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Human Beings according to John Duns Scotus**

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Free Will, Grace, and God: The Problem of Predestination of Human Beings according to John Duns Scotus

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Abstract

John Duns Scotus discusses the problem of predestination of human beings in the following works: *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, 41, *Lectura* I, d. 40, 41 and in the *Reportatio* IA, d. 39-40, 41.

There are three thesis that can be distinguished in his theory of predestination.

- (1) Scotus tries to reconcile the immutability of divine knowledge and freedom of created persons by applying the concept of synchronic contingency, which allows to justify that the knowledge of God is certain and unchanging, but contingent, and thus events (including the acts of will of created persons) are unnecessary and free. This allows Scotus to avoid fatalism.
- (2) Redemption is the matter of grace, and thus is a matter of God's will, and His free choice. It is not the consequence of merits of the created persons. On contrary, the condemnation is related to the reasons - God, when He condemns a person, he takes into account the sins and bad use of someone's free will. Scotus tries thereby to reconcile both God's justice and His mercy. Against the views of St. Augustine, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, Scotus' own position is moderate.
- (3) Scotus solves the most difficult problem of the impact of grace on the someone's freedom and choice by using the categories "velle" / "non-velle" / "nolle". God is non-willing (non-velle) the grace for the sinner but this act does not make the condemned person remain an ultimate sinner. This way, the "non-velle" act does not determine the condemned person to sin.

Keywords: predestination, free will, divine knowledge, grace, determination, Henry of Ghent, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus.

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John Duns Scotus concerned himself with predestination and related issues as he explained to students Peter Lombard's Sentences and composed his commentaries on this scholastic textbook. The lasting effect of his discussions are the following distinctions contained in the chief versions of his exposition of Lombard's work: *Ordinatio* I, d. 40-41¹, *Lectura* I, d. 40-41² (both contained in the critical edition) and *Reportatio* I-A, d. 39-40, 41³ published in a non-critical edition. The structure of these distinctions is similar. Scotus asked two questions: "Whether someone elected for salvation can be condemned to eternal perdition?", "Whether there is an action deserving election or damnation?". The problem of predestination is closely related to the problem whether God's foreknowledge predetermines future contingent events, including in that number future meritorious (and demeritorious) actions by human beings. Thus the problems considered in distinction 40 are intimately linked to the problem of how God knows the future contingents, which is discussed in distinction 39 of the *Lectura* whose subject matter is free will and the characteristic features of God's knowledge. This distinction is absent from the critical edition of the *Ordinatio*⁴.

The Meaning of the Term "Predestination"

In the Polish language, the word "predestynacja" (equivalent to the English "predestination") taken in its broad sense has the same meaning as "irreversible fate", "destiny", "doom". This meaning is closely related to Calvinist theological tradition, according to which predestination is essentially linked to the assumption that God eternally and in advance determines by the decision of his will who will be saved and who will be damned for all eternity⁵. However, in the texts by John Duns Scotus the term "praedestinatio" possesses markedly positive connotation and functions as the opposite of the terms "reprobatio" (reprobation) and "damnatio" (damnation). Predestination, to Scotus, is not pre-designation for either election or damnation, it is simply and unequivocally election for salvation. As Scotus himself writes in his *Ordinatio*: "Predestination in the proper sense is an act of God's will, namely a ruling by God's will through which an intelligent or rational creature is elected to grace and glory"⁶.

¹ Doctoris Subtilis et Mariani, Joannis Duns Scoti. 1963. *Opera Omnia, Ordinatio* I, vol. 6. Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitas Vaticana.

² Doctoris Subtilis et Mariani, Joannis Duns Scoti. 1966. *Opera Omnia, Lectura* I, vol. 17. Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitas Vaticana.

³ John Duns Scotus. 2008. *The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture, Reportatio* I-A, vol. 1-2. Franciscan Institute Publications St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure.

⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 39 has not been included in the main body of the text by the editors of the critical Vatican edition as a spurious text, an insertion by Scotus's pupils; instead, it has been relegated to appendices (Appendix A, pp 401 - 444). The authenticity of this text is still debated.

⁵ Becker M. L. 2015. *Fundamental Theology. A Protestant Perspective*. Bloomsbury, London, New York, Sidney, 39.

⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 4.

Modal problems

As he undertakes in his *Ordinatio* the discussion of the question whether someone predestined to salvation can still be condemned to eternal damnation, the Subtle Doctor appears to be considering possibility of God changing his own decrees. This, in turn, seems to contradict the theistic conception of God as an Absolute immune to any sort of alteration whatever. Scotus invokes two difficulties against any possibility of the change of status from elect to damned. First, if someone enjoyed the status of election (for all eternity) and then a change came about, whose result would be an alteration of the status to that of (eternal) damnation, there would come about a change affecting an already fixed past state of affairs, yet obviously any change affecting the past seems impossible⁷. The Subtle Doctor confirms this with an invocation of Aristotle's authority, who is quoted as saying in book 6 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*:

"For this alone is lacking even to God
To make undone things that have once been done"⁸

So the past is what has been made necessary and as such immune to any change.

The second objection to the possibility of change of the status from election to damnation comes from consideration from a possible cause of that alteration, since any change of God's decree would be irrational without an appropriate cause. However, as Scotus point out, any cause inducing God to change his previous decision would have to be an act of the will of the person concerned (the elected-changed-to-condemned person) and thus there would be an instance of the will of a creature causally influencing God's will, which, again, appears to be an impossibility, as the Creator is under no obligation to reckon with any acts of His creatures⁹.

On the other hand an assumption of inalterable election or damnation of a person eternally decreed by God appears to lead to determinist consequences, since on that assumption the final destiny, salvation or damnation, of a person seems to have been decided in advance, entirely independently of any moral efforts on the part of that person. This would mean, the Subtle Doctor concludes, that the moral law contained in God's commandments was superfluous¹⁰.

In trying to solve these difficulties Scotus's efforts will focus on demonstrating that the situation of election or damnation in which a person is found (at a given moment) lacks the feature of necessity; in doing this he will refer to his own theory of synchronic contingency explained by him in the preceding distinction (distinction 39) of his *Lectura*. The essence of his arguments will be to show that God's knowledge of the ultimate destiny (salvation

⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 1.

⁸ Aristotle. 1980. *The Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 1139 b 10, transl. W. D. Ross. Oxford University Press, Oxford. In fact the saying is of the poet Agathon, quoted in this place by the Stagirite.

⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 2.

¹⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 3.

or damnation) of a person is certain and eternally immutable, and yet this fact does not imply determinism, as the situation of election or damnation is a contingent situation; it has its source in God's will, but its character is not to determine (the acts of person concerned). Scotus's conception of God's knowledge is an attempt to justify the claim that God's knowledge is absolutely certain and immutable, and yet (with respect to some of its objects) it is perfectly contingent. This moment of contingency in God's knowledge allows true contingency of free (and thus contingent) actions of created persons. This enables the Subtle Doctor to claim that God's eternal decree concerning the salvation or damnation of a person is determining with respect to that person's acts and leaves sufficient room for human freedom and responsibility.

First of all, Scotus focuses his attention on analysis of propositions related to God's actions, which contain the modal operator "can" ("it is possible for"). In distinction 39 of his *Lectura*, Scotus scrutinized the way of operation of will in general, including God's will; he stated "it is possible for a will, which is willing at the moment t , not to be willing at the very moment t "; he added by way of illustration: "It is possible for God's will, willing in the instant of eternity that there be a stone, not to be willing at the very same instant that there be a stone"¹¹. According to the Subtle Doctor, the quoted statement will cease to be true if we take God's willing and His not willing as related to different instants of time, as there is no sequence of different temporal instants in God's willing. The quoted statement, Scotus explains, is true only in the divided sense (in *sensu diviso*) when construed as: "it is the case that p and it is possible that it be not the case that p " ($p \wedge \diamond \sim p$). Then this composite sentence can be broken into two following clauses: "God's will is willing in the instant of eternity that there be a stone" and: "It is possible for God's will not to be willing in the instant of eternity that there be a stone". This shows that in the quoted statement the modal operator "it is possible" applies only to one clause comprised in the original composite statement and not to the whole sentence.

The very quoted statement, the Subtle Doctor says, will be false and will involve contradiction if we take it in the composite sense (in *sensu composito*: $\diamond (p \wedge \sim p)$); for then it will be construed as "It is possible that in the instant of eternity it is the case that God's will is willing that there be stone and (at the same instant) it is not the case that God's will is willing that there be a stone". In the reading of that sentence in the divided sense, no contradiction appears, for both clauses into which it can be analysed, the "God's will is willing in the instant of eternity that there be a stone" clause and the "It is possible for God's will not to be willing in the instant of eternity that there be a stone" clause, can be simultaneously true.

This synchronicity (of a contingent choice of the will and the possibility of the contradictory choice of that very same will) guarantees that there is only one act of willing in God and that instants of eternity in God do not succede one another like moments in time. If this were not the case, God would lose His absolute simplicity¹².

¹¹ *Lectura* I, d. 39, n. 54.

¹² *Ibid.*

The contingency of the act of God's will related to creation taken for granted, Scotus's response to the question heading distinction 40 (Whether it is still possible for a person elected for salvation to be condemned to eternal damnation) of both the *Ordinatio* and the *Lectura*, must be in the affirmative. He states it as follows: "Given what has been said in the preceding question, God elects his chosen in a contingent way and He can (it is possible for Him) not to elect them to grace and glory, not simultaneously, nor in succession, yet both moments of his contingent act are separately present in the instant of eternity"¹³. Scotus, in distinction 40, once again denies possibility of successive acts elicited by God's will and goes on to apply to predestination the modal categories introduced in distinction 39. The statement "An elect person can be damned" (or "It is possible that an elect person be damned") can be construed either in the divided or in the composite sense. Taken in the composite sense ("It is possible that a person is elect and that very person is non-elect) this statement involves contradiction, as it affirms possibility of simultaneous (positive) election and non-election of a person; taken in the divided sense ("It is possible, for a person, who is actually elect, to be damned) this statement is actually a conjunction of two propositions, which can both be true with regard to the same subject¹⁴, and of which only one is a modal proposition: "A person is elect" and "It is possible for that person to be damned"¹⁵. Scotus clarifies, that what he means is not that "contraries can coexist simultaneously" nor that "one of the contraries can follow the other since both of them are in eternity"; what is meant by his statement is that both the states describes by the simple clauses comprising the quoted statement construed in *sensu diviso* are simultaneously true, (a person is elect, and it is possible for that person to be damned) since God's act of choice is considered as prior with regard to nature to the actual realization of that choice in the object. Thus the statement "It is possible that an elect person be damned (or non-elect)" taken in the divided sense ought to be construed as a conjunction of two propositions "A person is elect" and "It is possible for that person to be non-elect", as already indicated above.

The outcome of Scotus's discussion of the question whether it is possible for an elect person to be damned is not the conclusion that there can possibly come about a change in God's mind as to the final destiny of an elect person, but clear and unambiguous recognition of the contingent, and thus non-determining nature of God's decision. This allows the Subtle Doctor to emphasize that predestination does not exert a determining influence on the activity of a person's will in the world and does not take the freedom of choice and action away from an intelligent subject. Scotus's conception demonstrates how it is possible for created intelligent subjects to act in a contingent way even though God's knowledge of their activity is eternally certain and immutable and the reason he finds for this possibility is the contingent nature of

¹³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 5.

¹⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 7.

¹⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 7.

God's knowledge of contingent acts of freedom. Here Duns Scotus takes leave of the ontological tradition that associated immutability with necessity: God knows for sure and inalterably whether a given person is ultimately to be elect or damned, yet, since his knowledge of this is itself contingent, it exerts no determinist influence upon the domain of created free agents. In Scotus's conception the eternally immutable knowledge that God possesses of passing events of the created world does not bear the character of a determinist factor in the created Universe because Scotus has shown in his ontology that it is perfectly possible for a state of affairs to be both unchangeable and contingent (not necessary).

However, there still remains the problem, how one ought to save the freedom of created intelligent agents and the contingency of the choices made by them if it is God alone that makes the ultimate and irreversible decision concerning their election or damnation. Even if God Himself decides in a free and contingent way, it appears that His sovereign choice must introduce determinism in the subordinate and dependent realm of created beings. God remains supremely free but will a created, finite subject remain free in a Universe ruled by the sovereign God? If the decision issued by God concerning predestination of human beings has been made at the very instant of creation of the world, its determinist consequences for the persons concerned appear to be inescapable, even if God in that instant acted contingently and freely, that is, could have decided otherwise. What happened in the past has the character of necessity, for the past is necessary rather than contingent. Consequently, if the decision concerning predestination of a human being was made in the past, it must not only be immutable but also necessary.

Scotus is perfectly aware of the possibility of advancing this kind of reasoning as an objection to his theory. His answer to it crucially depends on exposing and refuting the anthropomorphic assumptions concerning God's relationship to the world that lie at the root of this objection. He warns us not to represent God's activity as if it took place in time, in the past from our viewpoint. For "divine predestination does not pass into the past. Although it coexisted with those past things that have passed away, it has not passed away with them"¹⁶. The mode of existence of the Divine Being is not temporal in its nature, so all the temporal terms signifying the past, the present and the future, when referred to God, no longer signify parts of time, but always signify the permanent 'now' of eternity. For God it is the same thing whether we say that he "did predestine", "predestines" or "will predestine", and his act of predestination is always contingent; it is neither present (in the temporal sense of the present), nor past, nor future, although it is coexistent with all the parts of time¹⁷. Our false manner of representing to ourselves God's activity consists in placing it in the past. The Subtle Doctor writes "As we always refer to an act of God's will as though it has already taken place in the past, we do not understand the freedom in God's will with respect to the act of predestination, as if that act has

¹⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

already been completed and finished by that will"¹⁸. Now, according to the Subtle Doctor, we ought rather to represent to ourselves God as acting in the present, after the pattern of our own deliberation preceding our choices and taking place here and now; let us think of God as if He was still undecided, as if He still was in the process of determining his will to one of the two mutually exclusive states of things or as if He still considered, whether He would predestine a person to salvation or not¹⁹. It is in this way that we can make it easier for ourselves to understand how the question of a person's salvation or damnation remains an open question for our present and that there is nothing in it to circumscribe our freedom of choice.

Having made these three assumptions, namely that (1) the present state of things is contingent, (2) the act of predestination is performed in the divine "now" and it is contingent, (3) God's will in a contingent way decides on the ultimate destiny of every individual, Scotus attempts to demonstrate that (4) we are not predetermined by predestination, and it is in this sense that it is possible for an elect person to be damned.

Having rejected necessity of the present and dropped the indissoluble link between immutability and ontological necessity, also having discarded the atemporal presence of the stream of time to God's mind (God's immutability essentially exceeds the temporal "now", yet it coexists only with the "now" that is actually present)²⁰, Scotus presents an impressive attempt to explain God's knowledge of future contingents. Important in this attempt is the assumption that the value of truth possessed by true propositions about contingent events does not make these events necessary. Many of these contingent facts are voluntary acts performed by created intelligent agents, whose will acts in a free way and is not determined by any cause other than the will itself. This freedom of the will is not constrained by the fact that God eternally knows these voluntary acts in a certain way. Scotus once more emphasizes the freedom of created intelligent subjects when he states that the will of a predestined person is not strengthened (*confirmata*) in a special way because of the fact of being predestined, it still retains the ability to sin, and thus it is still possible for it to remain in the state of sin²¹. Thus, in every conceivable respect, predestination is not predetermination. There are no doubts that this was Scotus's meaning, however, it remains open whether he sufficiently justified this point, especially in the context of his theory of grace.

The Reason for Election or Damnation

¹⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ On the conception of time in Scotus's philosophy see Lewis N. 2006. *Space and Time*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Th. Williams. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 83-93; Craig W. L. 1988. *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suárez*. E. J. Brill, Leiden, 30.

²¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 40, n. 6.

In distinction 41 of his *Ordinatio* Scotus confronts the problem whether there is a reason or a meritorious act (*meritum*) justifying or deserving predestination (as we already know, predestination for Scotus is the same as election for salvation). The Latin term *meritum* poses some problems with translation, in diverse context it can be translated as "reward", "merit", "meritorious act", "desirable quality", "essence", "reason". In theology it usually signifies an act or behaviour deserving praise or reward, a meritorious act. Regardless of the nuances of translation, the general meaning of the question heading the distinction under discussion is as follows: does God's decision to select human persons for eternal salvation or damnation find some justification on the side of man and his action and behaviour; does it depend in some way on the selected person's qualities, attitudes, acts of the will; does God, when deciding on a human being's ultimate destiny, take into account the conduct of His creatures.

Richard Cross, in his discussion of the conception of predestination found in Scotus's works, assigns rather more space to the explication of the concept of merit²². He makes ample reference to other texts than the *Ordinatio* I, d. 41 discussed here, in particular he quotes Scotus's definition of a meritorious act given in his *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*. A meritorious act (*actus meritorius*) is an act that is accepted by God because of certain good it represents, which justly deserves a reward²³. An essential feature of a meritorious act is that it must be grounded in charity, yet the most important distinctive quality of it is that it has to be positively approved by God. Thus we can identify three essential properties of a meritorious act; it must be a voluntary act, it must be an act inspired by charitable love, it must be positively approved by God (who approves it because it is an act of charity)²⁴. A meritorious act is by no means an achievement of a human person (that compels recognition on the part of God), nor is it something that "earns" for man the eternal life of beatitude, nevertheless it is something positive in axiological terms.

Scotus also makes use of the distinction between *meritum de condigno* (loosely: merit that is positively deserving of a reward), and *meritum de congruo* (merit that consists in doing what is suitable or obligatory or in compensation of a wrong that has been done), which, according to Cross, has been introduced by St. Bonaventure. The reward of the *meritum de condigno*, in the Subtle Doctor's conception, is the eternal life of salvation, while the reward of the *meritum de congruo* is sanctifying grace (that is justification)²⁵. The distinction between positive merit (act positively deserving a reward) and mere redress (act of compensation for a committed injustice) is vital in theology, while redress is setting right or offering compensation for harm done to another person or a committed offence, the positive merit is an act done for somebody else's good which deserves praise and reward. *Meritum de condigno* is merit in the

²² Cross R. 1999. *Duns Scotus*. Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 103-107.

²³ Cross R. *op. cit.*, p. 103 - 107. Cf. John Duns Scotus. 1998. *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, 17. In: *Opera Omnia, editio minor*, II/1, *Opera Theologica*, ed. G. Lauriola. Editrice AGA, Alberobello.

²⁴ *Duns Scotus on Divine Love*. 2003. ed. A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, E. Dekker, N.W. Den Bok, A. J. Beck, Aldershot, Ashgate, 126.

²⁵ Cross R. *op. cit.*, p. 105.

proper sense of the word, it is an act deserving a reward that is equal in value to the good contributed by that act, while in the case of merit de congruo, the reward exceeds in value the deserts contributed by the meritorious act²⁶. As an example of merit de condigno and its reward one may quote work done by a labourer and the just pay for that work, an example of a reward de congruo will be a bonus added to the just wages²⁷. As Cross makes it clear, Scotus firmly holds the doctrine that no human action whatever is sufficient to obtain justification of man, although some human acts may be sufficient to render the person that performed them fit to receive the reward of eternal life of beatitude²⁸. Absolutely no meritorious acts on the part of creatures have the power of compelling God's will to recognize them and offer a reward for them; in rewarding human merits God always acts in a free and never in a necessary way²⁹.

John Duns Scotus's Position on Predestination

Before expounding his own views on the reasons for election or damnation of a person, Scotus discusses relevant theories put forward by other theologians. These could be divided into the following groups: theories holding that (1) there are no reasons on the side of creature for either election or damnation, these both states are entirely unrelated to whatever merits humans might have (St. Augustin, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas); (2) there exist reasons on the side of creatures for either election or damnation, which means that human merits and demerits are taken into account in deciding the ultimate destiny of a human person (Henry of Ghent).

Henry of Ghent's elaborate solution to the problem of man's ultimate destiny as decided in predestination by God failed to win John Duns Scotus's approval.

The Subtle Doctor formulates three basic objections to Henry's theory. For one thing, He makes a different assumption from Henry's as to the primary and decisive moment determining the cause of good or bad use of the faculty of free choice by a human being. According to John, God foresees without doubt all future contingent events and the way they relate to what has been determined by His will. Thus what makes a human being decide to cooperate with grace in its very first instant depends on the will of God and not on the will of a created person. The will of, or a previous decree by God is the cause of the first difference obtaining between persons that are equal as to their nature. The consequence of this primary difference is ultimately election or damnation³⁰. Given this assumption, the good use of the faculty of free choice,

²⁶ Sieniatycki M. 1930. *Zarys dogmatyki katolickiej* [An Outline of Catholic Dogmatic Theology], t. III. Kraków, 158-159.

²⁷ *Historia dogmatów*, ed. B. Sesbotië, vol. 2. 1999. Wydawnictwo „M”, Kraków, 302.

²⁸ Cross R., *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁹ Cross R., *op. cit.*, p. 104.

³⁰ *Ordinatio I*, d. 41, n. 36.

which in Henry's eyes constituted the merit deserving a reward in the form of election is secondary to the determination set by God's will.

Secondly, the principle assumed by Henry, affirming that "the reason for predestination found in a person being an object of predestination is the good use of free will made by that person as foreseen by God" cannot, according to Scotus, have the characteristic of universality as it cannot apply to children in whom God does not foresee good or bad use of the faculty of choice³¹. Scotus has probably here in mind children who died before reaching adulthood. He tacitly assumes that children as such cannot make choices directed by reason (in this he follows Aristotle), so in the case of children there can be no question of any merit whatever. Another possible interpretation of Scotus's meaning in this passage is that he refers to children who die unbaptized and thus are not eligible for distribution of grace and in there case there can be no response to grace (which is a crucial moment in Henry's theory). In his *Reportatio* Scotus defines his reference with more precision: what he means is the situation of a child, who has been baptized, yet died before it had a chance to exercise well its faculty of free choice³². In all of these situation ther is no room for the reason for election found in the elected person as postulated by Henry. Scotus takes into consideration one possible argument in defense of Henry's position: in the case of children dying before reaching maturity in general God foresees hypothetical use of the faculty of free choice by a given child; he foresees what that use would have been had the child lived long enough to achieve its adult age. On this basis it might be possible to foresee hypothetical future merits and demerits that would constitute a reason for election or damnation. This answer, however, failed to satisfy Scotus; he pointed to the following very inconvenient consequence of this answer; once accepted the principle of including in the assessment of a person's conduct hypothetical would-be merits and demerits could in principle be applied to anyone, including any grown up person. There would be no reason then to believe that the elect adults were elected because of the performed meritorious deeds and their death in a state of grace, rather than because of hypothetical merits that had been foreseen for them and would have been earned had they lived long enough to make the foreseen hypothetical future come true³³. Another drawback of Henry's theory emphasized by Scotus is that it cannot be applied to angels regardless of whether predestined or not³⁴.

³¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 37.

³² *Reportatio* I - A, d. 41, n. 40.

³³ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 37. Marilyn McCord Adams points to further inconveniences involved in assuming that election/damnation depends on hypothetical merits/demerits earned after the moment of death. For any rational being one could probably find in the hypothetical future moments of time when a given being was in a state of grace and one when that being was in a state of mortal sin, and thus there would be no way of deciding which one of these moments should be taken into account in the final assesment of that person's merits and reaching the decision on her/his election/damnation. Since it is not possible to take all the relevant moments into account, the only adequate moment for the assessment of a person's merits appears to be the moment of death. McCord Adams M. 1987. *William Ockham*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1315.

³⁴ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 39. Scotus does not follow this topic in the *Ordinatio*. In the parallel passage in the *Reportatio* I - A, d. 41, n. 40. he explains that Henry's principle cannot be

Scotus's own preferred opinion is the following; there is no reason for predestination in a predestined person, that was prior to the predestination of that person and that somehow motivated that predestination; nevertheless there is a certain reason prior to and motivating the damnation of a damned person. This reason in a condemned person does not necessitate God's action as the efficient cause in the act of condemnation of that person, it is simply the reason that makes God's condemning act apply to that singular person as an object of damnation rather than to any other³⁵.

Scotus's view is a strongly modified version of Henry's conception: whereas election or predestination is in no way motivated by the good use of free will and thus human merit plays no part in procuring it (here Scotus departs from Henry's view), God takes into account the sin and evil use made of free will by a person in the act of damnation of that person.

Scotus justifies his position by constructing a certain model of God's action. His first step is to justify the thesis that election is in no way related to merit. Here Scotus once again to the principle of well-ordered action: whoever wills anything in a well ordered way he wills both the end and the thing leading to the achievement of that end, but he wills the end first and the means leading to the achievement of that end only secondarily³⁶. In the case of created beings that are naturally capable of achieving beatitude, the end intended by God is to make them achieve that perfect end which consist in perfect happiness. As God wills in a well-ordered way, He wills the achievement of that goal first, and, in consequence, He wants, as if in a succeeding instant, for these created being the means that lead to that desired achievement³⁷.

Scotus employs the qualifier "as if" (quasi) on purpose, as he wants to make the point that there is no temporal succession of instants in God and if we construe God's wanting the beatitude of his creatures and the means leading to it as coming in two successive moments, we fall into the error of anthropomorphism. (When we speak of "instants" in God's acts of willing, we do not mean temporal moments that succeed one another, but separable moments or aspects of God's total act that differ in intentional content from one another and complement one another to form God's total act, which is wholly atemporal.)

applied to angels as they (in contrast to human beings) do not experience resistance in doing good and inclination towards doing evil; so when God imparts his grace to them they have no impulse to resist that grace and thus no opportunity to earn merit in overcoming that impulse. Consequently, one cannot speak of their merits and their cooperation with grace in their exercise of the faculty of free choice.

³⁵ Ordinatio I, d. 41, n. 40.

³⁶ Garrigou-Lagrange quotes Thomas Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* I, question 23, art 4, resp) to make the point that Scotus was not the first theologian (as some interpreters meant) who, consciously invoking the principle of well ordered action asserted that God's willing the purpose, which is the glorification of a elect comes before His willing the means to that purpose. See Garrigou-Lagrange R. 1939. *Predestination*. B Herder Book Co, London, 87. However, it seems that Scotus made this point crucial in his arguing for the independence of election by God from any merits on the elected persons part in a more conspicuous way than did Thomas.

³⁷ Ordinatio I, d. 41, n. 41.

Scotus assumes that, with respect to predestination, the first instant in God's act of willing is (a) His willing to beatify a created person, secondly comes (b) His wanting the means of all kinds leading to that beatification, such as grace, faith, all kinds of benefits and good use of the faculty of free choice, and lastly comes (c) His foreseeing that that person will in fact possess any of these means. On the basis of this model Scotus concludes that God wills beatitude for a person beforehand, and not in consequence of His foreknowledge of the possession by that person the means of salvation³⁸. It follows from this that merits (which, of course, are of the number of means of salvation) cannot be a reason for predestination.

Scotus represents the action of God's will in an act of damning a person in a different way. As a leading assumption he takes, invoking St. Augustine's authority, the principle that damnation is good only when it is just, as any punishment would constitute an act of cruelty if it were meted out to an innocent person. It follows from this, that God never wants to punish anyone, before He clearly recognizes that person as a sinner. Thus in any instance of damnation the will to punish cannot precede the recognition of a relevant person as a sinner. This is in particular true with respect to Judas, who was the exemplum of a sinner for medieval thinkers. The first act of God's will as to Judas is not a wish to damn him, as "to begin with" he stands before God in his pure natural condition. Damnation of a person in the state of pure nature would be a damnation of an innocent and thus would constitute an act of cruelty. Only when Judas clearly appears before God as a reprobate, God may wish to condemn him. Scotus concludes from this premise that the reason for damnation is something existing in the object of damnation, namely the ultimate seen as foreseen by God³⁹.

However, this line of argument may appear insufficient in that it fails to clarify how God comes into the possession of the indubitable grounds for condemning Judas. Scotus intends to obviate this difficulty and he himself formulates the objection to his own view.

Suppose that God wills the existence of both Peter and Judas, who are equal to each other in their condition of pure nature. It may be granted, that God's first order will for Peter is that of beatitude; how about Judas, however? If God originally wills damnation for Judas, then He condemns him without any reason, or else He wants beatitude for Judas just as He does for Peter, yet in this case he elects him⁴⁰. It appears certain in any case that in creating Judas God must want some destiny for him; this destiny is rather not beatitude (for Judas is the paradigmatic case of a reprobate), but then it must be damnation, which, however, seems to be decided by God before any recognition of Judas as a sinner.

³⁸ Ordinatio I, d. 41, n. 41.

³⁹ Ordinatio I, d. 41, n. 42.

⁴⁰ Ordinatio I d. 41, n. 44.

To offer a satisfactory response to this sketched difficulty Scotus attempts to construct a more elaborate model of God's acts of volition with respect to both (a) an ultimately elect person, and (b) an ultimately damned person⁴¹.

Let us consider the relation of God's will to both Peter and Judas as envisaged in such an elaborate model showing the structure of discernible conceptual instants involved in the constitution of God's act of volition. The instants referred to in this models are not, as already observed, to be construed as temporal moments, they are conceptual (or logical) points discernible in the constitution of God's act, that differ as to their conceptual content and remain in relations of motivation or opposition of one to another. The doctrine of divine simplicity excludes in advance any real, and a fortiori temporal multiplicity in God, and in particular it precludes plurality of acts of decision on the part of God. God's will is prior to creature and all created events. Although created events stand in relation of temporal succession to one another, they may be past, contemporary or future one with respect to another, yet the very act of creation stands in no temporal relation to any of these events, it takes place in the eternal "now" of God's reality. Nevertheless, in order to account for the multiplicity and variety of effects of the one creative act, Scotus distinguishes in the one act of divine volition the "natural instants" (*instantiae naturae*), that is conceptual moments (all contained in the unique moment of eternity) whose interrelations within the structure of the whole of the divine act account for the diversity of created effects. In the same way the plurality of God's act of willing as spoken about in Scotus's account a purely metaphorical device, in fact all this analysis rests upon the assumption that in reality there is only one act of will in God, which in diverse ways encompasses all the different possible objects⁴².

The First Conceptual Instant

At the first conceptually discernible point in eternity, God wills beatitude for Peter and wills nothing for Judas (*nihil vult Iudae*). Both persons are in the condition of pure nature and in this respect are equal each to the other. At that moment there is no positive act with respect to Judas on the part of God, in particular there is no positive damnation of Judas by God.

The Second Conceptual Instant

At the second point, the will of God wants grace for Peter (*vult Petro gratiam*), however, there continues to be no positive act by the divine will with respect to Judas, there is only a negative act: there is no will in God (*negatio volitionis*) of grace for Judas.

⁴¹More or less detailed accounts of Scotus's conception of conceptual instants involved in God's volition in an act of election/damnation can be found in McCord Adams M. *op. cit.*, 1319, Cross R. *op. cit.*, 102; te Velde D. 2014. Verkiezing en verwerping bij Johannes Duns Scotus. Een analyse van *Ordinatio I 41*. *Kerk en Theologie*. 65 (2014), 240.

⁴² *Lectura I*, d. 39, n. 53.

The Third Conceptual Instant

In the third instant the divine will intends to permit (vult permitter) both Peter and Judas to remain within the mass of beings that would be eternally damned (by virtue of either original or some personal sin). This act of volition is the first positive act issued by God's will with respect to Judas. According to Scotus and by virtue of this positive act and the absence of any positive decision concerning Judas as in the first and the second instant, the proposition "Judas will ultimately be a reprobate" is already true.

The Fourth Conceptual Instant

In this instant Judas is represented to God's will as a final reprobate and then God positively wills justly to punish and damn him⁴³.

As we already observed above, God's foreknowledge of our contingent acts of free choice does not interfere with the freedom of our decisions precisely because this foreknowledge, according to the Subtle Doctor, is contingent itself. Yet in this more nuanced model of God's volitional acts with regard to predestination presented matters appear to get complicated and this by the admission into the scheme of God's will. The problem of predestination (and its compatibility with human freedom), as is shown with evidence in this scheme, concerns not only possible interference of God's cognitive acts regarding created persons with the free actions by these persons, it concerns above all influence of God's acts of volition (e.g. His willing to give or refuse grace to a person) on activity of created beings.

Some Scotus scholars believe that the negative moment, evidenced in the first two instants involved in God's act of volition, of not-willing grace for a man (Judas in the above case) may have decisive influence upon that man's activity and his/her ultimate choices. If that were the case, human freedom would turn out to be illusory after all. This is a very difficult and delicate matter. Richard Cross, for instance, points to Scotus's claim that although God positively wants the acts which will ultimately lead to Judas's damnation, this is not enough to affirm that God predestines Judas to eternal damnation. Cross, however, sees the difficulty in Scotus's argumentation and does not venture to issue his own judgment on it; he states that he leaves it to the reader to decide whether or not Scotus succeeds to avoid calvinism⁴⁴. To Marilyn McCord Adams damnation is the rock on which the ship of Scotus's theodicy gets wrecked⁴⁵. True, it is far from the case that God positively wants Judas damned: He only refrains from positively wishing grace and beatitude for Judas, yet He does not positively want Judas eternally miserable. This way of speaking results from the principle attributing all goods to God and all evil to creatures. Scotus says one cannot ascribe the will to damn to God, if He is

⁴³ *Ordinatio* I d. 41, n. 45.

⁴⁴ R. Cross, *op. cit.*, 102 - 103.

⁴⁵ McCord Adams M. 1987. Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God. *Faith and Philosophy*. 4 (1987), 105.

viewed as considering the object of possible damnation in its purely natural state; God can only want an object damned if He takes into account that object as known to be in the state of ultimate mortal sin"⁴⁶. Thus God is represented as "justified", because He only condemns a person deserving to be damned. If God refrains from positively willing grace and beatitude for Judas in the first two instants, he is not unjust either, for none of these goods is owed to Judas. As Scotus writes: "the highest goodness can go with free communication to others, although this goodness will not be equal for all"⁴⁷. God is not bound by any necessity when He gives out goods, for He can distribute His bounty in a free way and thus He can give unequal shares of His gifts to persons who are seen as equal⁴⁸. This reasoning appears cogent enough for God's justice, yet there still remains the problem of mercy. Withdrawing grace from Judas opens room for the latter's sin and the possibility of Judas committing ultimate sin.

Scotus describes Judas's sin and the possibility of committing ultimate sin as something that God permits. In connection to this statement two questions arise: (1) Does God in any way cooperate with a sinner's will? and (2) What kind of act is that permission (*permissio*) given by God to sin?

Scotus observes that God's foreknowledge and permission alone does not seem to ensure that a sinful act will be committed either in the case of a human subject (e. g. Judas), who is contaminated by original sin, or in the case of a subject not concerned with contaminating original sin (Lucifer)⁴⁹. So, Scotus concludes, there must be some efficient cause for a sinful act to come into being; a cause that is other than mere foreknowledge or admission of that act. Hence Scotus adds by way of specification that God's foreknowledge extends also to the fact that God will cooperate with the sinner (e. g. Lucifer) with regard both to sins of commission and omission. In the case of a sin of commission God's cooperation concerns the positive essence of a committed deed; in the case of a sin of omission God knows that He will not cooperate in the production of the essence of an act that will be omitted by the sinner (Lucifer in the analysed case)⁵⁰. However, there still remains the problem of the nature of the voluntary act of permitting evil by God; Scotus asks the question what type of an act is God's permission given to Lucifer's sin; if it is a positive act of God's will with respect to the committed sin, it would appear that God wants Lucifer to sin. If the act of God's permission is not a positive act of wanting the sin to be committed (God does not want the sin), but it is positive with respect to the act of permission itself (God wants the permission) then the act of reflection (*actus reflexus*) will be positive, that is a second order act (an act performed with respect to a certain first-order act)⁵¹.

The detailed analysis of the problem of the nature of the act of God's permission of evil was carried out by Scotus in another distinction of his revised

⁴⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 46.

⁴⁷ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 53.

⁴⁸ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 53.

⁴⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 48.

⁵⁰ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 50.

⁵¹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 41, n. 49.

commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences, where he discusses the nature of God's will⁵². In this distinction he introduces a number of new terms and distinctions: God's efficacy, according to him, may be exercised through a positive willing or lack of willing or unwillingness; thus Scotus distinguishes in God "efficient act of willing" or "efficient volition" (*volitio efficax*) and efficient "unwillingness" or "nolition" (*nolitio efficax*): the former makes its object exist, while the latter annihilates its object. Moreover, he distinguishes a "withheld act of willing" (*volitio remissa*) and a "withheld unwillingness" (*nolitio remissa*). The former term refers to the case when an intended thing awakes an inclination in the willing subject (God in the given instance), yet the will of the subject refrains from realizing that inclination, while the latter term denotes the case when an intended thing arouses dislike in the intending subject, yet the will of the subject does not prevent that thing from coming about, even if it has the power to do so⁵³. The act of permission issued by God's will with regard to sin can be included in the category of withheld nolition (*nolitio remissa*)⁵⁴; it certainly is not an act of efficient unwillingness (*nolitio efficax*) as this would remove the very possibility of sin. In terms of this analysis, God's act of permission with respect to sin will be a positive first order act of God's will (that is an act of will immediately regarding the intended object).

The Subtle Doctor also considers another possible analysis of the divine permission extended to sin; in terms of this alternative analysis God's act of permitting sin will be a second order act, that is an act of reflection (*actus reflexus*). Scotus points out that even if God is "willing to admit" (*volens sinere*) something, this need not imply that He performs a direct act of willing what He permits (a first order act of will with respect to what He permits), it is enough if He performs a second order act of willing His non-willing that the permitted (but not positively approved) thing come about (e. g. He wills His own non-willing that a given person should commit a sin). In this case God's intellect represents to His will the fact that a given person sins or will sin in the future; then, in the first (atemporal) instant God's will does not have a willing for that person to sin (which is not the same as a willing for that person not to sin) and naturally so, as it is not possible that God should want anyone to sin. In the next instant God's intellect understands His will as not willing a person to sin (that is, God's intellect performs an act of reflection with regard to the attitude of God's will) and then God's will may positively want that His will should will its own "non-willing" (*non velle hoc*) that person as sinning. In this sense one may speak of God as willing to permit the evil of sin (*volens sinere et volens permittere*). In terms of this analysis the problem of Judas's sin and his predestination is represented as follows: to begin with God has a non-willing (*non velle*) of glory for Judas, and He does not have a positive willing for Judas not to have glory (He does not positively predestine him for damnation). In another instant He may reflect upon His non willing glory for Judas and

⁵² *Ordinatio I, d. 47.*

⁵³ *Ordinatio I, d. 47, n. 4.*

⁵⁴ *Ordinatio I, d. 47, n. 7.*

perform a second order willing of that (first order) non willing. In this way, that is willing His own non-willing Judas to sin, God will not have a positive willing for Judas not to have glory and thus will not designate him in advance as a reprobate⁵⁵. In other words this might be expressed that God does not opt for an efficient nolition of Judas's glory (which would mean predestination for damnation), He only chooses (wills) the act of non-willing (refraining from willing) glory for Judas.

The final result of these consideration is that permitting by God sin may be viewed as a positive act, either immediately related to its object (a first order act) or as a second order act. God, in he finl analysis, wills to permit sin, although He does not will sin itself. Scotus thus demonstrates not so much why God should permit sin, but how sin is possible at all, that is how the reality of sin can be reconciled with the will of perfect and benevolent God. An appropriate act of divine will can construed either as an act of withheld unwillingnes with regard to sin, that makes sin possible (while an act of efficient nolition would destroy every possibility of sin) or as a (second order) willing of non-willing sin to be (as opposed to willing sin not to be, which, too, would make sin impossible).

Coming back to the problem whether or not the negative moment of not willing grace for Judas in God's original (first instant) will for Judas may be decisive for determination of his conduct and thus responsible for his ending up as a reprobate, it should be observed that, on the assumptions made by John Duns Scotus, this negative moment cannot determine or coerce Judas to sin, for, as was made evident in the preceding discussion, God does not (nor can He) want sin, neither does He positively want anybody to sin, nor does He positively will anybody's damnation. The positive acts of any will, whether divine or human, are the acts of willing (*velle*) and positively willing not (*nolle*); these have the property of being efficient acts, it is through them that a subject realizes her- or himself as an efficient agent. The negative attitude of non-willing (*non velle*), does not carry with itself any efficiency, thus the divine non-willing to offer glory to Judas does not have for an effect coercing Judas to become a sinner and finally a reprobate. What makes then the possibility (open by God's refraining from positively willing sin not to be) of turning away from the Creator, and this definitely and ultimately, come into realization? Scotus scholars point to the fact that the meaning of the Subtle Doctor is that Judas, who, as noted before, exemplifies the case of a reprobate, is not condemned because God had no intention of saving him or because He failed to offer Judas the necessary means of salvation, but because Judas himself did not want the salvation the possibility of which was open to him and spurned the gift offered him by God⁵⁶. Scotus refers to the means of salvation offered by God to all of His creatures in distinction 46 of his *Ordinatio*, where he states that God wills, by His prevenient grace, all person to be saved and offers to human persons "natural gifts, ffitting laws and universal aid to salvation". Thus

⁵⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 47, n. 9.

⁵⁶ *Duns Scotus on Divine Love*, ed. A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, E. Dekker, N.W. Den Bok, A. J. Beck. 2003. Aldershot, Ashgate, 175, 192.

God, on his part (ex parte sui) wants all humans to be saved⁵⁷. Yet, if damnation is possible, one ought to assume that the free will of creatures has been given possibility to "escape" the design of their Creator and deserve damnation through conduct lacking acts of charity.

Conclusion

In the conception of predestination that John Duns Scotus made his own one can distinguish the following theses. (1) He carries out an attempt to reconcile the immutability of God's knowledge (including foreknowledge of future contingents) and the freedom of created intelligent subjects through application of his conception of synchronic contingency which enables him to justify the thesis that God's knowledge of future contingents is both eternally certain and immutable, and, at the same time, contingent, and thus it does not preclude the contingency of contingent events (including the contingent acts of created free and intelligent subjects) in the world. This is Scotus's way of avoiding fatalism (theological determinism). (2) The election to the select group of the saved persons is a result of grace, and thus of God's will and His choice, it is not, in any case, a result of meritorious deeds performed by an elect person. In contrast to election, damnation of a created person is related to a cause present in that person: in condemning a human being God takes into account sin and bad use of free will on the part of a condemned subject. Scotus's nuanced and carefully worked out conception seeks to reconcile in theory God's justice and His mercy.

Against the background of conceptions discussed Scotus and rejected by Scotus (St. Augustine's, Peter Lombard's, Aquinas's, Henry of Ghent's) his own theory appears as moderate and comes in the middle between those which hold that there is no reason on the part of creatures either for election or damnation and those which attribute some reason for either election or damnation to created persons. (3) The most difficult problem involved in the discussion, the problem of relation obtaining between grace and freedom in procuring the act of election/damnation, Scotus solves through the introduction of categories *velle*, *non velle*, *nolle* applicable to analysis of actions by God's will. God's act of *non velle* (as distinct from *nolle*), that is His withdrawing grace from a person does not determine that person's will to commit sinful acts, and, in particular, does not have for an effect making a man a reprobate. Thus the non-willing does not determine man to sin and ultimate damnation.

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⁵⁷ Ordinatio I, d. 46, n. 7, 8.

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