles guiding how we ought to treat one another. The first practical principle of action simply directs us to our ultimate end—the infinite good itself. Two, even where these two incongruent approaches overlap—namely, both approaches have God as an object of natural law in the strict sense—they differ with respect to which human faculty is central to the moral project. For Aquinas, when the object is God, the appropriate human faculty is the intellect and its role is *knowing* God. For Scotus, the first practical principle of action directs us to God via a different human faculty, namely, the will and its affection for justice.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ David Horner, Review of *God’s Call: Moral Realism, God’s Commands, and Human Autonomy*, by John E. Hare, Eerdmans, 2001. *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 186-190.

⁵⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.100, a.1.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ordinatio* II, d.6, q. 2. By affection for justice, Scotus has in mind loving God for his own sake, rather than simply for the advantage that loving God might bring. Cf. *Ordinatio* III, d. 28-29. A full discussion of the nature and role of Scotus’s two affections of the will is outside the purview of this dissertation. For the latest scholarship

Consequently, our nature only directs us to one moral precept as necessarily binding upon us; specifically, to love God as our infinite good and highest end. These twin features of Scotus's natural law theory—an emphasis on the will both in God's establishment of moral norms and the human will in loving God—highlight the shifting tide toward ethical and theological voluntarism at the University of Paris in general, and specifically among the Franciscan masters.

Second, in contrast to Aquinas, nothing in human nature grounds the *means* to reach the final end, nor is there any intrinsic connection between the Second Table precepts and human teleology.⁵⁶⁸ As Thomas Williams aptly explains,

The human good is a loving union with the Triune God, and it is perfectly possible to have such a union even if one commits adultery. Scotus does not simply mean that adulterers can repent and be forgiven. He means (indeed, he explicitly says) that God could easily have set up the moral law in such a way that adultery was not forbidden, and his doing so would in no way have diverted us from the attainment of our ultimate end.⁵⁶⁹

Scotus thinks that we are all by necessity obligated to love and obey God, and that our nature

on the topic, see Peter King, "Scotus's Rejection of Anselm: The Two-Wills Theory," in *Johannes Duns Scotus 1308-2008: Die philosophischen Perspektiven seines Werkes/Investigations into his Philosophy. Proceedings of the 'Quadruple Congress' on John Duns Scotus*. Part 3. *Archa Verbi Subsidia* 5, ed. by Ludger Honnefelder, Hannes Möhle, Andreas Speer, Theo Kobusch, and Susana Bullido del Barrio, Münster: Aschendorff, 2010, 359-378. *Archa Verbi Subsidia* 5. *Johannes Duns Scotus 1308-2008: Investigations into his Philosophy*, edited by Ludger Honnefelder, Hannes Mohle, Andreas Speer, Theo Kobusch, Susana Bullido Del Barrio (Munster: Aschendorff, 2011), 359-378.

⁵⁶⁸ Cross, "Natural Law, Moral Constructivism, and Duns Scotus's Metaethics: The Centrality of Aesthetic Explanation," 184. In his Phd dissertation, William Patrick Lee argues for the same conclusion in an interesting and slightly different manner, namely, from the understanding of what is 'essential' to humanity for both Scotus and Aquinas. According to Lee, Aquinas and Scotus "both agree that if God creates man, God must endow him with what is essential to man, and that God is free to change anything else about man. The cause for difference is that for St. Thomas, man's moral orientation to the goods prescribed in the second table of the Decalogue is essential to man, whereas for Duns Scotus it is not." Lee's argument, it seems to me, hinges upon the nature and extent of Scotus's essentialism. On the one hand, Lee provides plenty of arguments and evidence that Scotus was an essentialist about natures—including humanity. However, at times Scotus seems completely comfortable claiming that the same kind nature could be imbedded with different powers and capacities. But if Lee is correct, this would further substantiate the anti-teleologist reading of Scotus, and well as further explain why Scotus and Aquinas differ about the Second Table. See Lee, *Natural Law and the Decalogue in St. Thomas and John Duns Scotus*, Marquette University, 1980.

⁵⁶⁹ Thomas Williams, "The Libertarian Foundations of Scotus's Moral Philosophy," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 214. Cf. *Ordinatio* IV, d.26, q. un. See also *Ordinatio* III, d.38, q.un., n.15, were Scotus makes the same point with respect to lying.

directs us to him as our final end, as the first practical principle of action states. But the means by which we reach him and relate to others is entirely contingent upon the divine will, and not grounded in human nature or finite ends—as goods—that we ought to pursue. Thus the teleological approach to the Consonance Problem directly contradicts many of Scotus’s teachings about God, the natural law, and the role of human nature (or rather, lack thereof) in the establishment of moral norms.

In light of these worries, a second solution to the Consonance Problem has been developed (in different ways) by Richard Cross and Oleg Bychkov. This view denies that consonance refers to some tight connection between human nature and moral norms: God does not have any moral obligation to prescribe certain laws to fit our nature. It also denies that God has moral reasons for preferring one ordering of laws to another. But to say that God has no moral reasons to prescribe the laws that he does prescribe is not to say that he has no reasons at all. According to this view, he has non-moral reasons: aesthetic considerations. In a recent article, Richard Cross argues that “consonance” should be interpreted as aesthetic considerations for God’s choosing certain moral precepts.⁵⁷⁰

Unfortunately, Cross’s view is plagued with interpretational and conceptual problems. With respect to interpretational difficulties, there are two issues here. One, some of the passages Cross enlists in support of his aesthetic considerations refers to moral goodness resulting from an act’s harmony (*convenientia*) with a number of conditions.⁵⁷¹ As I have argued in chapter 4, it is true that Scotus does connect goodness with beauty (Scotus says that they are similar).

⁵⁷⁰ Richard Cross, “Natural Law, Moral Constructivism, and Duns Scotus’s Metaethics: The Centrality of Aesthetic Explanation,” in *Reason, Religion, and Natural Law: Historical and Analytical Studies*, ed. Jonathan Jacobs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 175-197.

⁵⁷¹ Cross, “Natural Law, Moral Constructivism, and Duns Scotus’s Metaethics: The Centrality of Aesthetic Explanation,” 189. Cf. Scotus, *Quodlibet* 18, a.1.

However, goodness is not the same thing as rightness of certain Second Table precepts—and each, according to Scotus, has a different set of necessary and sufficient conditions: rightness is a prescription of what we should do and grounded in God’s will; moral goodness is an evaluation of how well we do what we ought to do, and requires a harmony of a number of factors. This distinction will become even clearer in the next chapter. In any case, appealing to passages where Scotus compares moral goodness with beauty is irrelevant to the question at hand: namely, whether aesthetic conditions establish the rightness of Second Table moral prescriptions.

Two, Cross appeals to what he sees as aesthetically minded passages that are irrelevant to the current topic, such as passages on the cognitive powers of the intellect perceiving God’s infinite being. For example, he appeals to the following two passages, stating that Scotus appeals to “aesthetic considerations” here:

The sense powers, which are less cognitive than the intellect, immediately perceive inappropriateness (*disconvenientiam*) in their object: this is clear in the case of hearing relative to an inappropriate object. Therefore if *infinite* were incompatible with *being*, the intellect would immediately perceive this inappropriateness and incompatibility, and then it could not have infinite being as its object.⁵⁷²

And,

The intellect, whose object is being, finds no incompatibility understanding something infinite: rather, it seems perfectly intelligible. But it is remarkable if a contradiction in relation to the first object is made evident to no intellect, when discord (*discordia*) in sound so easily offends the hearing.⁵⁷³

Three things must be kept in mind with respect to these passages that Cross enlists as supporting evidence for aesthetic reading of the Consonance Problem. One, even if Scotus appeals to aesthetic considerations at various places in his thought, it doesn’t mean that such an

⁵⁷² Scotus, *Reportatio I-A*, d.2, part 1, q.1-3, n.72. translated by Wolter and Bychkov, *John Duns Scotus: The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture: Reportatio I-A*, volume 1 (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2004). Cross, “Natural Law, Moral Constructivism, and Duns Scotus’s Metaethics: The Centrality of Aesthetic Explanation,” 190.

⁵⁷³ *Ordinatio I*, d.2, pars.1, q.1-2, n.136.

appeal is relevant to the current topic. Suppose Scotus's use of *disconvenientia* above happens to be an aesthetic notion. What follows from it about the nature of the Second Table precepts?

Nothing: there's no reason *disconvenientia* has to be an aesthetic notion when talking about the moral law just because it is an aesthetic notion here.

Two, aesthetic considerations do not seem to play a significant role in the above passages at all. The *disconvenientia* of 'infinite' and 'being' (if they were in fact *disconveniens* to each other) would not be aesthetic at all, but logical/conceptual. It's not that infinite and being would be like checks and plaids or whatever—jarring and hideous in combination—but that they would be logically incompatible with each other. The point of the analogy is not that the *disconvenientia* of 'infinite' and 'being' is the same thing as the *disconvenientia* of hearing and an ugly sound; it's that both are known in the same way: by immediate, non-inferential perception in a sense of 'perception' that isn't limited to the senses. In other words, this passage isn't about aesthetics at all; it's a defense of the idea that there is such a thing as logical intuition. This point is made clearer if the last quote above by Cross were carried through the rest of the pericope:

The intellect, whose object is being, finds no incompatibility understanding something infinite: rather, it seems perfectly intelligible. But it is remarkable if a contradiction in relation to the first object is made evident to no intellect, when discord (*discordia*) in sound so easily offends the hearing....*For if the unfittingness immediately offends when it is perceived, why does no intellect naturally flee the understood infinite as if from something incompatible, and so destroys its first object?*⁵⁷⁴

Thus Scotus's point is not to say that perception of the infinite being is some kind of aesthetic

⁵⁷⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d.2, pars.1, q.1-2, n.136. The first half of the translation is from Cross; the added material is mine. "Item, quia 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?"

taste we have for metaphysical entities, but rather that both a discord in harmony and a logical/conceptual contradictions are known immediately and intuitively. The harmony of a discordant sound merely serves as an example.

Three, Cross seems to take it for granted that *convenientia* and *disconvenientia* are always aesthetic terms.⁵⁷⁵ But as I have argued in chapter 4, while *convenientia* and *disconvenientia* apply to beauty, the notions in themselves are much broader. I argued there that Scotus uses *convenientia* as technical term, conveying a proper relationship among entities. For example, in his various questions on the works of Aristotle, Scotus often asks whether Aristotle *appropriately* or correctly applies or defines something, or whether some definition *suitably* captures the things being defined. And in each of these cases, he uses *convenientia*.⁵⁷⁶ Furthermore, in *Questions on Porphyry's Isagoge*, Scotus uses '*convenientia*' to refer to the fittingness or properness of the definition or concept, given the nature of the terms involved. A few cases will suffice to make the point:

- Q.15: "Whether the definition of a genus is fitting (*convenienter*) to what has been given."
- Q.17: "Whether 'difference of species' is fittingly (*convenienter*) posited in the definition of a genus."
- Q.19: Whether 'in quid' is appropriately (*convenienter*) posited in the definition of a genus."
- Q.21: "Whether this definition of a species is fitting (*conveniens*): 'A species is what is predicated of many numerical differences in virtue of the fact that it is a quiddity.'"
- Q.23: "Whether the first division of differences is fitting (*conveniens*)."

⁵⁷⁵ Cross, "Natural Law, Moral Constructivism, and Duns Scotus's Metaethics: The Centrality of Aesthetic Explanation," 188-190.

⁵⁷⁶ For example, see Scotus, *Quaestiones Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis* q. 30, 35, 38, 43 and 44; *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* V, q.4 and q.12; and *Quaestiones in Primum Libros Perihermenias Aristotelis* q. 4.

- Q.25: “Whether the first division of a difference, namely, ‘a difference is what a species surpasses from a genera’ is appropriately (*convenienter*) given.”
- Q.35: “Whether this definition of an accident is fitting (*conveniens*)...”⁵⁷⁷

Now we would be foolish to say that Scotus’s use of *convenientia* in his commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry conveys some deep aesthetic truth about reality! On the contrary, Scotus uses *convenientia* as a term for a proper relationship between two entities. And one type of *convenientia* happens to be beauty. But the fact that Scotus uses the word *convenientia* to refer to beauty does not necessarily mean that in every usage of the term Scotus has some aesthetic consideration in mind. In most cases he doesn’t.

The same concern applies to the term ‘consonance’ itself: purveyors of the aesthetic interpretation simply assume that Scotus’s use of the term has aesthetic undertones, and read that back into the passage about the Second Table. It is true that *consonans* has a semantic range that includes a harmony (of sounds). But I cannot find a single passage in Scotus’s writing that uses consonance in such a way. Rather, Scotus mainly uses the term to signify some type of “agreement” between two things with absolutely no aesthetic connotations whatsoever.

Consider some examples from Scotus’s *Questions on the Metaphysics* and the *Ordinatio* where Scotus uses *consonans* or its various cognates for a general “agreement” between two things, without any aesthetic undertones. In the *Questions on the Metaphysics* VIII, Scotus says “This [conclusion] agrees (*consonant*) with Book VII, where [Aristotle] compares generations according to velocity, in chapter 4.”⁵⁷⁸ Also in Book VIII, he claims:

If therefore it is asked why there is a *per se* unity from matter and form, I respond according to the Philosopher in the text: that because ‘one is in actuality, the other in potentiality, then [the question] is without difficulty.’ This is explained as follows: because

⁵⁷⁷ *Quaestiones in Librum Porphyrii Isagoge, Opera Philosophica* 1 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1999).

⁵⁷⁸ *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VIII, q.2-3, n 49: “Hoc consonant VII, ubi comparat generationes secundum velocitatem, cap 4.”

that same thing was first in potentiality on account of its matter, and now it is in actuality through its form. ‘For by the extraction of the potency in the act,’ according to the Commentator here, ‘it is not a growth in multitude but perfection.’ And it seems that the exposition of the commentary agrees (*consonare*) with this text.⁵⁷⁹

In these passages, the importation of aesthetics is nowhere implied. The term simply refers to an agreement between two ideas. The same point could be made from many passages from the *Ordinatio*. Consider two passages from the Prologue to the *Ordinatio*:

To the other, that which was supposed ought to be denied, namely, that being is naturally known to be the first object of our intellect, and this according to the total indifference [of being] to the sensible and insensible, and this is what Avicenna says is naturally known. For he has mixed his own sect—which was the sect of Mohamed—with philosophical matters, and certain things he says are proven by philosophy and reason, and other things consonant (*consona*) with his own sect.⁵⁸⁰

Concerning the second, namely the agreement (*concordia*) of the Scriptures, it is so obvious: in those things not evident from their terms, nor having principles thus evident from their terms, many diversely disposed people do not firmly and infallibly agree (*consonant*), unless they are inclined to assent from a cause superior to their intellect. But the writers of the sacred Canon, variously disposed and existing in diverse times, agree (*consonabant*) entirely in such inevident things. Augustine handles [the topic] this way in *City of God*, XVIII ch.42: “Our authors should have been few, lest on account of their multitude they become worthless, and are not so few, that their agreement (*consensio*) not be wondered at: for neither in the multitude of philosophers will one easily find agreement (*convenient*) between all the things they thought.” And this Augustine proves there in the examples.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VIII, q.4, n.7: “Si ergo quaeritur quare ex materia et forma est unum per se—responsio, secundum Philosophum in littera: quod quia ‘hoc actus, illud potentia, non adhuc dubitatio.’ Hoc sic exponitur: quia illud idem quod prius fuit in potentia per rationem materiae, iam est in actu per formam. ‘Extracto enim de potentia in actum,’ secundum Commentatorem hic ‘non largitur multitudinem, sed perfectionem.’ Et videtur expositio commentarii consonare cum littera illa.” See also *Quaestiones Super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* VII, q.20, n.36: “Item, quae est differentia huius opinionis subtilis, quae videtur sequi rationem, et primae, quae videtur grossa et est sensui consona?”

⁵⁸⁰ *Ordinatio*, Prol., pars. 1, q. un., n.33: “Ad aliud negandum est illud quod assumitur, quod scilicet naturaliter cognoscitur ens esse primum obiectum intellectus nostri, et hoc secundum totam indifferentiam entis ad sensibilia et insensibilia, et quod hoc dicit Avicenna quod sit naturaliter notum. Miscuit enim sectam suam — quae fuit secta Machometi — philosophicis, et quaedam dixit ut philosophica et ratione probata, alia ut consona sectae suae.”

⁵⁸¹ *Ordinatio*, Prol., pars. 2, un., n.102: “De secundo, scilicet Scripturarum concordia, patet sic: in non evidentibus ex terminis, nec principia sic evidentia ex terminis habentibus, non consonant multi firmiter et infallibiliter, diversimode dispositi, nisi a causa superiori ipso intellectu inclinentur ad assensum; sed scriptores sacri Canonis, varie dispositi, et existentes in diversis temporibus, in talibus inevidentibus consonabant omnino. Hanc viam pertractat Augustinus XVII De civitate cap. 42: ‘Auctores nostri pauci esse debuerunt, ne prae multitudine vilescerent; nec ita sunt pauci, ut eorum non sit miranda consensio: neque enim in multitudine philosophorum facile quis invenerit, inter quos cuncta quae senserunt convenient,’ et hoc Augustinus probat ibi in exemplis.”

These passages show that Scotus often uses the term *consonans* and its various cognates to refer to an agreement between two things, without any importation of aesthetic notions whatsoever—unless, of course, we’re willing to say that Scotus finds aesthetic beauty in the harmony Avicenna creates by conjoining philosophical ideas with the Muslim religion. These examples could be repeated indefinitely.⁵⁸² In the last passage cited, interestingly enough, Scotus seems to use *consonans* as synonymous with *concordia*, *consensio*, and *convenio*, all of which mean ‘agreement’ or ‘harmony,’ but not in any way that necessarily implies some aesthetic connotation. Any hint of aesthetics remain entirely absent here.

Furthermore, in examples where Scotus appeals to the concept harmony in an aesthetically relevant way, he does not use the term *consonans*, but *harmonicus*.⁵⁸³ If Scotus had any aesthetical understanding of *consonans*, he would presumably use the term in those cases where it would appropriately describe the situation. But he doesn’t. So in aesthetically appropriate settings, Scotus doesn’t use *consonans*, and in a plurality of different contexts where aesthetics plays absolutely no role, Scotus uses *consonans*. The only appropriate conclusion from such data is that Scotus doesn’t take *consonans* to be an aesthetically loaded term, but mere agreement between two things. So it seems that the aesthetic reading is basically a matter of fetishizing a particular group of words. Yet, as I have now shown, *consonans* and *convenientia*

⁵⁸² For example, there are plenty of other passages in the *Ordinatio* where *consonans* lacks any aesthetic undertones. For a sampling of passages from just the second half of Book 4 of the *Ordinatio*, see *Ordinatio* IV, d.43, q.2, n.104; n.141, *Ordinatio* IV, d.44, pars.1, q.un., n. 50; *Ordinatio* IV, d.45, q.1, n.17-18; *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, n.34; *Ordinatio* IV, d.47, q.1, n.33; *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, pars. 1, q.6, n.319; *Ordinatio* IV, d.49, pars. 2, q.un., n.463.

⁵⁸³ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars. 1, q.un, n. 95: “Sonus harmonicus in cithara immutat auditum, delectationem causando; et si fiant eadem notae, alio tamen modo ordinatae—ut si cordae percutiantur alio ordine—non causabit delectationem nec sonum delectabilem. Quid est causa principalis istius immutationis? Certe sonus, et non convenientia aut proportio in sono, quia relation non est causa effectus; temen absolutum sub relatione potest esse causa effectus cuius non esset causa nisi haberet illam relationem. . . immutatio igitur auditus a sono est propter sonum, sed quod sit delectabilis, hoc non est a sono ut sonus est, sed ut harmonicus et sic ordinatus.” See also *Ordinatio* I, d.17, pars. 1, q.1-2, n.152.

are not exclusively or primarily about aesthetics at all, and so their appeal as an explanation for God's choosing certain ethical norms remains quite tenuous.

Moreover, even if this view could be substantiated by the textual evidence, which I've argued it cannot, an ugly conceptual problem lurks in the background. Given the radical notion of freedom Scotus wishes to ascribe to God, and the true lack of limitations he wishes to place on God's absolute power (God can justly will anything that does not involve a contradiction), this view seems to limit God's freedom of choice to only prescriptive options with some intrinsic aesthetic appeal. On this view, God could only prescribe laws for humans that have some aesthetically appealing feature to them. But doesn't this limit God's sovereignty and aseity in precisely the way Scotus wishes to avoid? Doesn't this limit God's overall options as far as what he can choose?

In a footnote, Cross responds to similar worries raised by Terence Irwin.⁵⁸⁴ Cross claims that "God has options in cases that each alternative choice can be perceived to be aesthetically pleasing; in other cases, he has no choice." Thus, so long as God has multiple aesthetically pleasing options, he could retain the veneer of libertarian freedom. In cases where he doesn't, God must choose the aesthetically pleasing option. Yet this seems to limit Scotus's God in precisely the way in which Scotus wishes *not* to limit God: namely, constraining God beyond mere logical possibility.⁵⁸⁵ Cross seems to realize this, but nevertheless concludes that "Scotus is more concerned with providing a non-empty account of the grounding of the secondary principles than he is with preserving radical voluntarism."⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁴ See Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study, Volume I: From Socrates to the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 694-695.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.7 -8; *Reportatio* I-A, d.44, q.1, nn.7-10.

⁵⁸⁶ Cross, "Natural Law, Moral Constructivism, and Duns Scotus's Metaethics: The Centrality of Aesthetic Explanation," 192, n.57.

But is he? This is a particularly odd claim to make, considering that we have no evidence for taking *consonans* in the debated passage aesthetically, and plenty of evidence for Scotus's desire to preserve his radical voluntarism: at every possible place in his discussions of divine freedom, Scotus constantly emphasizes the freedom of the divine will over everything else.⁵⁸⁷ In these texts and many others, Scotus desires to save God's will not only from the Islamic necessitarianism found in Avicenna, but also from the restrictions that might be placed upon God's nature by anything beyond mere logical possibility. For example, in *Reportatio* I-A, d.43, Scotus claims that:

And so I say that God can bring about not only those things which he has not brought about, but even the opposite of those things he has brought about, because it is necessary that each opposite is possible for God...For nothing is impossible for God, unless it includes a contradiction.⁵⁸⁸

In light of this, I pose the following question to the aesthetic solution to the Consonance Problem: can God choose a non-aesthetically pleasing option? If yes, then it's hard to see how adding aesthetics does anything to supply content to the Second Table Precepts, since nothing determines or inclines God to act in such a manner (if it did, it would compromise God's freedom). But if God cannot choose a non-aesthetically appealing option, as Cross surmises, then aesthetic reasons end up collapsing into logical reasons, since logical reasons are the only restrictions Scotus wishes to place on the divine will. In other words, if God cannot bring about a non-aesthetically pleasing option, doing so would have to involve a contradiction—per Scotus's own words concerning divine power and what God can do. But Scotus explicitly claims

⁵⁸⁷ See *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., nn7-8; *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, n.25; *Reportatio* I-A, d.39-40, q.1-3, a.3, nn.38-44; *Reportatio* I-A, d.44, q.1, nn.7-10; Also see *Ordinatio* I, d.39, q.1-5, n.21 [Appendix A of Vatican Edition vol. VI, page 425-426]. For an explanation of why this question appears in the appendix of the *Ordinatio*, see Steven Dumont, "The Origin of Scotus's Theory of Synchronic Contingency," *The Modern Schoolman* 72 (1995): 150, n.7.

⁵⁸⁸ *Reportatio* I-A, d.43, q.2, n.32: "Et sic dico quod potest facere non tantum alia quae non fecit, immo opposita eorum quae fecit, quia oportet quod utrumque oppositorum sit Deo possibile...Nihil enim quod non includit contradictoria est Deo impossibile."

that the Second Table precepts are not logically necessary in the way the First Table precepts are, and their denials do not result in contradictions.

Second, as I've shown, Scotus explicitly argues that the divine will isn't determined to anything but his own goodness—and I take it this would apply this to aesthetic considerations too. But if Cross is correct, then Scotus's God would be bound to something beyond his own goodness, namely, he would be required to prescribe laws that are aesthetically pleasing. Yet this would contradict what Scotus specifically says. So God cannot be bound to choosing some aesthetically pleasing option.

The only way out of this conclusion would be to place beauty under the conception of infinite goodness, such that, in making judgements about beauty, God would not need to appeal to something beyond or independent his goodness: beauty would have to be an absolute quality, convertible with God's infinite being and goodness. In other words, beauty would have to be transcendental. But as I have shown in chapter 4, Scotus conceives beauty as a non-absolute quality that is not convertible with being, and thus not convertible with goodness—infinite or otherwise. And since God is only bound to his own infinite goodness, his will cannot be determined by aesthetics considerations.

Oleg Bychkov has also recently argued for an aesthetic conception of Second Table Precepts. After a *tour de force* in contemporary neurobiology and aesthetics, Bychkov appeals to various passages in Scotus that purport to show that God has aesthetic tastes—just like humans.⁵⁸⁹ The passages cited all refer to either moral goodness or the virtue of charity, and so my comments to Cross would equally apply here: it is not useful to appeal to these topics in

⁵⁸⁹ Oleg Bychkov, “‘In Harmony with Reason’: John Duns Scotus’s Theo-aesth/ethics,” *Open Theology* 1 (2014): 53-54. Cf. *Lectura* I, d.17, pars. 1, q. un, n.57; *Ordinatio* 1, d.17, n.62.

order to show that God operates the same way with respect to Second Table precepts, because goodness and virtue are distinct concepts from each other and distinct from rightness as prescribed by the divine will. And furthermore, there is no textual evidence to treat God's establishment of these moral norms on the basis of aesthetic considerations,⁵⁹⁰ and plenty of evidence that doing so would contradict Scotus's notion of divine freedom. Bychkov's conclusion is rather telling, as it all but admits that no textual evidence exists to support his view that the Second Table precepts are governed by aesthetic considerations:

Whatever the exact scenario may be, there is clear textual evidence that according to Scotus, God has aesthetic taste, just like us. And if he has aesthetic taste in perceiving moral beauty, there is a good *chance* that his legislative activity in the area of moral law will be similarly based, in order that his laws might allow for beautiful harmonious patterns in the soul to play out.⁵⁹¹

However, simply because God has aesthetic tastes in perceiving moral beauty, there is no reason to suspect that such perceptions of beauty govern or regulate the moral norms God wishes to establish. There may be a *chance*, as Bychkov says, but it's an unlikely one. And given the further restrictions this would place on God's creative activity, the aesthetic solution to the Consonance Problem remains highly improbable.

Moreover, I'm not even sure if Scotus has a conception of "moral beauty," as most of the passages where Scotus connects beauty with goodness, he's not necessarily claiming that moral goodness is beautiful (though it may be), but rather stating that what makes something beautiful and what makes something morally good are similar in the sense that they are both non-absolute qualities that require a harmony of a number of external conditions for their obtainment.⁵⁹² So in

⁵⁹⁰ This is especially true since 'consonance' has a broader usage in Scotus than mere aesthetics, as I have shown in above.

⁵⁹¹ Bychkov, "In Harmony with Reason," 54. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁹² See *Ordinatio I*, d. 17, p.1, q.2, n.62 and *Ordinatio II*, d.40, Q.un, n.7.

light of the dearth of evidence that consonance should be interpreted aesthetically, and in light of the abundance of passages defending Scotus's radical view of divine freedom, the aesthetic solution to the Consonance Problem seems rather suspect.

Given that attempts to provide some positive content for the notion of consonance founder on explicit statements to the contrary and a lack of explicit statements in support (plus various other confusions and conceptual problems), the only option that remains is that there's *no positive content* beyond being serviceable to express love of God. In other words, consonance should be reduced to conformity with the First Table.⁵⁹³ Scotus says that the principles in the Second Table are highly consonant *with* certain necessary moral truths. But these Second Table, run-of-the-mill moral principles can be dispensed with, and God can rightly will the opposite of what he has in fact willed about them. Furthermore, notice that the main moral truth Scotus has in mind that these contingent principles are consonant with is that *God must be loved*.

So it seems as though a whole host of commands and prohibitions could in theory be compatible—indeed, consonant—with this principle, so long as the agent acts in accord with the primary moral principle of loving God via the contingently ordained commands. If God says “don't steal,” then I don't steal as an expression of my love for God. And when God told the Israelites to plunder the Egyptians, their obedience in stealing the Egyptians property demonstrated or expressed their commitment to loving God. Thus the commandments in the Second Table of the Decalogue are simply contingent means to reaching God as our end or goal.

⁵⁹³ Thomas Williams has endorsed something like this view in various places. See “How Scotus Separates Morality from Happiness,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1995), 425-445; “Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: A Pseudo-Problem Dissolved,” *The Modern Schoolman* 74 (1997), 73-94; “The Libertarian Foundations of Scotus's Moral Philosophy,” *The Thomist* 62 (1998), 193-215; and “A Most Methodical Lover? On Scotus's Arbitrary Creator.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000), 169-202.

So their consonance with the first principle refers, not to something in their nature as precepts—like some intrinsic status they have—but rather to the fact that God desires that we obey him *through* such commandments—commandments which he could have made entirely different than he did. The fact that nothing in their natures as precepts make them consonant with the principle of loving God should be obvious from the fact that (1) God can make the same act under the same set of circumstances licit or illicit, (2) God’s justice requires only that he satisfy his own goodness, and besides that, could will any contingent thing justly, and (3) there is no necessary deduction from human nature to moral obligations we have toward one another (Second Table Precepts).

So I propose that ‘consonance’ indicates the suitability of a commanded action to serve as a means by which one can express love for God; that suitability derives entirely from God’s commanding it, and not from anything in the nature of the commanded act that requires or inclines God to command it. At least one passage from Scotus confirms this reading—*Ordinatio* IV, d.33—where Scotus claims that God makes dispensations from the (previously established contingent) moral order when the opposite of some precept is better suited in a particular setting to fulfill human beings’ obligations to the First Table; in other words, when the opposite of some precept is more in harmony *with* the primary law of nature, i.e., loving God.⁵⁹⁴ So sometimes the current precept fits better with loving God, and at other times it does not. Hence “consonance” refers to the precept’s connection to loving God, not something grounded in human nature or some standard of value independent of God’s will.

However, this view is not without difficulty, as this interpretation seems to make consonance a vacuous term. I admit that it makes consonance a somewhat empty concept. But I

⁵⁹⁴ *Ordinatio* IV, d.33, n.19.

think it best explains what Scotus says about God's justice and his ability to make dispensations. Furthermore, Scotus is a transitional figure trying to break with tradition at a number of points. And it seems at times, he is less clear of the implications of his view than he seems to admit, or his admissions of a radical voluntarism are tapered with discretion and the veneer of traditional natural law language.

Thus, the aesthetic interpretation and the consonance reductionist both agree that (a) God is not bound *morally* to choose certain contingent moral precepts, and (b) that whatever God does in fact choose in that regard will be just. We differ, however, on how to interpret Scotus's consonance claims, and what restrictions—if any—are further placed on God's will by aesthetic considerations. While the aesthetic interpretation suggests that God has non-moral reasons for prescribing specific second table precepts, the reductionist view doesn't have to claim that God doesn't have reasons for choosing some precept. Maybe he does. But the only possible reason would be that in some deep and profound (inexplicable?) way, certain precepts usually are better for our becoming co-lovers of God. When they are not better in a particular situation, God changes them. But wouldn't this mean that God has constraints? Yes, but only to his own goodness and that creatures love him. On the aesthetic view, the reasons are independent of God and thus question his sovereignty, his aseity, and his ability to act uninhibited by anything but his own nature. On the reductionist view, God's reasons are inextricably tied to his absolute power, his own goodness, and the mysterious nature of libertarian freedom. For as Scotus says,

And if you ask why the divine will is more determined to one pair of contradictories than to another, I respond: "the untutored seek causes and demonstration of everything," according to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* IV, "for the principle of demonstration is not demonstrable"... and thus there is no cause why the will willed, except because the will is a will, just as there is no cause why heat heats, except that heat heats, because there is no

prior cause.⁵⁹⁵

Whatever we make of the Consonance Problem and God's reason (or lack thereof) for choosing some precepts over others, I think it is safe to conclude the following few points: first, that "God should be loved" is a necessary moral truth that not even God can change. Second, God has the absolute power to establish Second Table precepts in any fashion he desires (even if we can debate why he desires some over others), and when he does so, those laws are just, because his will is the standard for justice itself.

Divine Willing or Commanding?

Does Scotus think that contingent moral laws depend upon divine commanding or divine willing for their moral status? While it is true that Scotus often speaks in terms of God's commands *expressing* the content of the Second Table precepts,⁵⁹⁶ numerous passages explicitly state that the divine will *determines* which contingent moral rules are right and wrong.⁵⁹⁷ For example, Scotus says that "Just as [God] can act otherwise, so also can he establish a different law; and if that law were established by God, it would be correct, *because no law is correct except insofar as it established by the divine will's acceptance.*"⁵⁹⁸

Thus on Scotus's account, the divine will decides which contingent moral precepts are obligatory, prohibited, and permissive. However, one main method of informing his creatures as

⁵⁹⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d.8, pars.2, q.un., n.299. "Et si quare ergo voluntas divina magis determinabitur ad unum contradictoriorum quam ad alterum, respondeo: 'indisciplinata quaerere omnium causas et demonstrationem' (secundum Philosophorum IV Metaphysicae), 'principii enim demonstrationis non est demonstration'... 'quare voluntas voluit' nulla est causa nisi quia voluntas est voluntas, sicut huius 'quare calor est calefactivus' nulla est causa nisi quia calor est calor, quia nulla est prior causa."

⁵⁹⁶ Most notably in *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.18.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un, n.15; *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, nn.10, 25, 29, 32.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.8. Translated by Thomas Williams, *John Duns Scotus: Ethical Writings* (Forthcoming, Oxford University Press). Emphasis mine.

to the content of such law stems from God’s commands, primarily as recorded in the Decalogue,⁵⁹⁹ and secondarily through direct divine interaction with creatures.⁶⁰⁰ Whether such precepts can be known via other means—such as reason—will be postponed until the next chapter. So thus far, Scotus restricts what moral value depends upon God to only contingent moral precepts, which depend upon the divine will for their moral status.

What Type of Dependence?

What type of dependence does Scotus hold? In other words, in what way do deontological propositions depend upon the divine will? First, it’s essential to point out that since necessary deontological propositions have their truth value independently of the divine will, they cannot depend upon any type of divine act—willing or otherwise. It seems as though Scotus wishes to ground these necessary moral truths—i.e., God must be loved—in the divine nature itself, as the infinite good and ultimate end of all things. For example, consider the following passage:

I say that ‘to love God above everything else’ is an act of conformity to natural right reason, which dictates that what is best ought to be loved most, and thus is an act that is right in and of itself; indeed, its rectitude is self-evident, as a first practical principle of action. For, something must be loved most, and that is nothing but the highest Good itself, just as nothing but the highest Truth ought to be held as true by the intellect. And this argument is confirmed because moral precepts belong to the law of nature, and thus “You ought to love the Lord your God,” belongs to the law of nature, and so this act’s rightness is known.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁹ See *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., nn. 19-26.

⁶⁰⁰ See *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., nn.4, 13.

⁶⁰¹ *Ordinatio* III, d.27, q.un., n. 14: “De Primo dico quod ‘diligere Deum super omnia’ est actus conformis rectae rationi naturalis, quae dictat optimum esse summe diligendum, et per consequens est actus de se rectus; immo rectitudo eius est per se nota (sicut rectitudo primi principii in operabilibus): aliquid enim summe diligendum est, et nihil aliud a summo Bono, sicut non aliud a summo Vero est maxime tenendum tamquam verum apud intellectum. Confirmatur etiam istud, quia praecepta moralia sunt lege naturae, et per consequens istud *Diliges Dominum Deum tuum*, etc. est de lege naturae, et ita notum est hunc actum esse rectum.”

Elsewhere, Scotus makes a further argument for this position: he argues that the grounds for loving something are the thing's goodness and unity. Since God has perfect and infinite goodness and unity, he ought to be loved most.⁶⁰² And this is precisely why God has no control over necessary moral truths of this type: God has an infinite *mode* of being. Goodness and unity are really identical and only formally distinct from being, and thus God has an infinite degree of unity and goodness as well. Since this is necessarily the way God is—one's mode of being cannot be changed, because it's the *way* in which something has existence—anything else that exists and is able to rationally recognize God's infinite being, goodness, and unity, will immediately recognize that one ought to love God most.⁶⁰³ Not even God could change that, since he, by nature, is the most infinitely valuable and infinitely desirable being.

Furthermore, in the Prologue to his *Lectura*, Scotus argues that one should love God most is a necessary truth, and can be demonstrated from an Anselmian perfect being theology. "I should love God above all," he claims, can be demonstrated from "God is that which nothing greater can be thought." Because of such greatness, God is supremely lovable, and therefore, "I ought to love him most."⁶⁰⁴ For Scotus, God's place as the greatest conceivable being—the infinite being, the infinite good—grounds the obligation to love and obey him.

⁶⁰² *Ordinatio* III, d.29, q.un., n.6: "Hoc etiam confirmatur, quia pensatis rationibus bonitatis et unitatis, quae sunt rationes diligibilis, post Bonum Infinitum—in quo est perfectissima ratio bonitas—occurrit in se ipso alia ratio maxima, scilicet unitas, quae est perfecta identitas: quilibet enim naturaliter inclinatur ad dilectionem sui post Bonum Infinitum; inclinatio naturalis est semper recta." See also *Ordinatio* III, d.27, q.un., n.30.

⁶⁰³ Scotus argues that natural reason reveals that the only supremely lovable object is the Infinite Good. And that only the infinite good is worthy of supreme love. See *Ordinatio* III, d.27, q.un, n. 47: "Ratio naturalis ostendit creaturae intellectuali aliquid esse summe diligendum, quia in omnibus obiectis et actibus (et hoc essentialiter ordinatis) est aliquid supremum, et ita aliqua dilectio suprema, et ita obiectum etiam est summe diligibile; ratio autem naturalis recta non ostendit aliquid sicut summe diligibile, aliud a Bono infinito, quia si sic, ergo caritas inclinaret ad oppositum eius quod dictat recta ratio, et ita non esset virtus; ergo dictat solum Bonum infinitum esse summe diligendum." See also *Ordinatio* III, d.27., n.30, where Scotus argues that no being can be ultimately satisfied except in that thing in which being is found most perfectly, namely, God.

⁶⁰⁴ *Lectura, prolog.*, pars. 4, q.1-2, n.172: "Similiter, me diligere Deum est contingens, et tamen de hoc potest esse veritas necessaria, ut quod debeam Deum diligere super omnia. Et hoc demonstrative potest concludi sic: 'Deus est quo maius cogitari non potest;' igitur, est summe diligibilis; igitur summe debeo eum diligere."

So our obligations to the first table of the Decalogue—those necessary moral truths (i.e., deontological propositions with a necessary truth value)—have an ontological dependence on God’s infinite goodness. Given God’s nature as God, we have a permanent and morally binding obligation to love and seek him—an obligation so strong, that not even God could change it. In fact, even God himself is bound to love himself and seek his own good above all else.⁶⁰⁵ This obligation isn’t due to God’s power, as one who enforces obligations with punishments and rewards, whereby “might makes right,”⁶⁰⁶ but because of God’s infinite value, as the greatest conceivable being and our highest good.

Nevertheless, since Scotus argues that contingent deontological propositions depend upon the divine will for their truth value/obligatory status, we can further inquire into the way they depend upon the divine will. Given Scotus’s insistence that the divine will has complete control over the truth values of contingent moral propositions, and his insistence that this control is a function of God’s sovereign and absolute will, it seems best to interpret Scotus’s claims that the Second Table of the Decalogue depends upon God in terms of a *causal dependence*.⁶⁰⁷ In other

⁶⁰⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d.2, pars. 1, q.1-2, n.95; *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1, nn.14-16; 48; *De Primo Principio* IV, 5.

⁶⁰⁶ Christine M. Korsgaard argues that this “voluntaristic” view of obligation was held by the likes of both Hobbes and Pufendorf. See Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 21-27. In his famous *A History of Philosophy*, Frederick Copleston provides a similar voluntarist account of obligation for Scotus. On Copleston rendering of Scotus, actions are not good because God wills them, but because of God’s nature. Copleston, however, believes that there is another sense in which the divine will plays an important role. “That it is not the content of the moral law which is due to the divine will, but the obligation of the moral law, its morally binding force.” On Copleston’s understanding of Scotus, the moral law “acquires obligatory force only through the free choice of the divine will.” In support of this, Copleston musters a single passage from Scotus that states, “To command pertains only to the appetite or will.” No doubt Scotus thinks to command pertains only to the divine will, and that is precisely the problem with Copleston’s interpretation. Scotus believes our obligation to obey the commands of God is necessary and therefore prevolitional. Since commands only pertain to what can be willed, and our obligation to obey and love God is necessary prior to any action on the part of the divine will, therefore, contra Copleston, the source of obligation cannot be grounded in the commands of God. See Copleston, *A History of Philosophy Volume 2: Mediaeval Philosophy Part II: Albert the Great to Duns Scotus* (Garden City: Image Books, 1962), 270.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.8. Scotus claims that no law is right or correct unless it is established as such by the divine will itself.

words, God's will causes of the content and truth value of contingent deontological propositions.

Thus we get something like the following three principles for obligation, prohibition, and permissibility, respectively, in regard to any contingent moral truth, which I have adapted and augmented from Philip Quinn's causal account:

- **Obligation:** For every proposition which is such that it is logically possible that God wills that p , and it is logically contingent that p , a sufficient causal condition that it is obligatory that p is that God wills that p , and a necessary causal condition that it is obligatory that p is that God wills that p .
- **Prohibition:** For every proposition which is such that it is logically possible that God wills that p , and it is logically contingent that p , a sufficient causal condition that it is forbidden that p is that God wills that not- p , and a necessary causal condition that it is forbidden that p is that God wills that not- p .
- **Permission (licit):** For every proposition which is such that it is logically possible that God wills that p , and it is logically contingent that p , a sufficient causal condition that it is permitted that p is that it is not the case that God wills not- p , and a necessary causal condition that it is permitted that p is that it is not the case that God wills that not- p .⁶⁰⁸

Consider for example the prohibition against stealing. According to Scotus, since stealing does not belong to natural law in the strict sense, it is a logically contingent moral proposition, and thus it is possible that God could will stealing. In fact, Scotus thinks that at certain times in history, God has willed just that!⁶⁰⁹ As it happens, God has in fact willed that stealing is wrong, making it prohibited. But it is entirely possible that God could will stealing, thereby making stealing obligatory. The point: any contingent moral proposition causally depends upon the divine will for moral status as obligatory, prohibited, or permissible. No intrinsic feature in the nature of these propositions or the actions they describe necessitates God

⁶⁰⁸ Philip Quinn, "Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory," 312. Quinn formulates the causal conditions in terms of God's commands, but as I have argued above, Scotus places their dependency upon the divine will—hence the modification. But overall, I think Quinn's view best captures Scotus account of obligation.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q. un., nn. 2-4; 40.

to imbue them with their current moral status; rather, God's will is the sole cause of such. Thus when we act in accordance with the obligations as established by God's will, we act rightly; when we act contrary to the moral requirements set forth by the divine will, we act illicitly. In other words, Scotus adopts a constructivist viewpoint toward these contingent moral duties—God may have reasons for choosing them, but they are not moral ones.⁶¹⁰ As Hare puts it,

One objection often raised to divine command theories of ethics is that they make ethical rightness arbitrary. After all, if what is right is simply what God commands, and God is not bound by any antecedent standards, could not God command just anything, and it would be right? In Scotus, the second table of the law is, in a sense, arbitrary. It is within God's discretion (in Latin, *arbitrum*). But this is not arbitrary in the modern pejorative sense implying that a decision is made without rational grounds that should be present. A decision to grade papers by the alphabetical order of the students' names is arbitrary, because the grading should be done on the papers' merits. But God does have a reason for prescribing a set of laws to human beings, namely that these laws are a good route for humans to get to their final end to become co-lovers with God. What Scotus is denying is that the route that God prescribes is the only possible route, and so is mandatory for God to prescribe.⁶¹¹

To aid in clarifying Scotus's position on these matters, let's consider Scotus's understanding of moral dependence in terms of an analogy: picture a room with a vast number of light switches with three settings: on (up), off (down), and neutral (middle). Consider on the top of each light switch some moral proposition written (e.g., honor your parents), and on the bottom the prohibition against that proposition (e.g., do not honor your parents). Furthermore, let's stipulate that every light switch representing contingent moral propositions is originally set in the neutral position. On Scotus's view, God causes the moral truth value of each proposition by metaphorically turning the switch to on (morally right/obligatory), off (morally wrong/prohibited/illicit), or leaving the switch in the middle (permissible/licit). For contingent

⁶¹⁰ See Richard Cross, "Natural Law, Moral Constructivism, and Duns Scotus's Metaethics: The Centrality of Aesthetic Explanation," 188-191.

⁶¹¹ John E. Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 99.

moral propositions, these are chosen by the divine will; for necessary moral truths, only one position of ‘on’ or ‘off’ exists, such that God cannot change the switch. Furthermore, whatever way in which the lights are ordered, God has established it as the contingent means of metaphorically seeing him—but he could have chosen a different way. What’s important is not necessarily the lighting of the room *per se*, but that fact that God has chosen that specific arrangement of the light to illuminate our path to him as the ultimate end.

So, *that* God should be sought is a moral necessity, but the means to this end solely depends upon God’s will.⁶¹² This, it seems, motivates the common assumption that Scotus held to a divine command theory of ethics. It is true, after all, that Scotus believes the moral value of most human actions are grounded in the will of God. But the region shared with unrestricted versions of (DC) diverges at a central point, specifically, the intrinsic goodness of being lovers of God. This is done, not because it is command by God, but for its own sake—because it is intrinsically good.

Given all of this, it follows that Scotus cannot accept (4) in its present form. Recall that (4) claims actions have moral value intrinsically. However, Scotus believes that *many* actions (Second Table precepts) do not have their moral value intrinsically, but are grounded in divine volition. Nevertheless, unlike a U-DC, Scotus rejects (5) and thus accepts a reconstituted version of (4):

(4a) Right actions that are necessarily right have their moral value intrinsically.

Included in (4a) is our obligation to obey and love God, as well as making him our ultimate end, resulting in (5) being false. But a second valuative principle is needed to account for actions

⁶¹² See John E. Hare, *God’s Call: Moral Realism, God’s Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 66-75, and “Scotus on Morality and Nature,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9 (2000): 15-38.

excluded by (4a):

(4b) Any right action that is not necessarily right has no intrinsic moral value.

Consequently, (4b) remains true only for actions excluded by (4a): namely, contingent moral actions (Second Table prescriptions) which have their moral value only in relation to the divine will. So, (5) must be reformulated in Scotistic terms:

(5a) A *necessary* condition for the rightness of any *contingent* moral truth is that God wills it.

Since the majority of moral truths are contingent upon God's creative will, nearly all moral actions will be right only by divine prerogative. On Scotus's account, God has the freedom to either create or refrain from creating. Once God creates, necessarily, his creatures are obligated to love and obey him as their highest good—not even God can change it.⁶¹³ However, the path God chooses for his creatures, and what he commands them to do, depend entirely upon God. Once it is commanded, humanity is obliged to obey the command out of a necessary moral duty to love God.⁶¹⁴ The Second Table of the Decalogue wholly depends upon the divine will, and thus God could have commanded differently than he did—and that would have been right.⁶¹⁵

Scotus's claim that divine willing is unnecessary for the intrinsic value of some actions, along with his denial that goodness depends upon any divine action, preclude his theory from properly being classified as a version of U-DC. But for the very same reason, Scotus upholds the fundamental impetus for a U-DC, specifically, the problem of divine aseity and the intrinsic value of certain actions. In distinguishing (4a) from (4b), Scotus's version upholds the original

⁶¹³ Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, d.37. , q.un, nn. 3, 16-17.

⁶¹⁴ See Thomas Williams, "The Libertarian Foundations of Scotus's Moral Philosophy," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 193-215, and "A Most Methodical Lover? On Scotus's Arbitrary Creator," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 169-202.

⁶¹⁵ Scotus thinks God has done this in our own history. See *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.13.

incentive for a U-DC, the argument from God's aseity. Recall that a U-DC wishes to uphold (3) but is concerned that (4) is at odds with it. Distinguishing necessary moral truths from contingent moral truths, of which only the former has intrinsic value, Scotus facilitates a novel solution to the problem. In separating (4a) from (4b), Scotus can agree with a U-DC that any intrinsic moral truth *distinct* from God would in fact compromise his aseity—hence, (4b). But, in contrast to a U-DC, Scotus can legitimately claim (4a): that *necessarily* right actions have their moral value intrinsically. This is accomplished by stressing that (4a) is not distinct from God, but grounded in God's nature as the infinite good and therefore does not violate (3). For Scotus, the only necessary good with intrinsic moral value is that humans love and obey God as the ultimate end. Why? Because God has intrinsic infinite goodness. Consequently, the duty to obey the commands of God is grounded in God's supreme goodness, as a perfect being.

Conclusion

It is here—on God's relationship to moral norms—that Scotus is a transitional figure. His views are the ethical halfway-house between the natural law *eudaimonism* of his predecessor, Thomas Aquinas, and the unrestricted divine command theory of his successor, William of Ockham.⁶¹⁶ Many interpreters of Scotus, however, have not been clear as to what aspect(s) of the moral realm depend(s) upon God, nor have they been clear as to the way in which it depends upon God. These blunders, along with a failure to carefully see that the Subtle Doctor subtly distinguishes moral goodness from moral rightness, have led to a panoply of misleading interpretations of Scotus's ethics, on both sides of the spectrum: both from those

⁶¹⁶ For this interpretation of Ockham, See Thomas M. Osborne, "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist," *Religious Studies* 41 (2005): 1-22; and Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, tr. by Mary Thomas Noble (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 240-253.

wishing to interpret Scotus as an ardent defender of divine command ethics, and also from those wishing to make Scotus into some quasi-natural law theorist, closer to Aquinas and mainstream Catholic tradition.⁶¹⁷

The truth, it seems to me, lies somewhere in the middle: Scotus restricts the divine control of the moral realm to contingent deontological propositions, which depend upon the divine will in the sense of being caused by God to have their particular moral status. That is to say, he holds a restricted-causal-will-theory. Furthermore, God could change which of these contingent moral norms are obligatory, prohibited, or permissible without changing the nature of the act itself, and without altering human nature. He could do so simply by divine fiat. In the next chapter we'll see how Scotus considers the relationship between goodness and rightness—and only then will we be in the proper place to consider the whole of Scotus's metaethics and its relationship (or lack thereof) to normative ethical theorizing, and furthermore, enable an answer to the following question: what kind of voluntarist is Scotus?

⁶¹⁷ Parthenius Minges takes this approach to the extreme, when he argues that there is only a verbal difference between Scotus and Aquinas on natural law. See Minges, *Der Gottesbegriff des Duns Scotus: auf seinen Angeblich Exzessiven indeterminismus* (Wien: Verlag von Mayer & Co., 1907), 101-119.

CHAPTER NINE:

THE SEPARATION OF GOODNESS FROM RIGHTNESS

This final chapter intends to accomplish two things. First, I argue that Scotus separates goodness from rightness. Second, I deal with a potential puzzle in Scotus's account, namely, that moral goodness seems accessible to right reason and is not directly tied to God's causal control, whereas the rightness of an act seems to depend upon God's will, and doesn't seem, at least initially, to be accessible to natural reason. Furthermore, the acting agent's nature seems to play a role in the goodness of an act but not in the act's rightness.

The Separation of Goodness from Rightness

As we have already begun to see, Scotus distinguishes the rightness of an act from the goodness of an act. The moral rightness of an act depends upon whether the act conforms to (1) a necessary moral truth or (2) one of God's contingent precepts that God wills as one of the many possible means to reaching him. In either case, an act's rightness results from its conformity to one of these. In contrast, the moral goodness of an act concerns the harmony of all factors pertaining to the act, which would include elements involved in (1) and (2). Given this, goodness is a broader notion than rightness, such that we could conceive of acts on this model which are right but lack the appropriate moral goodness. I have already made some broad arguments for this position in chapters 2-6, and chapter 8, respectively. In what follows, I argue for this distinction in three further ways: from the relationship of goodness and rightness to the

divine will, from the existence of inordinate circumstances, and from the nature of Scotus's autonomy clause.

First, we can see this distinction from an examination of the divine will's role in goodness and rightness, respectively. As we saw in Scotus's "conformity of wills" thought experiment in chapter 6 (*Ordinatio* I, d.48), conformity to the divine will is not sufficient for an act's moral goodness. Furthermore, Scotus provides many explicit passages setting out the various conditions for an act's moral goodness, and none of them contain anything about God's will as the determining factor.⁶¹⁸ For example,

It can be said that just as beauty is not some *absolute quality* in a corporeal body, but is the *aggregation of all things appropriate to such a body* (such as magnitude, shape, and color), *and the aggregation of all its aspects* (which are all fitting of that body and to each other), so also the moral goodness of an act is a certain *décor* of the act, including the aggregation of proper proportion to all things to which it should be proportioned (such as the potency, the object, the end, the time, the location and the manner), and this specifically as what is dictated by right reason ought to pertain to the act.⁶¹⁹

Thus in his explicit statements about what makes an act morally good, Scotus provides tons of detailed information about the role of various factors, but never mentions the divine will.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁸ See *Quodlibet* 18, a.1; *Ordinatio* II, d.7, nn. 28-39; *Ordinatio* II, d.40, q.un., nn.7-11.

⁶¹⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, p.1, q.2, n.62: "dici potest quod sicut pulchritudo non est aliqua qualitas absoluta in corpore pulchro, sed est aggregatio omnium convenientium tali corpori (puta magnitudinis, figurae, et coloris), et 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..."

⁶²⁰ One might object that meritorious goodness requires divine acceptance and thus does in fact depend upon a divine act for its goodness. This is true. However, Scotus clearly argues that divine acceptance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for an act's meritoriousness, for at least two reasons. One, order for an act to be meritorious, Scotus claims that the act must also be generically and morally good—the kind of act must be appropriate to the agent, her nature, her causal powers, and be performed with an appropriate object in mind, for one or many good ends, in the right manner, time, and place (*Quodlibet* 18, a.1; *Ordinatio* I, d.48, n.5; *Ordinatio* II, d. 40, q.un.). And since these factors do not depend upon a divine act, a divine act alone is not sufficient for an act's meritoriousness. Two, according to Scotus, in the present dispensation, God ordained that divine acceptance only occurs when an act was performed from the incurrance of the co-causes of a free will and the virtue of charity (*Lectura* I, d.17, Pars.1, q.un, nn.102-103). Since these are independently necessary conditions for an act's meritoriousness (at least in the present dispensation), divine acceptance isn't sufficient for such acts. Thus, while a meritorious act's goodness does require some involvement from God, any meritorious act's goodness isn't the sole result of divine acceptance.

However, as we saw in chapter 8, Scotus claims that the divine will determines the truth value of contingent deontological propositions. God's will, he argues, suffices to provide some deontological proposition its truth value, and thus, sufficient to make some corresponding act licit or illicit.⁶²¹ Consequently, the goodness of an act does not directly depend upon the divine will, but the rightness of an act does directly depend upon its conformity to the divine will. Thus Scotus separates goodness from rightness.

Second, the existence of inordinate circumstances (or lack of appropriate circumstances) in some acts shows this distinction. Suppose God commands that some act be carried out, making the performance of the act right. In addition, suppose the agent does carry it out, but does so in a disordered manner: through the wrong means, or at the wrong time, or with the wrong intent in carrying out the action. In such a case, it is possible for the act to still be morally right without obtaining perfect moral goodness. Thus rightness and goodness are distinct notions for Scotus.

For example, suppose that I obeyed God's command to help the poor, but merely for vainglory: suppose I provide a beggar a sufficient amount of money, but I do so, neither out of love for God, nor out of pity for my fellow human—I give alms to the poor because I want people to see me as generous. In this case, I've performed an act that God prescribed as obligatory, but I've done so for a disordered end. It seems that in such cases, I've performed a morally right act, since God commanded it, but morally dubious one, since a disordered end suffices to make the act morally bad. In other words, my right action can be evaluated as

And even so, it is still the case the *moral* goodness does not seem to depend upon some divine act for its moral value. Hence, an act's moral goodness does not depend directly upon the divine will for its moral worth.

⁶²¹ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.13; *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.8.

morally bad, even though I ought to have carried out the act (without the disordered end).

Now one might argue that since the act was morally (contrarily) bad given its disordered end, it can't be right. And maybe so, as Scotus doesn't address this possibility, as far as I can tell. But Scotus thinks that an act need not have circumstances incompatible with the act's goodness in order to fail at being good; it merely needs to lack some of these conditions. As we saw in chapter 7, privative badness occurs when an act lacks some circumstance needed for moral goodness, but whose circumstances are not contrary with its goodness. For example, suppose I give alms for neither a good nor bad end. In this case, my act would lack the requisite requirements for moral goodness and so would be generically good and privatively bad. But then, the act performed was the right act, but lacked moral goodness. Thus goodness and rightness are distinct.

Or consider Immanuel Kant's shopkeeper example: Kant envisions a case whereby a shopkeeper treats people honestly and fairly because it's good for business.⁶²² This act may lack a good end, but it isn't incompatible with a good end, such as the customer's own flourishing. In Kant's example, I think Scotus would claim that the act would be morally indifferent, but still right in the sense of acting in conformity to God's law of truth-telling. So the act of truth-telling in this case would be right, but the shopkeeper's action could not be evaluated as morally good—not for the same reasons Kant gives—but because the act lacked an appropriate end. So goodness and rightness are distinct.

Third, we can see this distinction from Scotus's requirement for rational self-direction. Scotus thinks that the moral goodness of an act requires the agent's right reason make a judgment for oneself—what I have called the “autonomy clause” for moral goodness: it is not

⁶²² Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:397.

sufficient that the agent is informed from another that the action should be carried out, but the agent must make the appropriate judgment for herself.⁶²³ So let's suppose God commands some action. Furthermore, suppose that the agent comes to this knowledge not by one's own judgment, but by the judgment of another. Now suppose the agent carried out the act in question. The act is surely right, as it conforms to a divine precept. However, according to Scotus, the act would lack moral goodness, since it lacks the appropriate judgment by the agent.

For example, God commands that I not tell a lie. Now suppose I'm in a sticky situation where lying would be convenient. Furthermore, let's say that some moral authority in my life—say, a priest—knows of my current situation and has advised me not to lie, but he hasn't given me any rational reasons for such council. When my troublesome circumstances present themselves, I inconveniently tell the truth, not because I've formed a judgement that lying in these circumstances is wrong, but simply because the old priest told me not to lie. Here's the curious result of such a case: according to Scotus, my action was morally right, since God's will has made it the case that lying is prohibited, and my act conformed to this precept. But notice that on Scotus's view, my action lacks a necessary condition for moral goodness: namely, right reason forming a judgment about the appropriateness of the act. Thus Scotus's autonomy clause precludes this morally right act from being morally good. So goodness and rightness are distinct.

From these arguments, I conclude that an act can be morally right while simultaneously failing to exhibit moral goodness (i.e., by conforming to God's moral laws while failing to meet right reason's requirements for moral goodness), and furthermore, that an act cannot be morally good without being right. Thus (1) goodness is broader than rightness, (2) an act's being morally

⁶²³ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, nn.11-12.

right is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for an act's being morally good,⁶²⁴ and (3) other than necessary moral truths, moral norms and the rightness derived from their corresponding actions is contingent upon divine volition, whereas goodness is much more complicated and involves the harmony of a whole range of factors, including the object, the act, the nature of the agent, the end, the manner, and the means. So according to Scotus, moral rightness requires fulfilling my obligations to God's commands about which acts are right and wrong; moral goodness encompasses a broader evaluation of just how well I fulfill such requirements.

The Problem

But how are the moral goodness of an act and the rightness of an act connected? There seem to be twin problems confronting us here:

The Problem of Rationality: right reason plays a critical role in moral goodness, forming judgments about which objects are fitting to which acts, ends, means, etc. Right reason does not initially seem to play such a role in an act's rightness: the rightness of an act concerns its conformity to the precepts set forth in the divine will, which seem to be known through God's revelation and not through natural reason.

The Problem of Nature: moral goodness depends upon the agent acting upon the judgment that the act fits her nature, causal powers, the type of act, etc. Rightness of an act is not tied directly to our nature as moral agents, but depends upon the act's conformity with God's will—and God could prescribe any number of acts and their opposites without changing human nature.

So what do we make of all this? Well, unlike Aquinas, Scotus never attempted a *summa* or any kind of systematized summary of his ethical thought—an early death prevented him from

⁶²⁴ Part of my reasoning for claiming this will be developed more fully below. Basically *convenientia* of the object with an act implicates rightness of the act. In other words, to say that an act is right will mean, for Scotus, that God makes an object of the act either appropriate or inappropriate. See below.

the chance at doing so. Instead, we mainly have smatterings of ethical thoughts scattered through his commentaries on Lombard's *Sentences*, and a few quodlibetal questions related to particular ethical issues. In his commentaries on the *Sentences*—*Lectura*, *Ordinatio*, and *Reportatio*—Scotus often interweaves discussions of ethics within larger debates of whatever the book and question in Lombard's *Sentences* pertained to. For example, Scotus situates one of the central passages on moral goodness within a larger passage on the fall of the bad angels, and Scotus just says enough about goodness to make his larger, and only tangentially related, point.⁶²⁵

We do not have a complete treatise about how each aspect of his ethics fits together. We do not have, as far as I can tell, anything explicitly stating how moral goodness and moral rightness relate to one another. He treats each topic, and clearly states the conditions under which acts are morally good and morally right. But his treatments of each are often occasional—and not systematic—in nature. And he does not show how the two concepts relate with one another. Presumably, conjoining the two concepts into a unified theory shouldn't be that difficult, since Scotus has supplied all of the pieces. The pieces, however, do not seem to fit well with one another, at least based upon the details that Scotus provides.

This may be the reason that some interpreters have overemphasized the voluntaristic aspects of Scotus's thought, while many others dismiss the voluntarist passages and exaggerate

⁶²⁵ *Ordinatio* II, d.7, q.un. cf. nn.28-38. Examples of this could easily be multiplied. Here's another one: in his *Sentences*, Lombard's systematic exposition of theology follows this pattern: Book 1: God, the Trinity; Book 2: Human Nature, The Fall, etc.; Book 3: Salvation; Book 4: The Sacraments. Given Lombard's systematic structure in the *Sentences*, and the fact that Scotus is commenting on them, we would expect Scotus to provide a similar systematic structure to how he answers various topics. And so, for example, we would expect a discussion from Scotus on the virtue of charity in Book 3. And he does do this. But some of the most revealing aspects of his views on the virtue appear not in Book 3, but in Book 1. Why? Well, Lombard had argued in Book 1 that charity is identical with the Holy Spirit. So, Scotus feels the need to stop and address the virtue of charity there, to show that charity is not the same thing as the Holy Spirit. So he provides a long explanation of his own view of charity there. But even here, it is not a systematic treatment of the virtue, but just enough to make Scotus's own point. He augments what he says there once he gets to Book 3.

the role of rationality in moral matters—on the pain of contradiction, so the theory goes, reinterpreted one in light of the other. Others simply admit a fundamental contradiction and move on. For example, C.R.S. Harris writes that Scotus's

Whole ethical theory is thus haunted by a vast inconsistency of his own making, within the domain of natural morality itself. For while he does not deny the rational nature of the moral law, he attempts, nevertheless, to make it dependent upon the divine will, and it is the presence of this contradiction in his doctrine which has rendered it so particularly susceptible to one-sided misinterpretation.⁶²⁶

Harris rightly recognizes the lopsided interpretations of Scotus's ethics. Yet a more charitable reading of Scotus would at least attempt a rational reconstruction of the missing pieces in an effort at resolution. As Alvin Plantinga has reminded us in another context,⁶²⁷ we do not have to show the exact relationship between Scotus's theory of goodness and rightness in order to stave off the worry of contradiction; we only have to provide one *possible* way in which the two may cohere. Harris, however, warns against this:

We must therefore content ourselves in pointing out the two opposing currents of Duns' thinking without making any attempt to twist them into agreement, and it is only by a frank recognition of the antinomy that we can hope to avoid the one-sided interpretation in which his teaching has so often been distorted.⁶²⁸

But I suspect one of the main reasons Harris denies the possibility of reconciliation stems from his failure to separate Scotus's account of goodness from rightness. It would be true that if Scotus claimed that goodness necessarily and independently depended both upon the divine will *and* conformity with right reason in the same way, we would have a blatant contradiction. But the Subtle Doctor is far too subtle, and far too smart to make such a simple mistake. But if goodness and rightness are two distinct notions in Scotus, as I have argued above and throughout

⁶²⁶ C.R.H. Harris, *Duns Scotus, vol.2: The Philosophical Doctrines of Duns Scotus* (Oxford University Press, 1927), 308.

⁶²⁷ Alvin C. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 24.

⁶²⁸ Harris, *Duns Scotus, vol.2: The Philosophical Doctrines of Duns Scotus*, 335.

this dissertation, it seems at least possible to reconcile the two into a complete account of morality, even if Scotus failed to do so himself, and even if, his views on each matter make for uneasy bedfellows.

I suggest the starting point for this reconciliation must be Scotus's notion of the end; or rather, his conception of the end in the *ultimate* sense. Recall that Scotus claims moral goodness relies on all of the circumstances, but most importantly the end.⁶²⁹ However, our natures only necessarily direct us towards the infinite good as our ultimate end. This is *the* practical principle of action; it is grounded in our nature. It is known *a priori*. So rationality and nature are not a problem in one important respect: our nature does in fact point us to our ultimate good. And we can, by reason, know that we ought to love God most.⁶³⁰ Thus goodness and moral rightness converge in those necessarily right actions—loving God as our ultimate end and infinite good.

We can see this best in the following two passages:

I say that 'to love God above everything else' is an act of conformity to natural right reason, which dictates that what is best ought to be loved most, and thus is an act that is right in and of itself; indeed, its rectitude is self-evident, as a first practical principle of action. For, something must be loved most, and that is nothing but the highest Good itself, just as nothing but the highest Truth ought to be held as true by the intellect. And this argument is confirmed because moral precepts belong to the law of nature, and thus "You ought to love the Lord your God," belongs to the law of nature, and so this act's rightness is known.⁶³¹

And,

Natural reason reveals to an intellectual creature that something must be loved most, because in every essentially ordered object and act there is something supreme, and so [there is] something supremely lovable, and so there is also a supremely lovable object.

⁶²⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d.48, n.5.

⁶³⁰ *Lectura, prol.*, pars. 4, q.1-2, n.172; *Ordinatio* III, d.27, q.un., n. 14, 47; *Ordinatio* III, d.29, q.un., n.6; *Ordinatio* III, d.27., n.30.

⁶³¹ *Ordinatio* III, d.27, q.un., n. 14: "De Primo dico quod 'diligere Deum super omnia' est actus conformis rectae rationi naturalis, quae dictat optimum esse summe diligendum, et per consequens est actus de se rectus; immo rectitudo eius est per se nota (sicut rectitudo primi principii in operabilibus): aliquid enim summe diligendum est, et nihil aliud a summo Bono, sicut non aliud a summo Vero est maxime tenendum tamquam verum apud intellectum. Confirmatur etiam istud, quia praecepta moralia sunt lege naturae, et per consequens istud *Diliges Dominum Deum tuum*, etc. est de lege naturae, et ita notum est hunc actum esse rectum."

But natural right reason does not reveal something as supremely lovable other than the Infinite Good, because if it did, then charity would incline to the opposite of what right reason dictates, and so it would not be a virtue; therefore, [right reason] dictates that only the Infinite Good ought to be supremely loved.⁶³²

By natural reasoning we come to see that our nature directs us towards our ultimate end, and that God must be loved most as our infinite good—and thus those precepts in the First Table of the Decalogue, our nature, and our natural reasoning converge.

But this is not the case for the Second Table precepts, because the acts they prescribe are not always required for the attainment of our ultimate end, and God can and does at times change which acts are right, without changing human nature.⁶³³ The problem then, centers upon the role of nature and natural reason in the relationship between Second Table precepts and morally good actions: how do I know that God has contingently commanded such and such, so that my act may be right, and when carried out according to the dictates of right reason, evaluated as good? Thus how can our reason access these contingent prescriptions, and what role does our nature play since moral goodness requires right reason to judge which acts are appropriate to a whole host of conditions, including our natures and causal powers?

One obvious solution to the problem of rationality would be to claim our knowledge of contingent prescriptions originates from some type of supernatural revelation: either directly by God telling us, or indirectly through the Scriptures. Accordingly, nature and reason would direct us to God as our ultimate end and infinite good, and God supernaturally tells us the nature and extent of our obligations towards each other. Scotus obviously recognizes a place for this kind

⁶³² *Ordinatio* III, d.27, q.un, n. 47: “Ratio naturalis ostendit creaturae intellectuali aliquid esse summe diligendum, quia in omnibus obiectis et actibus (et hoc essentialiter ordinatis) est aliquid supremum, et ita aliqua dilectio suprema, et ita obiectum etiam est summe diligibile; ratio autem naturalis recta non ostendit aliquid sicut summe diligibile, aliud a Bono infinito, quia si sic, ergo caritas inclinaret ad oppositum eius quod dictat recta ratio, et ita non esset virtus; ergo dictat solum Bonum infinitum esse summe diligendum.”

⁶³³ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.18.

of moral knowledge.⁶³⁴ And yet he consistently argues that right reason can *naturally* come to know which objects and which acts are appropriate or fitting.⁶³⁵

Consider the moral act of ‘honoring one’s parents.’ How would the appropriateness of this object (as an object to honor rather than, say, scorn) be known? Well, I want to suggest that God’s will makes it an *appropriate* object. However, I must address one possible hurdle: Scotus has also argued the appropriateness of some object results from his concept of *convenientia*: two things that should stand in some relationship to each other. Thus, children ought to act in an honoring way towards their parents. But as we have seen, rightness of the act derives solely from its conformity to the divine will’s prescription of the act—and Scotus claimed that God could make the same act right or wrong for the same agent without changing the agent’s nature. So according to Scotus, God could make one’s parents an appropriate object of dishonor. Is there some infelicity here?

Well, that depends. If I am right about Scotus’s use of *convenientia*, it conveys not only a proper relationship between two entities, but also a non-inferential grasping of such a connection. We can see this most clearly in the following passage examined in the last chapter:

The intellect, whose object is being, finds no incompatibility understanding something infinite: rather, it seems perfectly intelligible. But it is remarkable if a contradiction in relation to the first object is made evident to no intellect, when discord (*discordia*) in sound so easily offends the hearing....For if the unfittingness immediately offends when it is perceived, why does no intellect naturally flee the understood infinite as if from something incompatible, and so destroys its first object?⁶³⁶

⁶³⁴ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.18. See also *Ordinatio* IV, d.33, q.1, nn.10-11.

⁶³⁵ See for example *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, nn.8-12.

⁶³⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d.2, pars.1, q.1-2, n.136. The first half of the translation is from Cross; the added material is mine. “Item, quia 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?”

As I pointed out in the last chapter, the point of the analogy is not that the *disconvenientia* of ‘infinite’ and ‘being’ is the same thing as the *disconvenientia* of hearing and an ugly sound; rather, both are known in the same way: by immediate, non-inferential perception in a sense of ‘perception’ that isn’t limited to the senses. So a discord in harmony and conceptual incongruities are known immediately and intuitively. So if we take this usage of *convenientia* and apply it to the present case, maybe Scotus has something like that in mind when he says right reason must judge the act appropriate (*conveniens*) to the object and other conditions: an agent immediately perceives—in the *moral* sense of perceiving—something proper to certain acts. And it seems, at least *prima facie* possible, that such immediate perceptions could be supplied by God via the faculty of intuition.

So, as we saw in the last chapter, certain acts turn out to be right or wrong because God’s will has determined it to be the case. Yet that would just mean that God’s will makes an object either appropriate or inappropriate for a certain kind of act. For example, God makes it the case that the act of murder is wrong. But a more robust description of the act might help clarify this: murder is the act of ‘killing an *innocent human being*.’ And here, the fuller description supplies an object. So when Scotus says that Second Table precepts like “you shall not murder” depend upon God’s will for their moral status, he means that God makes it the case that ‘killing an innocent human being’ is morally wrong, which, put differently, says ‘an innocent human being is an *inappropriate object* for an act of killing.’ So if I’m in a situation where I have a knife in my hand and I’m about to bury it into Joe—an object that fits the description of ‘an innocent human being,’ the act would be morally illicit, but also morally bad, since God has made it the case that the object (an innocent human) and act (killing) are incongruous.

So I’m suggesting God decides that some act is right or wrong, and he does so by

determining which act-object combinations are appropriate or inappropriate (*inconveniens*). Furthermore, perhaps we have immediate intuitions aligning with God's claims, such that, we can morally perceive the truth of the proposition that *killing an innocent human being is wrong*. Suppose I hate Joe and I'm thinking about killing him. I know Joe is an inappropriate object for killing via two other things I know: (1) a particular fact about the case, namely, Joe is innocent, (2) some God-given intuition that innocent human beings ought not be killed; i.e., I immediately perceive the unfittingness (*inconvenientia*).

Accordingly, reason plays an important role in two ways: one, in immediately perceiving or intuiting which act-object combinations are fitting or unfitting and consequently, right or wrong, and two, in the processes of conscience and *synderesis*: taking the general principle that 'killing an innocent human being is morally wrong' and applying it to the present case—determining if the object of this particular act is innocent.⁶³⁷ So maybe it is the case that the only way we know, say, *murder is wrong*, is that God has told us so—not supernaturally—but naturally: God has given us the appropriate intuitions. And knowing that still leaves room for right reason to operate: it must know the object is the sort that falls under the description 'innocent,' it must know this particular agent's stabbing someone with a knife with the intent to kill constitutes an interior act of killing, etc.

So on Scotus's account, God *could have* made it the case that innocent humans ought to be killed. And if he did, he would have given us intuitions that align.⁶³⁸ Thus for contingently

⁶³⁷ See *Ordinatio* II, d.39, qq.1-2. Interestingly, in direct opposition to Bonaventure and in agreement with Aquinas, Scotus argues that *synderesis* and conscience are in the intellect rather than the will. Furthermore, Scotus doesn't give us a detailed account of his own views in the question (or elsewhere); rather, he mainly criticizes the view of Henry of Ghent. See Langston, "Scotus and Ockham on Synderesis and Conscience," in *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*, ed. Douglas Langston (University Park: Pen State University Press, 2001), 53-69.

⁶³⁸ In *Ordinatio* IV, d.46, q.1., n.48, Scotus gestures in this direction by claiming that God might give our natures what is needed to know certain precepts are right or wrong.

right actions, which act-object units are right and wrong depend upon God making the object either appropriate or inappropriate, and we have the ability to form judgments about acts and objects, such that we can know what ought to be done in order for an act to be morally good. If God has willed otherwise, we would have an entirely different set of intuitions, and reason would need to make appropriate judgments about them instead.

But if such intuitions are supplied by God (via moral intuition), so that we immediately know things like *killing an innocent human being is wrong*, doesn't this make it unlikely or nearly impossible that we sin? Scotus would answer 'no,' for at least three reasons. First, even when the intellect intuitively grasps the major premise of a practical syllogism, reason can still be mistaken about which objects fall under the general description (e.g., innocent human being), and so which acts are applicable or inapplicable. For example, I might know that innocent human beings are inappropriate objects of killing, but nevertheless fail to recognize Joe's innocence.

Second, things can go awry with respect to the relationship between privately bad acts and rightness: recall that a privately bad act lacks something needed for (circumstantial) moral goodness, but the act does not have some positive condition that would make the act incompatible with such goodness.⁶³⁹ Suppose God makes 'honoring one's parents' an appropriate act-object combination for humans. This still leaves reason room to consider what would be appropriate *ways* to honor one's parents, given my nature as human and their present circumstances, etc. And suppose I honor them by giving them money to aid in their needs, but

⁶³⁹ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n. 20: "Potest autem aliquis agere non cum circumstantia debita, et tamen non cum circumstantia indebita; puta quando non ordinat actum ad finem debitum, nec tamen ipsum ordinat ad finem indebitum; tunc ille actus est malus privative, non contrarie, sicut ille qui ordinatur ad finem indebitum, et ex multis talibus actibus generatur habitus consimilis in malitia, scilicet privativa, non contraria. Exemplum huius: dare eleemosynam non propter finem bonum, scilicet amorem Dei vel subventionem proximi, non tamen propter malum finem, puta vanam gloriam vel nocumentum alicuius, est actus malus privative, non tamen contrarie."

not enough to satisfy the demands that right reason sets forth. I've done a morally right action, but one that lacks morally goodness because I've failed to give them a sufficient amount. I have failed to make a correct judgment; that is, reason failed to see the *conveniens* with the circumstances: my humanity, casual powers (my ability to act in the world), the nature of the act of honor, a fairly robust description of the object (my parents), the time, the manner, the location, and my intent for honoring them. So even if the *object-act* unit has its status as obligatory or prohibited from God, and I know such things by some God-given intuition, right reason still has plenty of work to do in order for my act to rise above simply being the right act, but obtain perfect moral goodness. And when reason errs, an intellectual failure leads to a moral failure.

Third, because of the will's unconditional freedom, it can always reject the claims of the intellect. This is true not only for Second Table precepts, but even for our actions related to God. For example, Scotus says that we often act contrary to our happiness, even when we know what our happiness consists in: a person could conceive of happiness as the enjoyment of the divine essence, and know that fornication in no way leads to that happiness, and yet, the person could seek fornication anyway.⁶⁴⁰ So having proper intuitions about which act-object combinations are morally right or wrong in no way ensures that a person will execute the appropriate action, because according to Scotus, the will must always have the ability to reject such practical syllogisms in order to retain its freedom. And it can do so by willing contrary to the moral prescription, or even by not willing at all. So having the correct intuitions about which act-object combinations are right and wrong is necessary but not sufficient for an agent to act in a morally

⁶⁴⁰ *Ordinatio* IV, dist. 49, q.9. While this example and question appear in the Wadding Edition, the editors of the Vatican edition believe this to be a *reportatio*: a student report of Scotus's lecture on the question, which has been interpolated here to fill in the unfinished pieces of the *Ordinatio* after Scotus's untimely death. But the material is certainly "Scotistic" and exactly the kind of thing Scotus probably said. See *Ordinatio* IV, dist. 43-49, in *Iohannis Duns Scoti Doctoris Subtilis et Mariani Opera Omnia*, vol XIV, 394. Scotus makes a similar point in *Ordinatio* I, d.1, pars.2, q.2. See especially n.92

good manner: that agent must make a judgment pertaining to all of the circumstances, and the agent's will must ascent to the act's rightness of its own accord.

Thus one way to solve these worries about the uneasy bedfellows of rightness and goodness would be as follows: what makes an act right or wrong is simply God's choosing it to be that way—and God does so by making some object-act combination either fitting or unfitting. But suppose God generally “rigged the dice,” such that, whatever precepts are obligatory, he also made it the case that our right reason intuits their “fit” with the other factors involved. So stealing is prohibited, and thus illicit. But given our natures, causal powers, and the kind of the act, we can know that acts of this kind are generically bad when performed. This would still uphold Scotus's claim that there is no *necessary* deduction from human nature to the acts we ought to perform, even if *contingently*, God has made it the case that we can naturally form correct judgments about such matters. Had God made (or when God makes) the act of stealing obligatory—as Scotus believes was the case with the Israelites plundering the Egyptians—God could change our intuitions to fit the particular case, because for some mysterious reason that act in the particular case makes us better co-lovers with God.⁶⁴¹

One might think all of this is speculation; however, there are at least two passages where Scotus gestures in this very direction: in a question concerning why lying is wrong, Scotus entertains Aquinas's position that acts are generically good or bad in virtue of their objects, and so generically bad acts can never be good, and since lying is a generically bad act, it can never be made good.⁶⁴² In response Scotus argues,

What one believes to be entirely false is no more inappropriate or illicit matter for speech than a human being who is innocent and useful to the commonwealth is illicit matter for

⁶⁴¹ See *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q. un., nn. 2-4; 40; *Ordinatio* IV, d.33, q.1, nn.10-11.

⁶⁴² *Ordinatio* III, d.38, q.un., n.16; Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 18 a. 2-3 and *Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 110 a. 1.

killing. But with these conditions on the part of the matter (that is, the human being) remaining intact, it can become licit to kill such a human being, for example, if God revoked the commandment “You shall not kill” (as was said in the previous question [d. 37 n. 13])—and not merely licit, but meritorious, for example, if God commanded someone to kill, as he commanded Abraham concerning Isaac. Therefore, by topical reasoning from the similar or from the lesser, it can become licit to make an utterance believed to be false if the commandment not to deceive one’s neighbour (a commandment that evidently exists) is revoked, since the commandment not to deceive is no more binding than the commandment not to kill. For it is less bad to take true opinion away from one’s neighbour, or to be the occasion of generating false opinion in him, than to take away his bodily life. Indeed, there is scarcely a comparison.⁶⁴³

Scotus makes a similar point in a passage about procreating and marriage:

Proof that it is not intrinsically sufficiently good in terms of moral goodness: no willing is intrinsically good in virtue of having a morally good object unless its object is intrinsically worthy of being willed, in other words, unless its object is the unqualifiedly ultimate good. Such willing is loving God, which can never be contrary to right reason; indeed, it is necessarily in accord with right reason that such an act tend toward such an object. But that is because this object is the ultimate end, which is to be willed in its own right by everything ordered to the end, in whatever way it can love that end. For a human being can distinguish everything that is for the end either rightly or wrongly, because it can order it to God and thus use it, or not order it to God and thus enjoy it, which is a great sin.

But it is evident that the object of the act of procreating or of willing to procreate offspring is not the ultimate end, but merely something ordered, or capable of being ordered, to the ultimate end. Therefore, such an act is not intrinsically sufficiently morally good. Therefore, it is capable of [being morally good in virtue of] being characterized by the right circumstances.⁶⁴⁴

There are a number of points we can glean from these passages. First, as we have seen elsewhere, God can make an act licit or illicit—such as killing, lying, and procreating—simply by willing/commanding that such an act ought to be done. And making such acts licit or illicit means that God makes the object of such an act appropriate or inappropriate, as Scotus seems to claim here, since his response concerns Aquinas’s claim that generically good/bad acts are only good/bad in virtue of their objects. Second, Scotus says that no object is intrinsically good and

⁶⁴³ *Ordinatio* III, d.38, q.un., n.17. Translated by Thomas Williams, *John Duns Scotus: Ethical Writings* (Forthcoming, Oxford University Press).

⁶⁴⁴ *Ordinatio* IV, d.26, q.un., n.15-16. Translated by Thomas Williams, *John Duns Scotus: Ethical Writings*.

necessarily worthy of love except the infinite good. All other objects have no such intrinsic value, and thus when combined with an act, could be made right or wrong by divine fiat. And for God to do so, would simply mean God makes some object either appropriate or inappropriate for some act. Furthermore, in response to Aquinas's view about generically good acts being good in virtue of their objects, Scotus seems to deny the existence of intrinsically bad acts, save those that have God as their immediate object (e.g., hating God).⁶⁴⁵ So which acts and objects are right or wrong depend upon God making the object appropriate to the act.

Ironically then, in an attenuated sense, goodness too depends upon God, but not directly: morally good acts (both generic and specific) are ones in which the agent's right reason *judges* that the act and object *et al.* are fitting, and the reason why it's fitting happens to be God's making that act-object combination appropriate or inappropriate, and consequently, right or wrong. So goodness requires an action based upon a rational judgement or a moral perception, a perception which stems from God's willing the act-object combination as appropriate or inappropriate. Thus while moral goodness narrowly construed does not depend upon God, *all thing considered*, moral goodness does depend upon an act and object *judged as appropriate by the agent*, and this appropriateness ultimately depends upon God's making it the case. But even so, according to Scotus, moral goodness pertains more to the agent making the judgment and acting according to it: morally perceiving or intuiting the fittingness of the act with the agent's nature, causal powers, and the kind of act, and with the object and the circumstances that specify the act. And the agent can do so, even if one were unaware of God's will: just because one has appropriate intuitions about which acts are fitting does not necessarily imply one has to know the reason behind their fittingness, namely, the divine will.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ordinatio* IV, d.26, q.un., n.17.

Perhaps then, an act's moral goodness does not *directly* depend upon the divine will for its moral worth, even if an act's goodness requires God to make an act-object combination fitting: the moral goodness of some agent's act does not directly depend upon the divine will for its moral worth because moral goodness of some act directly concerns the agent forming a judgment about the act's fittingness, and the agent could do so, even if she is unaware of the ultimate reason for some act's fittingness: the divine will. As Thomas Williams says, "While the fact that murder is wrong depends upon and is in some sense explained by the fact that God wills that murder is wrong, our knowledge that murder is wrong does not depend upon our knowledge that God wills that murder is wrong."⁶⁴⁶ Accordingly, moral goodness requires a judgement about the suitability of the act to the object and other conditions; it does not, however, require a second-order judgement about the source of that suitability—God.

That solves the rationality problem. The nature problem seems a bit more complicated. According to Scotus, our nature only necessarily directs us to God. Thus Scotus offers a minimalist picture of what follows from our nature: while we have other ends that satisfy various potentialities in us—e.g., survival, procreation—our *rational nature* is not dual-focused, as Aquinas interprets the Aristotelian tradition, directing us naturally to our twofold end and twofold happiness—community with others (imperfect happiness) and God (perfect happiness). It is rather singularly focused on God as the ultimate end and our infinite good. Thus, Scotus radically alters the Aristotelian conception of flourishing and human nature. Let's see how.

Aristotle conceives all action as teleological: all agents act for the sake of some end conceived as good. The highest good consists in humanity's final end, which Aristotle identifies with happiness. However, while everyone agrees that happiness is our final end, they often

⁶⁴⁶ Thomas Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: A Pseudo-Problem Dissolved," 93.

differ as to what this happiness consists in.⁶⁴⁷ How do we determine the nature of this happiness? For Aristotle, it's determined by our function—by an investigation into human nature in order to see what kind of thing a human actually is—and thereby obtain a better grasp on human happiness. Function generally describes the activity an object is designed to fulfill, and fulfilling its purpose is said to be the object's good. So a *good* knife is good in so far as it cuts well, for that is its function or end.

Aristotle applies the same strategy to humans: the function will be the *telos* human nature was designed to fulfill. Grasping our end requires grasping our nature *qua* humanity: since we share with plants and animals the nutritive part of the soul, and we share with animals the sensitive part of the soul, this cannot be what makes us human, as distinct from plants and animals, and is thereby incapable of determining our unique function. The distinctive part that determines our function is rationality: we are rational animals. As such, our function consists in reasoning well or good. This leads Aristotle to his concept of the human good: “And so the human good proves to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue.”⁶⁴⁸ Since our good has been identified with man's happiness, happiness is only obtained through a life of virtue. Human flourishing is thus construed as living out a (complete) life of virtue in the context of the *polis*.

Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that rationality is distinctive to humanity and thus constitutes its function. So, like Aristotle, knowing the nature of our happiness consists in knowing humanity's function as a rational animal. Aquinas appropriately asks whether this happiness consists in any created good, and on Aristotelian grounds he claims it does not. He

⁶⁴⁷ Aristotle draws this distinction in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.4.1095a18-20. He states, “As far as its name goes [i.e., the highest good men seek], most people virtually agree; for both the many and the cultivated call it happiness...But they disagree about what happiness is.”

⁶⁴⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7.1098a17-18.

argues that happiness consists in a complete good, where “complete” means the total satisfaction of desire. If the final good was not something that terminated in fulfillment of all desire, happiness would not be the ultimate end. Aquinas then argues that the object of the will is humanity’s universal good, and as such, only this can satisfy our will. This good as our ultimate end, of course, is God:

It is impossible for human happiness to be found in any created good. For happiness is the complete good, which totally satisfies the desire: otherwise, it would not be the ultimate end, if something remained to be desired. But the object of the will—the object of human desire—is the universal good, just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. From this it is obvious that nothing can satisfy the human will, except the universal good. And this is not found in any created good, but only in God: because every creature is good by participation. And so only God can satisfy the human will...therefore human happiness consists in God alone.⁶⁴⁹

As a result of changing the nature of humanity’s highest good, Aquinas differentiates imperfect happiness from perfect happiness, the former consisting in Aristotle’s conception of human flourishing in the life of the *polis*—natural happiness obtained in this life—while the latter consists in the beatific vision, or perfect happiness in the next life. According to Aquinas, Aristotle didn’t take his own teleology far enough, for the final end must be God: only the infinite good is final, self-sufficient, and complete, and thus only the infinite good can ultimately satisfy our natures.

Consequently, once the Aristotelian conception of happiness is supplemented with a Christian notion of teleology whereby the *summum bonum* is augmented from a mere finite or earthly conception of human flourishing in the context of the *polis*, to an infinite and

⁶⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.2, a.8: “Impossibile est beatitudinem hominis esse in aliquo bono creato. Beatitudo enim est bonum perfectum, quod totaliter quietat appetitum: alioquin non esset ultimus finis, si adhuc restaret aliquid appetendum. Obiectum autem voluntatis, quae est appetitus humanus, est universale bonum; sicut obiectum intellectus est universale verum. Ex quo patet quod nihil potest quietare voluntatem hominis, nisi bonum universale. Quod non invenitur in aliquo creato, sed solum in Deo: quia omnis creatura habet bonitatem participatam. Unde solus Deus voluntatem hominis implere potest...In solo igitur Deo beatitudo hominis consistit.”

transcendent end, Aquinas makes the necessary interpretive move that Aristotle was only working in the sphere of natural or imperfect accounts of happiness, and his account must be tweaked in order to provide a complete account of morality.

This significant alteration has at least two implications for Aquinas's own account of human flourishing. First, Aquinas thinks that our nature and function direct us towards an end which we lack the natural powers to achieve on our own.⁶⁵⁰ As such, only imperfect happiness can be achieved through our natural powers in this life. Perfect or complete happiness consisting in a vision of the divine essence requires supernatural aid and the addition of theological virtues: *grace perfects nature*.

Second, when Aquinas alters the object or end of human teleology in the *summum bonum* from the context of the *polis* to that of God, the nature of his ethical account changes: when the highest good is something this worldly, the nature of the virtues were construed a certain way, and directed toward social life in the *polis*. But when the highest good becomes a transcendent end, the highest virtues must be supplemented as well. His argument runs as follows: the virtues are necessary to perfect humanity, and this perfection is directed at our happiness. However, as we have seen, human happiness is twofold: imperfect happiness obtained through our natural powers, and perfect happiness that "surpasses" human nature. This latter happiness, Aquinas claims, can only be obtained by God's power. Because the latter surpasses human nature, man's capacities which enable him to act well to his natural ends aren't sufficient; consequently, we need "principles" of supernatural assistance for perfect happiness. Such "principles" Aquinas calls theological virtues, for the following three reasons: their object is God, they are infused in

⁶⁵⁰ See *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.42, 5, 5.

us by God, and they are known only through divine revelation.⁶⁵¹

To summarize: for Aristotle, our ultimate end consisted in something this-worldly, and could be achieved through natural powers in the context of one's community. Aquinas recognizes a place for human flourishing in community with others, but also recognizes that this end cannot ultimately satisfy our natures—only the infinite good can do that. And thus Aquinas conceives two ends particular to our nature as rational animals: know God *and* be sociable.

In contrast to Aquinas's Aristotelian adaptation, Scotus only provides one end that our rational nature directs us towards, and that's God himself. Our rational nature only directs us necessarily to the ultimate end, our infinite good. So unlike Aquinas, our rational nature's ends and subsequent goods are not dual-focused, directing us to God and creatures, providing normative constraints for both. Scotus's first practical principle of action, after all, is 'love God,' and not some more general truth like Aquinas's 'do good,' which directs us both towards finite and infinite ends (e.g., being sociable, knowing God).⁶⁵² Thus when we deliberate about moral actions, on Scotus's view human nature will play a more reduced role, since we cannot make deductions from our rational nature to any goods other than the infinite good. If we have other obligations, then they arise, as we've seen, from the divine will expressed in his commands.

Thus Scotus provides a minimalist view of what ends and various entailment relations exist given our nature as humans. Aquinas, by way of contrast, has an extremely robust account of human nature and the various ends that can be deduced from it. Indeed, the entire natural law that governs human action can be deduced from our nature as rational animals and the first practical principle for action: do good and avoid evil.⁶⁵³ Not so for Scotus: our rational nature

⁶⁵¹ See *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.62.1.

⁶⁵² See especially *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.14; Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, qq. 93-94.

⁶⁵³ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, qq. 93-94.

only directs us to God as the infinite good—whatever else we are obligated to do, it is not the result of deciphering what finite goods we are directed towards, but intuiting what contingent laws God has prescribed *for* humans to become co-lovers with God.

So what does Scotus mean when he says that the agent must make a judgement about the act's fittingness with its *nature*, the kind of act, and causal powers? Well, since he was writing in the heyday of medieval Aristotelianism, I think it's easy for us to wrongly attribute to Scotus some robust concept of nature, with a whole host of ends and goals. In other words, I think it's easy to assume he holds the same view of human nature that many card-carrying schoolmen would have held: namely, some robust version of Aristotelianism, of which Aquinas is the gold-standard. In other words, we read 'nature' and we automatically think 'Aquinas's Aristotelianism.'

But this cannot be what Scotus holds to, since Scotus explicitly states on multiple occasions that God could make the same act licit or illicit *for humans* without changing human nature,⁶⁵⁴ and that, various human acts and their opposites are not necessary for our natures to reach our final end.⁶⁵⁵ Thus Scotus seems to deny the very foundations of Aquinas's Aristotelianism about our nature and the various finite ends that it naturally and normatively directs us towards. So how does Scotus use 'nature' in this moral context, when he claims that agent must form judgments about the kind of the act, the agent's nature and causal powers, and the object, etc.?

I want to suggest that Scotus has in mind a minimalist picture of human nature, in that all he means by 'nature' is simply that: the kind of creature acting, without all of the Thomistic-

⁶⁵⁴ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q.un., n.13; *Ordinatio* I, d.44, q.un., n.8; *Ordinatio* IV, d.26, q. un; *Ordinatio* III, d.38, q.un., n.15.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ordinatio* III, d.37, q. un., n. 18; *Ordinatio* III, d.33, q.1; *Ordinatio* IV, d.26, q. un.

Aristotelian import about various ends. Recall that for Scotus, an act arises above being naturally good when the agent forms a judgment about the act. But judgements are the types of things *rational agents* do. And in Scotus's writings, we see three types of rational agents: human, angelic, divine. I want to suggest that when Scotus uses the phrase "the nature of the agent," he often just means to index the act to some particular type of rational agent—such as a human—as opposed to some other type of rational agent—such as God—but without all the metaphysical baggage Aquinas's account would associate with nature and its various finite ends.⁶⁵⁶

Recall that Scotus conceives of two types of secondary goodness: secondary natural goodness and secondary moral goodness. Secondary goodness concerning acts can be taken as a "quasi-genus" in which there are two species: acts of non-rational agents that are fitting to certain ends consonant with their natures, and acts of rational agents who judge the act suitable to certain ends appropriate to them as rational agents. The former Scotus calls 'secondary natural goodness;' the latter he calls 'moral goodness' and is possible only in rational agents.⁶⁵⁷ But since there are three types of rational agents, each of these have their respective goodness when they meet the conditions for rational self-direction.

By 'nature' then, Scotus means those various qualities of an agent relevant for moral evaluation of *the particular kind of agent's* act: rational or non-rational,⁶⁵⁸ and if rational, whether its mode of being is finite or infinite and its corresponding intensity,⁶⁵⁹ whether its will

⁶⁵⁶ See *Ordinatio* I, d.48.

⁶⁵⁷ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.10.

⁶⁵⁸ *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.4-11; *Ordinatio* I, d.1, pars.2, q.2, n.95; *Quodlibet* 16, a.2.

⁶⁵⁹ *Lectura* I, d.17, pars.1, q.un., n.55; *Ordinatio* I, d.48; *Quodlibet* 16, a.1.

is created or uncreated,⁶⁶⁰ the agent's particular causal powers,⁶⁶¹ its various affections,⁶⁶² etc. All of this is relevant in determining an act's moral worth, and each of these various qualities may differ depending upon whether the agent in question is human, angelic, or divine. Thus Scotus simply means that an agent must take into account his own nature and causal powers when acting for an act to obtain moral goodness.

For example, take the obligation to 'love God above all else.' Since this obligation is a necessary moral truth, it's obligatory for both God and creatures. But given God's infinite mode of being, and the corresponding infinite intensity in his acts, God must love himself with an infinite intensity that would be inappropriate—indeed, impossible!—for a finite creature. A human, by contrast, must love God above all in a way that is fitting (*conveniens*) with its finite nature. It would not be fitting for us to love God with an infinite intensity, nor would it be fitting for God to love himself with a finite intensity. So that's the kind of thing Scotus has in mind when he says that an agent must form a judgment about the act's fittingness with an agent's nature and causal powers. It is not a tacit appeal to some underlying teleology directing us towards a whole host of normative ends; rather, it's a declaration that diverse kinds of rational agents have different natures and causal powers relevant for the overall moral evaluation of their acts.

So unlike Aquinas, for example, we cannot look into human nature and deduce that the act of murder is uncondusive to human flourishing because it violates the end or goal of being sociable—and so on for other normative constraints that human nature and its ends might produce. By 'nature of the agent,' Scotus simply means the type of creature—imbued with

⁶⁶⁰ *Ordinatio* II, d.43, q.un., nn.3-6;

⁶⁶¹ *Quodlibet* 18.1, a.1, n.13.

⁶⁶² *Lectura* II, d.6, q.2; *Ordinatio* II, d.6, q.2; *Reportatio* II, d.6, q.2.

certain causal powers and affections—doing the action, without the metaphysical import of a horde of ends Aquinas thinks govern and constrain moral action.

But what about those finite ends that our sub-rational nature seems to direct us towards, like eating and procreating? Do they have moral ramifications? Scotus claims that whether an act is moral depends upon the *type* of object, and that certain types of objects aren't moral ones.⁶⁶³ Thus some of the ends that our sub-rational nature direct us towards have objects that would not bring it into the realm of moral, perhaps like eating. In these types of cases, if the object were appropriate to the act and the nature of the agent, then the act would have a secondary natural goodness. So raw meat might be fitting for a beast, but unfitting for a human. When the object of the act of eating—say a salad—fulfilled its role in restoring a human's energy, the act would have a secondary *natural* goodness.

Other objects of our sub-rational natures would in fact bring the act into the realm of moral, like the act of procreating. And here, it seems that Scotus might say something like the following: the acts of non-rational agents can exhibit a secondary natural goodness when they fulfill the end of procreation with objects which are fitting to their nature: that is, others of their same kind-nature. But as a rational animal, reason ought to govern the way in which we fulfill this end, by forming a judgment about which object is appropriate. And what makes the object of the act of procreation appropriate (in the present dispensation) is whether or not the object happens to be one's spouse. At times in the distant past, God has made a dispensation from this, allowing men to procreate with a number of women so that more people might exist to love him.⁶⁶⁴ But currently, since God has willed that the act of marriage makes the object of the act

⁶⁶³ *Ordinatio* III, part 1, q.2; *Quodlibet* 18, a.1, n.14.

⁶⁶⁴ See *Ordinatio* IV, d.33, q.1-3.

of procreation appropriate, our actions are right only when they conform to this divine precept. And if the act were carried out in conjunction with a judgment about the act's appropriateness (and other circumstances), the act would also be morally good. Thus some natural ends have moral ramifications; others do not. When they do, the act is right only when God commands/wills it.

Conclusion

Accordingly, while it is obvious that Scotus distinguishes the moral goodness of an act from the rightness of an act, the relationship between the two seem a bit tenuous. Here we see Scotus struggling as a transitional figure, whose views on moral metaphysics are deeply rooted in Lombard's hierarchy of goodness, but whose account of normativity has taken a decidedly voluntaristic turn. As a good scholastic, we see Scotus striving for the project of a robust moral metaphysics of goodness, open to the many fine-grain distinctions that only a schoolman would appreciate. But at the same time, we see Scotus as a theological voluntarist, ever wary of placing constraints upon God, and always willing to sacrifice moral norms on the altar of *potentia absoluta*. And in that vein, we see the Subtle Doctor simultaneously desiring to uphold a rational metaphysics of goodness while denying any normative implications of it to human nature, ethical eudaimonism, and natural law.

While his views of moral goodness and rightness make for uneasy bedfellows, they do not seem blatantly contradictory, so long as something like the account I provided here is correct. Had the Subtle Doctor not succumbed to a premature death, perhaps he would have written a treatise on morality that might explain these incongruities more carefully. But in absence of this, we have to let the texts speak for themselves: Scotus believes that an act's rightness depends upon whether it conforms to some moral truth—either a necessary moral truth or a contingent

precept. For contingent precepts, God makes certain actions right or wrong by making the act either appropriate or inappropriate to a certain object. In contrast, the moral goodness of an act is a broader evaluation of how well the agent performs the act, in conformity with a whole host of conditions as right reason dictates, and this would include forming judgments about which acts are appropriate to certain objects *et alia*. I have suggested that reason could know such things are fitting for a particular kind-nature by moral intuition, even if their ultimate status as fitting or unfitting stems from the mysterious will of God. But even here, the agent need not know the ultimate source for some act's appropriateness in order to form a judgment that the act is appropriate—to require such things would be to confuse ontology with epistemology.

CONCLUSION:

Writing in the heyday of both Aristotelianism and voluntarism, John Duns Scotus's moral philosophy offers a unique glimpse into a transitional time from an innovative, eccentric, and transitional figure. On the one hand, the Subtle Doctor clings to the fruitful production of past scholastics, particularly on the relationship between being and goodness, the Great Chain of Being, and the moral metaphysics of goodness, while simultaneously providing new and interesting justifications for these well-established doctrines. But we also see a mind shaped in the aftermath of the Condemnation of 1277, steeped in the voluntarism of his Franciscan predecessors, and thoroughly committed to producing and defending philosophical views that uphold God's utmost freedom at any cost.

In terms of being and goodness, Scotus agrees with the commonly made claim that 'everything that exists, is good'—[B]. His own account of *why* this is the case hinges upon the plausibility of his formal distinction: that two things can be inseparably connected in such a way that they are really identical, and yet have different *rationes* or characteristics that make them what they are, and furthermore, that such characteristics are not simply ways we describe or conceive one indiscriminate thing, but are features of those things discoverable by the mind. No doubt that many of Scotus's contemporaries surmised that carving a further distinction between a conceptual distinction and a real distinction was absurd. But Scotus finds the formal distinction useful in numerous contexts, including the relationship between being and goodness.

On that score, goodness is an inseparable and necessary (quasi-) attribute of being, such

that whatever has being, also has goodness. Since being comes in two modes—finite and infinite—goodness also comes in these two modes. Finite being is divided into Aristotle’s ten categories which represent finite modes of being. Thus in each category of being, there exists a goodness proportional to being. In the category of substance, beings are arranged hierarchically in terms of their perfections as substances. Since God’s being is infinite, his infinite goodness shines like a beacon of light atop the apex of the hierarchy of being.⁶⁶⁵ Thus Scotus’s account of [A] remains Augustinian in terms of its nature, while at the same time discarding the heavily Neoplatonic elements—like the robust privation theory and the language of measure, form, and order. Nevertheless, aspects of an Augustinian “Great Chain of Being” remain, even though Scotus prefers to call it an “Order of Eminence,” and even though Scotus reconstructs this account within the working metaphysics of his day, particularly along the lines set forth in Aristotle’s *Categories* and *Metaphysics*. Furthermore, while Scotus identifies good with *perfectum* or completeness, one kind of which he links to an end—as the Aristotelian nature account does—he nevertheless rejects that the end is the only factor for determining an act’s goodness, and denies that such goodness resulting from the end and other factors converts with being. Thus the end doesn’t perfect the agent in the way it does for Aristotle and Aquinas.

With respect to acts, every act, in so far as it is an act, will have a natural or ontological goodness because it has being. But not every act receives moral goodness. As a species of secondary goodness, moral goodness is not an absolute quality—like natural goodness— but a secondary, extrinsic, and accidental perfection that requires a whole host of conditions as judged by right reason. As such, Scotus follows Lombard and his students by claiming moral goodness

⁶⁶⁵ See *De Primo Principio*, 4.84: “You are the boundless good, communicating your rays of goodness so generously, and as the most lovable being of all, every single being in its own way returns to you as its ultimate end.”

does not convert with being, and thus, in the final analysis, does not perfect the agent in the way acts do for Aquinas's ethical eudaimonism.

Moreover, at the heart of Scotus's moral philosophy lies the distinction between an act's moral rightness and an act's moral goodness. Moral rightness concerns what we ought to do, while moral goodness is an overall evaluation of how well we do what we ought to do. The rightness of an act depends upon whether it conforms to either a necessary moral truth, or a contingent moral truth whose truth value depends upon God's willing it to be the case. Since the majority of moral norms are not necessary moral truths, the bulk of moral norms, according to Scotus, are supplied by God's commands as expressions of his will. In contrast, an act has moral goodness when the agent of the act has acted in conformity with a judgment that such an act is appropriate with a whole host of situations or conditions.

The separation of goodness from rightness allows Scotus, on the one hand, to uphold the rationality of the moral life, while simultaneously rejecting its connection with the ethical eudaimonism and the natural law theory of Aquinas. The only natural law principle our nature directs us towards is loving God as our infinite good. All other prescriptions and prohibitions cannot be deduced from our nature, nor do they contribute to some diminished sense of flourishing in this life, akin to Aquinas's imperfect happiness. While our nature directs us to God as our infinite good and the source of happiness, it does not provide normative provisions for our treatment of others. Such information depends upon God's will as its ontological basis, and could be known to us, I have suggested, via the faculty of intuition.

I'll close this study with a question: what kind of voluntarist was Duns Scotus? Well, as Bonnie Kent has aptly noted, there are numerous kinds of voluntarism that flourished in the thirteenth century at Paris, and precisely which kind of voluntarism in question makes all the

difference in the world. Roughly, she notes three kinds of voluntarism: psychological, ethical, and theological. Psychological voluntarism is simply a general emphasis on “the affective and volitional aspects” of human nature, which began with Franciscans such as Bonaventure. Ethical voluntarism designates “a strong emphasis on the active character of the will, the claim that the will is free to act against reason’s dictates, and the conviction that moral responsibility depends on this conception of the will’s freedom.”⁶⁶⁶ Theological voluntarism indicates a strong emphasis on God’s freedom and his ability to will anything but logical contradictions. All of these distinctions are helpful. And, although somewhat outside the purview of this dissertation, elements of psychological and ethical voluntarism are definitely found within Scotus’s ethics. But on the topic of theological voluntarism itself, given Scotus’s views, it seems to me we need to make further subcategories of moral theological voluntarism and axiological theological voluntarism—the former being a voluntarist view of the moral law and what God is able to command; the latter being about God’s general relation to value itself: is value itself determined by God’s will?

With respect to moral theological voluntarism, we could say that Scotus is a quasi-moral theological voluntarist, since Scotus restricts God’s control of the moral realm to only contingent moral truths. God cannot make necessary moral truths false, and thus, they are outside of the power and control of his will. God cannot will that people hate him, nor can he will that we love something else as our ultimate end. But with respect to all other moral norms, God could justly will whatever he wants. And if he did, conformity with such laws would be morally right.

As for axiological theological voluntarism, Scotus is not an axiological voluntarist in any

⁶⁶⁶ Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 94-96.

sense: with respect to primary goodness, value supervenes upon being—the ontological goodness of every created thing and (& THE uncreated thing) is necessarily determined by the thing's being. So substances have their value fixed by their being (since goodness is a formal property of being), and thus the value of some entity is not directly tied to God's will. With respect to moral goodness, acts are good in so far as they are elicited in accordance with a judgement made by the agent's right reason concerning the act's fittingness with the object and the circumstances of the act. Thus moral goodness does not directly depend upon the divine will for its value. The same thing could be said about beauty: since beauty involves the harmony of a number of features, it does not depend directly upon God's will making it the case that something is beautiful.

So in what sense is Scotus a theological voluntarist? We should say he is a quasi-moral theological voluntarist, since only contingent moral truths directly depend upon the divine will for their moral status. Thus Scotus is only theological voluntarist in a very limited sense; namely, with respect to contingent moral laws governing interpersonal relations between humans. Limited though it may be, it does have huge ramifications for the future of moral philosophy, the rise of theological voluntarism in its various forms, and the rejection of Aquinas's natural law theory and ethical eudaimonism.

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