

# The condemnation of 1277 : another light on Scotist ethics

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MARY E. INGHAM

## The Condemnation of 1277: Another Light on Scotist Ethics

Although the Medieval Franciscan ethical tradition enjoys some interest and scholarly attention today, one cannot undertake its study with ease. This is especially true of the thought of John Duns Scotus, a thinker of the late 13th century aptly referred to as the Subtle Doctor. Beyond textual and critical problems of spurious manuscripts and contaminated passages, Scotist thought is not expressed clearly, nor does one find the stylistic clarity of a Thomas Aquinas<sup>1</sup>. When dealing with the ethical elements present in the writings and teachings of Scotus, this difficult situation can appear almost impossible. His preference for the will over the intellect has solicited a variety of judgments, from vehement condemnations for his voluntarism to high praise for his psychological insights<sup>2</sup>.

Interest in Scotist ethical theory is only now on the rise, as critical texts from the Vatican edition become increasingly available and scholars are able to distinguish with greater accuracy those authentic passages from additions by students and commentators<sup>3</sup>. The chronology of

<sup>1</sup> A quality present in Scotist texts which has been aptly described by Etienne GILSON in *Jean Duns Scot: Introduction à ses positions fondamentales* (Paris 1952), 9: «... cette manière abrupte et un peu altière présente au moins un avantage: elle rend difficile au lecteur l'illusion, si périlleuse au lecteur de saint Thomas, qu'il atteint aisément en son fond la pensée du maître. Avec Duns Scot, on s'aperçoit tout de suite qu'on ne comprend pas.»

<sup>2</sup> A good example of the first is found in Bernard LANDRY's *La Philosophie de Duns Scot*, Paris 1925. The second evaluation predominates among Scotist scholars such as Walter HOERES (*Der Wille als reine Vollkommenheit nach Duns Scotus*, Munich 1962) and Roberto ZAVALLONI («Personal Freedom and Scotus' Voluntarism» in *De Doctrina I. Duns Scoti* II, Rome 1968, 613–627).

<sup>3</sup> On this, see the foundational work of Charles BALIC: *Les commentaires de Jean Duns Scot sur les quatre livres des Sentences*. Louvain: Bureau de la revue, 1927.

his writings has now been established, enabling greater analysis of the evolution of Scotist thinking, especially relative to the role and primacy of the will in moral action. Yet, while the publication of the Vatican edition<sup>4</sup> has solved many difficulties related to the Franciscan's thought, some do remain.

In this presentation I suggest my own response to the difficulties present in Scotist ethical thought, a response which includes the influence of an important historical event: the Parisian condemnation of March 7, 1277. I consider this event to be an essential element for any appropriate understanding of the primacy of freedom and the will within Scotist texts – an element which has received little attention by most contemporary scholars<sup>5</sup>.

Before considering textual evidence wherein I detect the echo of this important Condemnation, it is important to delineate clearly the problem before us. Most scholars agree that freedom of the will is an important aspect of the Franciscan's theory<sup>6</sup>, but how does he portray this freedom? Is the will the unique source of all moral action (as he states in II, D. 25) or does it collaborate with the intellect (as in IV, D. 49)? Is freedom an indifference (*Reportatio* I, D. 40) or the ability of the will for self-movement (IV, D. 49, q. 10)? Both are affirmed by Scotus. Finally, how are we to understand the activity and primacy of the divine will which appears consistently in Scotist texts? The presentation of the *Ordinatio* Prologue can frighten us where we read that the

<sup>4</sup> Previously under the direction of the late Charles Balic, and currently headed by Camille Bérubé, this project was begun in 1951. Currently, only *Lectura* Book I and *Ordinatio* Books I and II have been edited. Further scholarly study and understanding of Scotus depends upon the completion of this edition.

<sup>5</sup> To my knowledge, only Charles BALIC has written anything relative to the Condemnation and the formulation of Scotist thought. See his «Johannes Duns Scotus und die Lehrentscheidungen von 1277» in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 29 (1966) 210–229 as well as «Il decreto del 7 Marzo 1277 del Vescovo di Parigi e l'origine dello Scotismo» in *Tommaso d'Aquino nella storia del pensiero*, II, Naples 1976, 279–285. In these articles, however, Balic does not make direct application to the notion of freedom in Scotist thought, but rather to the new position the Subtle Doctor was able to formulate as a result of the questioning of many previous philosophical teachings. From the vantage point of 1277, Scotus rethought the entire relationship of Aristotelian philosophy to Christian revelation.

<sup>6</sup> One has merely to reflect upon the recent work of Lawrence ROBERTS («The Contemporary Relevance of Duns Scotus' Doctrine of Human Freedom» in *Regnum hominis et regnum Dei*, Rome 1976, 535–544) and of Allan WOLTER («Native Freedom of the Will as a Key to the Ethics of Scotus» in *Deus et homo ad mentem I. Duns Scotus*, Rome 1968, 359–370).

burden of human destiny depends «mere ex voluntate divina» due to the profound state of ignorance «pro statu isto» (n. 18). Human intellection, in the absence of Revelation, is totally unable to attain knowledge of the ultimate end or those means necessary («ea quae sunt ad finem»). The impossibility of such natural knowledge seems to eliminate any type of teleological ethical theory without the help of theological reflection. Against the background of the absolute divine will (*potentia absoluta dei*), how is any natural ethical theory possible? Yet despite this clear emphasis upon the divine will, Scotus affirms within the same text that this state of affairs reveals the enhanced dignity of human nature, and does nothing to diminish it (cf. Prologue, n. 75).

Here then we see a major imbalance in Scotist theory: how can we reconcile the workings of divine omnipotence with the dignity of human moral action? Without hedging in a re-interpretation of certain authentic texts, is there any way to reconcile the presentation of the divine and human wills so as to preserve an internal harmony in Scotus' perspective?<sup>7</sup>

I believe there is and that, in addition to the tremendous work of scholars such as Balic and Bérubé on the evolution of Scotist thought, we must consider the historical event of 1277 as part of a better understanding of the emergence of freedom (and, consequently the primacy of the will) within Scotist thought. The notion of freedom which Scotus presents has both divine and human applications: it resides in the infinite and the finite wills. Yet if my intuition is correct, it is in fact the freedom of the divine will which Scotus seeks to defend: freedom for the act of creation, incarnation and redemption of each person. Divine freedom undergirds the entire Scotist perspective, and divine freedom,

<sup>7</sup> One of the more interesting of the scholarly efforts in this area is that of Camille BÉRUBÉ who espouses an evolutionary perspective of Scotist thought. His analysis traces Scotist development in several authentic texts in order to grasp the fundamental insights present in the Franciscan's thought. See, for example his «Pour une histoire des preuves de l'existence de Dieu chez Duns Scot» in *Deus et Homo ad Mentem I. Duns Scoti*, Rome 1972, 17–46. My own perspective in the study of Scotus (with the historical-critical bias) is deeply indebted to the method and research of Bérubé. When this notion of evolution is applied to the relationship between the will and intellect, a facile reading might lead one to conclude to the evolution from a radical to a rational will. Yet early texts contradict this. See his *Quaestiones subtilissimae* Book XII, q. 18, n. 4 (Vivès VII, 688a): «Ad primum dicendum, quod voluntas intellectualis duplex est, scilicet practica et speculativa. Speculativa est universalis; practica singularis, et ideo a voluntate intellectuali practice bene potest modus procedere.»

as we shall see, was denied in several propositions taught at the Faculty of Arts in Paris during the latter half of the 13th century.

It would undoubtedly be beyond the scope of this presentation to enter into a detailed account of the rise of radical Aristotelianism during the 13th century along with the several ecclesiastical condemnations which attempted in vain to restrain the influence of the Arab and Aristotelian traditions at the Faculty of Arts. Fernand van Steenberghen, among others, has provided one interpretation of the development of heterodox philosophical strains, and it need not be repeated here<sup>8</sup>. For our purposes I would highlight one important proposition, found in the teaching of Siger de Brabant, and defended by him as a valid Aristotelian philosophical thesis. «Quod Deum necesse est facere quidquid immediate fit ab ipso» – that God necessarily does whatever he does. This proposition calls divine freedom into question, it was defended at the Faculty of Arts and condemned by Stephen Tempier in Paris on March 7, 1277. The proposition describes divine activity according to a neo-Platonic paradigm and implicitly denies the possibility of divine intervention in human history. Along with this proposition, others defending Philosophy as the highest and noblest way of life and affirming the possibility of human beatitude by natural means effectively reduces Revelation, theology and the life of grace to the level of superfluity<sup>9</sup>.

I suggest that these propositions, and especially that denying divine freedom, were the key background against which Scotus sought to rethink the primacy of freedom of the will and the essential action of divine freedom for creation and redemption. In his attempt, the Subtle Doctor uses several arguments, both philosophical and theological, to question the power of natural reason and to explain the workings of divine liberality.

<sup>8</sup> See his «La philosophie à la veille de l'entrée en scène de Jean Duns Scot» in *De Doctrina I. Duns Scoti*, I, Rome 1968, 65–74 as well as *La philosophie au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Louvain 1966.

<sup>9</sup> Roland HISSETTE in *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 mars 1277* (Louvain-Paris 1977) documents that Siger of Brabant, famed member of the Faculty of Arts and opponent of Thomas Aquinas, did indeed defend the proposition «Quod Deum...» as validly philosophical. As was his method, however, he presented it as the opinion of Aristotle and not as his own. In his *Errores Philosophorum*, Giles of Rome attributes this proposition to Alkindi.

Before turning to the second part of this presentation, wherein we consider several textual passages which echo 1277, it is important to document Scotus' knowledge of the condemnation and those heterodox propositions. He was, after all, 12 years old at the time and living in Scotland. Two textual passages offer some evidence of his awareness. The first is from his early or *Lectura* Commentary (c. 1298) and refers to an article among many condemned in Paris: «But because this article has been condemned in Paris, as have others...»<sup>10</sup> The second text refers more clearly to the proposition denying freedom in creation and is found in the *Ordinatio* Prologue (after 1305): «For it is a property of this nature to cause contingently «ad extra», and in opposition here many have been led into error, as seen in the philosophical opinion that the first cause necessarily causes whatever it causes.»<sup>11</sup> These two pieces of evidence are not conclusive, yet I do think they reflect an awareness of the condemnation in Scotus' mind and a clear position against the denial of divine freedom.

Thus, it appears to me at least plausible that an awareness of 1277 can indeed shed new light upon our reading of Scotus and especially relative to the importance of freedom and the primacy of the divine will within an otherwise intellectual and humanistic theory. If indeed Scotus approached the question against the background of philosophical denial of divine freedom for creation and redemption, then seemingly conflicting texts, where human and divine wills appear at odds, might demonstrate a closer harmony.

I propose now to look at three elements in Scotist texts: the causal nature of his description of freedom, the primacy of the divine will and the portrait of the eternal lawgiver, specifically in light of the proposition «quod Deum necesse est facere quidquid immediate fit ab ipso». I believe that there is sufficient textual evidence to support my suggestion that 1277 represents a key element in the articulation and evolution of ethical themes in Scotist thought.

<sup>10</sup> «Sed quia iste articulus est excommunicatus Parisius, ideo utuntur alii alio verbo, dicentes quod est in loco per applicationem ad locum.» *Lectura* II, 2 Pars 2, q. 1–2, Vatican XVIII, 156.12–14.

<sup>11</sup> «Proprietas etiam istius naturae ad extra est contingenter causare; et ad oppositum huius magis effectus ducunt, in errorem, sicut patet per opinionem philosophorum, ponentium primum necessario causare quidquid causat.» Prologue, n. 41, Vatican I, 24.7–10.

### 1. *The causal nature of Scotus' description of freedom*

In the earliest authentic text left by Scotus, the Franciscan presents a fundamental distinction which serves as cornerstone for his theory of the primacy of the will over the intellect. It is that of *natura* vs. *voluntas*, found in the *Quaestiones Subtilissimae super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, Book IX, question 15. Here Scotus states quite clearly that the distinction irrational/rational found in Aristotle corresponds to that of natural with free causality. The will is by definition a free cause, capable of self-determination, of self-movement. The intellect, by contrast is a natural faculty, subject to natural, necessary determination, incapable of self-regulation or self-movement<sup>12</sup>.

It is this simple distinction which is found at the heart of every subsequent discussion on the relationship of intellect to will. In his commentary, IV, D. 49 ex latere, Scotus returns to the relative superiority of will over intellect, this time in reference to the beatific vision. Here again we see clearly that the distinction is not intellect from will, but natural from free<sup>13</sup>. Despite an increase in the influence of intellection upon the act of volition in this text<sup>14</sup> the fundamental distinction remains operative. The will commands the intellect, since it is a free potency, the intellect can only direct the will's attention and obey the will's command.

Finally, in a third text taken from the «Secundae Additiones» to II, 25<sup>15</sup>, we witness Scotus' definitive position upon the relative supremacy of will over intellect. In a passage where he balances the integrity of intellection with volition, Scotus introduces partial co-causality as

<sup>12</sup> «Iste autem modus eliciendi operationem propriam, non potest esse in genere, nisi duplex. Aut enim potentia ex se est determinata ad agendum, ita quod quantum est ex se, non potest non agere, quando non impeditur ab extrinseco; aut non est ex se determinata, sed potest agere hunc actum, vel oppositum actum, agere etiam, vel non agere. Prima potentia communiter dicitur natura, secunda dicitur voluntas. Unde prima divisio principiorum activorum est in naturam et voluntatem.» *QQ Metaphysicorum*, IX, q. 15, n. 4, Vivès VII, 609 a.

<sup>13</sup> «... quia cum prima intellectio causetur a causa mere naturali, et intellectio sit non libera.» *Ordinatio* IV, D. 49, ex latere, n. 17, Vivès XXI, 152 a.

<sup>14</sup> Here Scotus introduces the aspect of mutual, partial causality between the two faculties which never threatens the primacy of volition as free act. «Intellectus autem si est causa volitionis, est causa subserviens voluntati, tamquam habens actionem primam ordine generationis...» *ibid.*, n. 16, 151 b.

<sup>15</sup> Edited by Charles BALIC and published as «Une question inédite de J. Duns Scot sur la volonté» in *RTAM*, 3 (1931) 198–208.

model for their interaction in most later texts. Here the object as known operates as partial co-cause with the will in the act of moral choice. The will, for its part, is primary partial co-cause within the order of moral action<sup>16</sup>. The two faculties collaborate far more closely in this third text («ut una causa totalis») than in either of the previous two, yet the initial distinction of natural from free faculty is never minimized. The will, as free, is of a superior order and in constant control of every act of intellection as well as of subsequent moral choice.

What these three texts demonstrate is, in my opinion, a definite causal preoccupation with freedom on the part of Scotus. It is not the will he defends consistently (as was the case for earlier Franciscans), but freedom as the expression of self-determination. In the *Quaestiones subtilissimae*, he offers an interesting example for this most perfect freedom: it is the divine act of free creation<sup>17</sup>. Indetermined by any other natural or necessary causality, God has chosen to create this world. It is this divine and creative freedom cast within the framework of efficient causality which predominates in Scotist thought.

## 2. *The importance of divine freedom*

Divine freedom plays an important role in the Prologue to Scotus' Sentence Commentary, where he questions the need for relevation *pro statu isto*, or in the present state. In both *Lectura* and *Ordinatio* versions of this question the divine will takes center stage, while the human natural intellect is presented as victim of its own ignorance.

Human intellection is, according to Scotus, incapable of attaining naturally any knowledge of the ultimate end or goal of human life<sup>18</sup>. Thus, within this state of ignorance, one can never determine those means necessary to reach eternal bliss (*ea quae sunt ad finem*). Knowledge of the end naturally and necessarily implies knowledge of those means

<sup>16</sup> «...unum tamen est agens principale et aliud minus, unde habet principale, ut pater et mater ad productionem prolis, et stilus et penna ad scribendum, ... voluntas unius cause habet rationem... voluntas tamen est causa principalior et natura cognoscens minus principale, quia voluntas libere movet.» «Une question inédite...», 203, 1. 398–405.

<sup>17</sup> «... scilicet quomodo perfectionis est in Deo nihil necessario causare.» IX, q. 15, n. 8, Vivès VII, 612b.

<sup>18</sup> «Sed distinctam cognitionem finis non habet homo ex naturalibus.» *Lectura* Prologue, n. 6, Vatican XVI, 12.5–8.



required, in a way similar, affirms Scotus, to that by which conclusions can be deduced from premisses.

The end cannot be known, nor can human agents have any idea of what the divine will intends to accept. Here we encounter the key Scotist notion of *acceptatio* or divine acceptance which holds central place within the Franciscan's vision of reality. God accepts certain acts as worthy of reward, these are deemed meritorious, and ordained toward the ultimate end or praemium<sup>19</sup>. The radical freedom exhibited by the divine will in this case may appear to destabilize human intellection and human moral action, reducing it to a status of dependency upon divine whim.

*Acceptatio* operates as finalizing term within Scotist thought. It offers an *ordo executionis* which fulfills the divine *ordo intentionis*, or divine intention which can be traced back to a contingent act of creation<sup>20</sup>. In I, 17, Scotus describes at some length the divine plan to save all humanity. This is the goal which God alone sees clearly and for which he accepts certain acts, conferring upon them a meritorious status, and ordering them toward eternal reward<sup>21</sup>.

*Acceptatio* is divine liberality and not strictly divine liberty, as Paul Vignaux has stated so clearly. This liberality is a free act of the divine will, an act which extends through creation, redemption and salvation. Contingent reality has dignity only insofar as it is pleasing or acceptable to the divine will, in the same way, Scotus says, as harmonious music is pleasing to the ear of the listener<sup>22</sup>. *Acceptatio* relates to the act as done in a spirit of charity, because only love fulfills the divine plan.

<sup>19</sup> «... non enim potest sciri naturali ratione acceptatio voluntatis divinae utpote tamquam contingenter acceptantis talia vel talia digna vita aeterna... dependet mere ex voluntate divina circa ea ad quae contingenter se habet...» *Ordinatio* Prologue, n. 18, Vatican I, 13.4–7.

<sup>20</sup> Here is the key insight which emerges from the work of Paul VIGNAUX in his life-long study of Scotist thought. See especially his «Valeur moral et valeur de salut», *Homo et mundus*, Rome 1984, 53–67 and «Infini, liberté et histoire du salut» in *Deus et Homo...*, 1972, 495–507. The central place held by *acceptatio* for Vignaux within Scotist thought is clearly supported by textual evidence. Vignaux offers, in my opinion, some of the keenest insights into the heart of the Franciscan's thought.

<sup>21</sup> «... intelligendum est de acceptatione divina aeterna, qua Deus ab aeterno praevidens hunc actum ex talibus principiis eliciendum, voluit ipsum esse ordinatum ad praemium...» I, 17, n. 149, Vatican V, 210.13–15.

<sup>22</sup> «... sed quod sit delectabilis, hoc non est a sono ut sonus est, sed ut harmonicus et sic ordinatus.» *Lectura* I, 17, n. 95, Vatican XVII, 211.11–13. «Similiter, sonus magis est ex percussione corporis sonantis quam ex ordine percussionis, et tamen ut acceptabilis auditui...» *Ordinatio* I, 17, n. 152, Vatican V, 212.7–8.

Moral and meritorious actions depend to a large extent «mere ex voluntate divina» at once foundation for created order, the moral sphere and the order of merit. The tremendous emphasis placed upon the contingent act of the divine will is, in my opinion, to be read in relationship to those articles which denied divine freedom and initiative and which were themselves condemned in 1277. As such, the primacy of the divine will in the Franciscan's thought is not to be seen as the triumph of an arbitrary, uncontrolled despot, as Bernard Landry maintained, but the defense of divine initiative in self-revelation as *objectum voluntarium* in Exodus 3:15 («Ego sum qui sum»), to become incarnate, and to extend participation in the Spirit and the life of grace to all, regardless of any human merit. It is this primary freedom which Scotus seeks to explain and defend at every turn and it is for this reason that the divine will appears in such a dominant light.

### 3. *The eternal lawgiver*

The third textual area wherein I suggest the contextual echo of 1277 is the image of God as the eternal lawgiver in I, 44. Scotus' portrait of divine action is highly dynamic and his presentation of *potentia absoluta Dei* exceeds any temporal limitations. In this question the author asks whether God can (not could) make reality other than he has done<sup>23</sup>. This question does not refer to some imaginary moment at the beginning of time, but to this very moment today, and its relationship to divine power and freedom.

In his solution to this question, Scotus refers to the paradigm of any legislator: the institution of law depends upon the will of those with power over the law. The lawmaker can nullify or set aside any statute,

<sup>23</sup> In its *Lectura* version, the question reads «Utrum Deus aliter potest producere res quam praeordinavit». The *Ordinatio* version tones it down slightly: «Utrum Deus possit aliter facere res quam ab ipso ordinatum est eas fieri». As William COURTENAY points out, the traditional rendering of this question from Damian on was «potuit», not «potest». See «The Dialectic of Omnipotence in the High and Late Middle Ages» in T. Rudavsky (ed.): *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985, 249.

for the law depends upon the power of his will<sup>24</sup>. *Potentia ordinata* conforms to established law, *potentia absoluta* sets one law aside to create another. Each is a function of the legislating rational will and both can be predicated of God. In fact, in the case of divine power and freedom, the law is not properly an object of the intellect but of the divine will<sup>25</sup>.

In Scotist texts we find more emphasis given to the eternal lawgiver and to the dynamic operation of divine freedom than to the eternal law. To be sure, there indeed exists an eternal law, but it is contingent and depends «mere ex voluntate divina». The divine intellect presents several possibilities to the will: what is chosen becomes reality. To a limited degree, then, we encounter within Scotist thought the seed for the proliferation of possible worlds, so common to 14th century thought<sup>26</sup>. In fact, Scotus not only maintains that God could have done otherwise (in I, 44) but elsewhere (III, 37) he affirms that in a divine dispensation God does exactly that: he sets a law aside and declares an illicit act licit<sup>27</sup>.

Scotus' solution to the question of dispensations differs from that of Aquinas. To the question of whether or not divine power extends to dispensations of the Decalogue (Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac or the Hebrew's theft from the Egyptians), Scotus does not reinterpret the law according to divine intention, he affirms that God indeed makes

<sup>24</sup> «In omni agente per intellectum et voluntatem, potente conformiter agere legi rectae et tamen non necessario conformiter agere legi rectae, est distinguere potentiam ordinatam a potentia absoluta; et ratio huius est, quia potest agere conformiter illi legi rectae, et tunc secundum potentiam ordinatam... et potest agere praeter illam legem vel contra eam, et in hoc est potentia absoluta, excedens potentiam ordinatam.» I, 44, n. 3, Vatican VI, 363.17–364.4.

<sup>25</sup> «... dico quod leges aliquae generalis, recte dictantes, praefixae sunt a voluntate divina et non quidem ab intellectu divino ut praecedit actum voluntatis divinae... sed quando intellectus offert voluntati divinae talem, puta quod <omnis glorificandus, prius est gratificandus>, si placet voluntati suae – quae libera est – est recta lex, et ita est de aliis legibus.» I, 44, n. 6 Vatican VI, 365.9–15.

<sup>26</sup> See a discussion of this in Edward GRANT's «The Effect of the Condemnation of 1277» in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg (ed.), Cambridge University Press: 1982, 537–539.

<sup>27</sup> «Sed dispensatio est revocare praeceptum vel declarare qualiter debeat intelligit... Quaero an, ... posset Deus facere quod ille actus qui cum talibus circumstantiis aliis est aliquando prohibitus aliquando esset non prohibitus sed licitus?» III, 37, n. 3, Vivès XV, 785b.

an illicit act licit – and by an act of his will – for it is only the first two commands of the Decalogue which belong to natural law *stricto loquendo*.

The dynamic divine will, legislating and dispensing, chooses between possible worlds in light of the ultimate goal of which God alone has any knowledge. In this divine prototype we get a glimpse of the Medieval foreshadowing of later developments within modern moral thought, where the rational, autonomous will determines moral action by means of a process of self-legislation.

The important control and influence which the divine will has over all aspects of creation in Scotist thought can surely not be minimized. Despite this, it is not the affirmation of an arbitrary divine power. Even though he refers to *potentia absoluta Dei* (an important notion for later Franciscan thinkers), Scotus affirms that the present order exists *de potentia ordinata*: thus even the divine will has accepted submission to it.

The Scotist portrait of the eternal lawgiver echoes biblical imagery and presents divine freedom under an innovative human model: the free, rational legislator. This dynamic image portrays divine freedom as an ongoing reality. Divine *posse* is *potest*, not *potuit*: it is not a question of what God could do or could have done, but what He can indeed do now. God's freedom is a central element in Scotist thought, maintaining the present order by an act of His will. Here I believe it is possible to suggest the echo of 1277 as an essential element in our understanding and interpretation of the primacy and activity of the divine will.

#### *Conclusion: perspective on the centrality of freedom*

I come now to some concluding remarks on the thought of Scotus and the importance of divine freedom as cornerstone to his ethics. I have suggested that a proper reading of the emergence of freedom as central to Scotist ethics can be enhanced with an awareness of the context of the Condemnation of 1277. That Scotus reacts to certain heterodox philosophical propositions explains several aspects of his ethical theory. *First*, it clarifies why the entire presentation of the will's freedom is largely based upon an examination of causality: that freedom is defined as self-determination, as indifference to natural, necessary influences. It also explains why the divine exemplar illustrates the most

perfect form of freedom for creation. In light of this definition, the suggested Scotist reaction brings to the fore the fundamental importance of the distinction between natural and free causality within moral action, a distinction which can be found throughout Scotist texts and which shows evidence of an evolution toward greater unity between intellect (as natural cause) and will (as free cause) within the moral realm. Yet despite its evolution, this key distinction remains central to the Franciscan's vision of reality.

*Second*, the background of heterodox philosophical propositions gives a larger and better context for the presentation of divine freedom, both as *objectum voluntarium* for human knowing and in the meritorious order of *acceptatio*. The divine will is neither arbitrary nor despotic: God has chosen to accept those acts done out of charity as worthy of merit. In general, he conforms to the dictates of his will. However, this does not prevent the divine will from accepting any act as worthy of reward, or for that matter, bestowing reward upon all humanity. The consistent reference to both intellect and will as they function harmoniously within the act of choice (whether divine or human) saves Scotus from the charge of mere voluntarism. True, the will is superior and predominates, but it is a rational will, functioning in collaboration with reason and reason's laws.

*Finally*, the divine knowledge of the goal, and contingent choice of means does not appear in Scotist thought as an effort to destabilize human activity, nor is it meant to denigrate human nature's dignity. In the *Ordinatio* Prologue, Scotus clearly affirms, «... in hoc magis dignificatur natura...» (in this is nature even more dignified) by the fact that grace is needed to achieve the ultimate end. The presentation of possible worlds and contingency of creation is not to be read as a denial of the stability of the present state, but rather as the affirmation of its superiority: this world was accepted, this world is pleasing to the divine will and has been created from among several possibilities.

Scotist thought suffers from extreme textual ambiguity and obscurity. This is due in part to the Franciscan's difficult style, but also due to the present state of textual evidence. If we are to avoid the conclusion that Scotus frequently and consistently contradicts himself throughout his teaching career, we must find an explanation for the primacy of freedom over natural causality, the superiority of the will over the intellect, the integral role played by reason in moral choice, the ever-

present activity of the dynamic divine will, the affirmation of natural human dignity and the fundamental goodness of the contingent order perceived around us. All of these aspects form a unified and harmonious whole, I suggest, when we consider the formulation of Scotist thought in light of the Condemnation of 1277 and as a response to the presence of radical philosophical propositions in Paris after 1260.

