

## **A History of Philosophy**

### **27 Duns Scotus and William of Ockham**

#### **By Dr. Arthur Holmes of Wheaton College**

Now, what I want to do today, if you sit from the board, is to deal with two late medieval figures, Doug Scotus and William of Argyll, who represent something of a reaction against what they see as the untoward influence of Greek philosophy. Indeed, what they see as Greek determinism is the untoward influence of this on Christian thought. Doug Scotus, a Franciscan, is very much concerned about Greek determinism and so leaps towards a more voluntaristic view of the personality of both human and divine.

Now, when I say a voluntaristic view of personality, what I'm doing is referring to the fact that, on the matter of will and intellect, there are really two main alternatives that result. Voluntarism and intellectualism, the one obviously stressing the primacy of will and the other stressing the primacy of intellect. But the question is, when one chooses to do something, is that choice, is that decision, is that action, a result of intellect or of will free from intellectual demand, necessity, or requirement? And both Scotus and Ockham read Aquinas as an intellectualist in this sense, maintaining that, that is to say, God acts in accordance with eternal forms, eternal architectures, so that God's act of creation was not, in that sense, free.

From anything other than what he could choose. And in regard to human nature, the moral action, in the moral psychology of Thomas Aquinas, moral action is again governed by the intellect, what one perceives as good, and consequently, one is not free from those moral causes. So this is their concern.

And the feeling is that this compromises, in the first instance, the sovereignty of God, which is saying the will of God, and compromises, in the second case, the responsibility of humans, and that is to say their freedom of choice. So, how does all this come together? Well, you may have gleaned, if you've been trying to read on Scotus, that there is a good reason why he was called the subtle doctor. Because, rightly, is there anything more difficult to figure out than Thomas Aquinas? But I think we can get a handle on it.

If we go back to the overall shape of the philosophical worldview that Thomas Aquinas has left, mainly the emphasis on a hierarchy of being, where each degree of being and goodness in the hierarchy is in accordance with the essential forms of things that make up the whole hierarchy of creation. That is to say, inasmuch as this is a hierarchy without gaps and without arbitrariness, and the forms are essential, in the sense that they could not be otherwise, the whole hierarchical pattern is seen as something which represents ontological necessity. It's a hierarchy of being which could not be otherwise.

It's the necessary shape that being takes. Humans could not be otherwise than where they are in the hierarchy of being. Nothing could be anywhere else than it is in the hierarchy of being.

Because in the juxtaposed interrelationship of the creation as a whole, everything has its appropriate place in accordance with its form. Now, that kind of universe is what the problem is. Scotus sees it initially and tries to modify the picture.

Occam sees it clearly and rejects the hierarchical picture altogether. Now, how does Scotus modify this? Well, first of all, he tries to affirm what he calls the unicity of being, rather than the analogy of being. And if you're alert to those distinctions between the way in which words could be predicated, univocally, analogically, or equivocally, you can see quickly that what he's doing is proposing that the word being should be used univocally of all things, rather than analogically.

That is to say that the word being is such that it refers to simply one is, isness, not to degrees of something and degrees of qualities. There may be degrees of goodness, degrees of order, degrees of beauty, but that doesn't mean to say that these are degrees of being, degrees of isness, something is or isn't. It's that simple.

And in that sense, for that reason, the being has one and only one meaning. It's not a range of analogies. So the unicity of being.

Now, at times, he was misunderstood. In the 17th century, he was misunderstood as talking of the unity of being. Now, to speak of the unity of being is to say that there is only one all-inclusive being, which would be a pantheistic kind of position, which is not what Scotus was asserting.

He's very clear about that. But he's not asserting that being is one, that the meaning of, quote, being is one. And not the reference being refers to one and only one being, all-inclusive.

Not the reference of the word being. But the underlying concept of being. The word does not have a variety of analogous meanings.

One and only one sense. So, the unicity of universality, if you like, of being. Now, in this work, he is breaking the necessity that things be arranged in the particular hierarchy that is, and the way they are.

They're arranged according to order of goodness, not according to their order of degree of being. And accordingly, determinism, he thinks, is broken. God could have made other creations arranged differently.

The creation is contingent in its being and in its order on the way God chose to make it. That does not mean to say that God is completely arbitrary and unthinking. No, he chooses reasonably, but it is dependent on his choice.

Now, there's one corollary of this unicity of being. Namely, that God knows things, not through their forms as archetypes in his mind, which he can contemplate and indirectly have an idea of creatures. But God knows beings directly as the kinds of beings they are.

Because there is no differentiation between beings, qua beings. There is one concept of being. And so, a direct awareness of all particular beings that he has made.

Direct awareness of all particular beings. Now, that business of direct knowledge of particulars, direct knowledge of particular beings, is significant not only because it shows that God is actively involved, makes that intelligible, but because for there to be a direct knowledge of things outside of the divine mind, in contrast to archetypes within the divine mind, for there to be direct knowledge of things outside the divine mind, there must be a kind of mental intentionality. And this word intentionality becomes very significant.

We got the notion of intention in the double intention of Thomas's efforts. But here's the claim that in God's knowing, God engages in an act of intentionality. What is that? An act of external reference, of mentally referring to, mentally pointing out to yourself.

Something external to the mind. Now, he sees this in human knowledge as well. And it becomes significant there.

And incidentally, that's the kind of intentionality that I assume Dallas Willard's going to be talking about in the Thursday morning Philosophy of Mind seminar. Intentionality is an external reference, an act of the mind, in directly apprehending things external to the mind. Let me pause and have a thought.

Part of the development of anti-realism in epistemology, in modern times, has been due to the fact, and I say part, I mean part, part of it has been due to the fact that knowledge was understood as a by-product of behavioral stimuli. That is to say, sense stimuli provoke a change in the state of consciousness, which is a by-product of those sense stimuli. The mind is simply a passive recipient of such states of consciousness.

How then do we know there's something external? And in David Hume, that's why he became famous; we couldn't know anything beyond our first experience. Now, the other part of the anti-realism is due not to that behaviorist feeling of consciousness, but rather to the subjectivity involved, the subjective grids that we bear, and

superimpose on our consciousness. Now, if there is a subjective grid that is brought to bear, then it's likely to reshape the way things would otherwise appear.

Do we ever know them as they really are in reality? So in either case, whether because of behaviorism or because of subjectivism, there's a problem of answering the question, how do we know that what we know is real? So, if it can be argued that there is a direct awareness of reality, by virtue of a mental act that's able to transcend the limitations of one's own inner consciousness and reach outside, then the affirmation of a knowledge of reality becomes possible. And this is where it is at schools. This is the way it was for the Scottish realism of the 18th century.

This is the way it was for a lot of 20th-century realism. And so we'll be watching for this theme of a mental act all along the way. There's a lot of anti-realism in the idealist philosophies of the 19th century.

And when the reaction against idealism set in in the early 20th century, one of the main arguments against it on the part of some British and American philosophers was in terms of this act of external reference. The mental act of intentionality. Where did they get that idea? They got it from German philosophers.

From people like Brent Tallow, who was one of the phenomenologists of the early 20s, along with Edmund de Seul. And when Dallas Willard is here, he's a De Seul specialist. So he brings it straight from the German horse's mouth.

Instead of via the British individuals. Okay, that's the mental act. So watch this Scotistic emphasis on intentionality.

With its direct apprehension, direct awareness. Alright, now that's the first ingredient in his modification to the Christianized Aristotelianism of Thomas. Second, how do we account for individuality? How do we account for individuality? Now, if you recall, that again, there's been a variety of positions on this.

The tendency in the past has been to say, in the Platonic tradition, that individuality is a privation of thought. And since there are various privations of thought, there are various individuals, all of them lacking the fullness of their nature in some regard. But that gives no positive value to individuality.

And particularly in Judeo-Christian thought, rather than Neoplatonic thought, that's a problem. For the Neoplatonists, not so much. They were happy to lose individuality in the mystical human world.

So, the Aristotelian tradition became attractive with its notion that in some way, that are individuals. That by virtue of having a space-time location, the embodied form is

the individual, by the excellence of that material existence. For Aquinas, that wasn't quite sufficient.

Because Aquinas wanted to give positive value to matter, because it's something that God created. And you remember, therefore, that Aquinas speaks of matter as pure potency. That is to say, matter has potential for the whole choreographed variety of this creation.

Positive value in potential. And that potential is drawn out by virtue of the natures which God combines with matter in the act of creation. So, individuality, then, is by the act of God drawing out the particular potencies of the matter.

Now, Scotus is still not satisfied. It sounds as if matter is still individuals. And if matter is what is doing the individuation, whereas the rational soul is immaterial, can an immaterial rational soul, when released from the body, be individuated? And furthermore, if God is an immaterial spirit, how can God be individual? Can matter be individuals? So, what Scotus proposes is that whereas the form gives the quidditas, that is to say, the what-ness of a thing, it is provided by the form, its generic nature.

What species is it? Is it a matter? On the other hand, the individual nature of the thing, its this-ness, is provided by a third form, a third kind of principle, other than matter and form. A principle he calls heikeitas. Heikeitas, simply being the Latin for this-ness.

Did any of you take Latin here in high school? So, a few of you know about pink, white, hot, or pink, hot, or hot, or conjugating the monstrous pronoun this. Alright, heikeitas, you see, has the height of the monstrous pronoun this. Heikeitas is this-ness, this-ness, individuality.

This particular thing, this particular person, not human in general, but this, heikeitas. So, the particular is the result not of two principles brought together by God, form and matter, but three principles, form, matter, and heikeitas. Though he keeps in mind carefully the Aristotelian conjoiner, that these three were not actually separated, at least in this life, they always come apart.

They always come apart. In that sense, the distinction is said to be purely formal, rather than material. A formal distinction, one that we make in our thought, rather than three things you can separate out in themselves.

So, the individuality is due to the principle this-ness. And you have emphasis on individuals whose individual identity is not determined either by form of speech, or by matter, bodily matter, generically. But there is an individualized identity.

And it's the *heikeitas*, then, that makes possible the freedom of the individual's will. Because the individual's will is not a generic will. It's not a byproduct of material processes.

It's the individual's will. So, in those ways, he tries to reinforce the freedom of the will of God in creating, by modifying the hierarchical picture. And he tries to reinforce the freedom of the human will by modifying the picture of individuality.

And with those changes to the underlying metaphysics in mind, then, now, we can see what he does with the will and intellect issue, which is the source of the whole dispute. He has a more voluntaristic view of God. He has a more voluntaristic view of human nature.

What are the implications? Well, take logic. In the case of Aristotelian logic, you remember how Aristotle developed the syllogism but drew our attention to the fact that with such demonstrative reasoning, the big problem we had is of establishing the first premises, the first principles, from which syllogistic reasoning proceeds. And you recall how, according to Aristotle, one gains knowledge of those first principles.

That is to say, by abstracting the first principle of the species from the cumulative experience of the whole species. So, according to Aristotle, you can have assured knowledge by means of this intuitive abstraction. You can have assured knowledge of first principles in engaging deductive demonstrative reasoning.

If you know the first principles of the species, you can infer all sorts of other things about it, concerning males of the species, individuals of the species. All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, so you know he is ghetto. As they did in Athens, they got him.

Now, the problem that Scotus sees is with this claim that first principles for logical demonstration are readily accessible. And the reason for that is that in a world where individuals are what they are because of Hycaean tasks, the distinction between species may not always be that clear. At best, we would have some probability only concerning the nature of the species.

So that your syllogistic arguments would never lead you to logical certainty, but only to varying degrees of probability. Accordingly, natural theology, if possible, will lead only to certain probabilities limited by the nature of the premise. But he is not unduly alarmed at that because if we have direct knowledge of particular things, then we're able to examine particular things as particulars more carefully and find similarities.

And so the probability of that kind of examination of particulars is available too in establishing first practices. So in logic, the implication is that arguments yield only

probability. If they only yield probability, then the act of believing something or the act of judging something to be true or judging something to be morally good or bad takes an act of will, not just intent.

And so belief is seen as an act of will. Moral judgment is an act of will. A truth judgment is an act of will that we have been responsible for.

The act of will. Now, the implications then flow from logic into epistemology. Into epistemology.

Abstraction of sorts is possible, yes, not as definitely, but it is aided by the intentionality of reference to particulars. Aided by that direct mental act of external reference, in which we assent to something or deny it. Aided also by divine illumination.

And Scotus draws more explicitly on the Aristotelian tradition, as it emphasizes the way in which the divine light enlightens the mind in its understanding of truth. But perhaps the more far-reaching implication comes into evidence. If the creation is contingent in what it is, on the will of God, rather than being logically necessary as it is, that is going to have an effect on natural law ethics.

Because the natural law ethic is saying that by virtue of the essential nature of things as they are a necessity, by virtue of form, universal, there is a common inbred, common built-in tendency, inclination, direction, which can be read from the nature of things, indicating the natural moral law. We are talking about that at the end of the hour. But if Scotus is correct, that kind of natural law is, well, let's say, just a *prima facie* obligation.

Because if the creation is contingent on the will of God, then God might, as things change, will something different. And so Scotus allows for possible changes in the nature of moral law. He takes, for instance, as an example the Ten Commandments, which Thomas has seen as an example of natural moral law, which is simply reproduced in divine law given in Scripture.

And incidentally, that way of seeing the Decalogue is very common. It's true of Thomas, it's true of Scotus, it's true of John Calvin, and it's true of Martin Luther. With an adumbrated notion of natural moral law, even the Decalogue is seen as representative of that natural moral law.

But according to Scotus, the first three commandments, thou shalt have no other gods before thee, not make raven images, bow down and worship them, not take the Lord's name in vain, those first three commandments have to do with our relationship to God, who is unchanging. And because God is unchanging, those first three commandments are unchanging. But the last seven commandments are about

relationships to created things, created beings, other humans, in changing situations involving changing particular things.

So it is conceivable, he says, that those commandments might change in the course of history or in particular cases. Why, for instance, in the Old Testament, did God seem to allow polygamy? Why could he ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac? How could he tell Hosea to marry Ahab? So what Scotus comes out with is not saying that it's all up for grabs, but saying basically our ethic depends on divine will, divine command. It doesn't depend on the nature of things because the nature of things is not necessary.

It depends on divine command, and so his is a clear case of what nowadays we call divine command theory as to the grounds of an ethic, a divine command. But insofar as the divine command leaves us with no change given to the natural law, ten commandments, that holds, that holds. And if we're dealing with matter in which the natural law or the divine commands are both silent, then, says Scotus, we have to appeal to right reason.

Right reason. The right reason tends to be prudential. Now that is to say, weighing the consequences of actions and policies.

And while he doesn't develop that at great length, it's that which becomes the cue for William of Arnhem, Martin Luther, Thomas Hobbes, and on the influence of the nominalism of the late part of the Middle Ages. So Scotus then is modifying the Thomistic modification of Aristotle to avoid deterministic implications concerning God, concerning human nature, and the resultant unchanging necessity of the creation of natural law. Well, okay, let me pause there.

Question. In Aquinas, for a generation back, it was said that we would be born a matter of violation. And in Scotus, is he requesting a violation? Yeah, I don't know of a passage where he talks about that.

He was saying that in Aquinas, the three things needed for generation are matter, which is privation, and, no, which is politics. Matter of form and privation. Yeah.

Still on the state of politics, of course. Those three things are necessary. Is he denying some of this? Is that the question? Yeah, just, he hasn't ever said that about privation.

No, he talks about matter, form, and likelihood, but I think in terms of the overall picture, he has to say privation. If you're talking of any process of becoming, any process of change, then what is going to change has to be suffering from privation in regard to that to which it is changing. Oh, you couldn't have changed? Yeah, is this

tautological, so that it's included in that early image? And so it gets sort of bracketed in emphasizing this question.

What was he going to say about the nature of evil, that there's no, since that kind of rules out that some beings are less, by virtue of the fact that they have fewer beings than there are? Yeah, I'm not sure that it changes that. You see, to say that evil is privation of good, it's still hot. It's not going to be privation of being, let's say, because it is innate, but it's going to be privation of good, perhaps privation of form, perhaps privation of the intended high chaos.

They're not the man you follow, but it would still be privation. Where does the high chaos come from? Does God create that directly? Yes, yes. So that every single individual existence is directly created by God? Yes.

God has direct knowledge of every particular and directly creates every particular and every individual. Right. Is he God? Has he created an evil being? Or has he created beings who now suffer from privation of good? And I take it, in your mind, you're mulling over, well, yeah, after all, Adam created the sun and the moon.

So I think he handles this pretty well. To this day, I think it's fair to say that people in the Dominican tradition, Jesuits and so forth, tend to favor Aquinas, their tradition. In the Franciscan tradition, they tend to favor Scotus.

It's more of the old stick. And so if you want to see the philosophical difference between those two Catholic orders, then it's really Thomas and Scotus. Though again, it has to be said that since Vatican II, what's changed there? I'm interested in his picture of God.

You said that he maintains a hierarchy of goodness, so there's not a problem in that ethical structure, but he's talking about where God gets in, as far as the metaphysics is concerned, which is really, you know, humanism. You see, God, like every other being, is a being. But God is not the totality of being.

God is not being itself. He is a being and the creator of other beings. That's saying that God is different in essence, even though there is a difficulty.

God is all-powerful. God is perfectly good, so on and so forth. So, what you have in that sense is a, well, it's not as systematic and detailed a metaphysical picture as Thomas is, but it is in another sense, because every individual has their own identity, and that identity is known directly by God.

It has its own worth and purpose. But God is a being, a supreme being. Qualitatively different.

So that when you say that God exists, you're using the word exist in exactly the same sense as when you say about David Seward. Because, oh, when you say God is good, you're certainly using it in a fascinating sense, when you say David Seward. I'm not sure why, if you created this individual so I could be outside of the divine mind, why that wouldn't be included in the second one.

You know, the phrase knowledge outside the divine mind is confusing. I don't think that's a nice phrase. If God knows it, then he knows something in his mind.

But in his mind, he knows about something that's outside. Don't you? I mean, in your mind now, you're thinking about what I just said. What was said was outside your mind.

Now, the question is whether you know what is outside your mind directly. Or only through the intermediate immediacy of ideas. You see, according to Aristotle, we know things through the intellectual species abstracted from the sensible species.

That is to say, through our ideas. In the Platonic tradition, God would know things only through the archetypal ideas. Well, the question is, do we just have ideas and then try to infer that something particular exists to correspond to it? Do we have direct beliefs? As they are.

And what Thomas is asserting is that the mind, God's mind in the mind, the very nature of mentality, the mind is able, as it were, to extend its mental grasp to see far beyond. Now, you know, visually, that's like saying, I might say I have my eyes on somebody back there. My eyes on... No, my eyes are here.

But you see, in sense experience, I'm able to give attention to something way over there. Watch it. And the same is true with other senses besides the eyes, although the eyes are most clearly here.

You do it with your ears now. Where does that sound come from? You see, you try to get your direction from it. Because you're trying to, you know, identify directly that which is out there.

But this act of external reference, intentionality means a mental point, an act of refinement, a need for that. That's what I mean. Also... You're saying that God doesn't have the ability to form specific individuals in his mind.

No, I don't think it's saying that God doesn't. I think it's showing you. That is to say, God can think of the essence of humanness as a species.

But he can also think particularly of Christophe Coyne here. Which I suspect you find rather encouraging. But it seems as if he had created those individuals.

But there's a difference between their being in your mind and not being able to contemplate anything other than that. That is to say, you have several alternatives. One, you have the mind contemplating the archetype within the mind.

You have the mind contemplating the archetype and referring to then some particular outlier. Or alternatively, you have the mind that contemplates the archetype, that contemplates the particular, and does that referring back to the other. So what you have is this immediate thought.

You've got this intentional awareness. And in terms of... One of the people who developed this in the 20th century was George Santayana, who taught at Harvard in the 20s. Santayana made the distinction this way between perception in the mode of causal efficacy.

And I simply cause to have a sense to use. And causation in the mode of presentational means. When the mind does contemplate a type of object.

Now what's involved in causal efficacy? He's talking of human perception. What's involved in causal efficacy is a stimulus-response mechanism between the object and the consciousness. Stimulating consciousness, which therefore reflexes back in an act of reference to the source of stimulus.

And only when that is accomplished, as a general rule, do we start asking ourselves, now what is this object? And then the idea of the presentational means. Is it a man or is it an object? What is it? That's why you can wake up in the night and say hello to God. You mistakenly conceive what that external object is, whose existence you are immediately aware of.

So this is the thing with Santayana. We think of particulars in terms of our ideas. God thinks of them in terms of his archetypal ideas.

He thinks of them, not just of the archetypal ideas. Yeah? Yeah, the thing is that Scotus reads Aquinas as saying that because the intellect perceives x to be good, it therefore naturally, read necessarily, seeks that good x. And there's no choice. And there are places where even Aquinas seems to be saying, yes, the intellect determines what we seek, the will determines how we seek it, by what means.

Now, Scotus wants will as the determining and critical factor in both cases. In reading this book. Is this a misreading of Aquinas? Yeah, I think so.

Yeah. But remember, before the printing press, it was very easy to misread this book. And we had to write it.

But it worked. I may not have been fortunate enough to hear, to talk, to get hold of it. Thank you.

All right, now I want to make some comments about William of Ock, before we're through. And perhaps we'll come back to this on Friday if we need to. But the thing that I want to emphasize here is the plainness of the book's twirliness.

The critique of realism extends from Scotus, and we'll come back to that. But William of Ock, I mean, his rejection of real universals, develops a kind of nominalist position. It's best known as terminalism, to avoid confusion with the nominalism of Rosling, whom we mentioned earlier when we were introducing the problem of universals.

Rosling had simply maintained that only words have anything universal about them. Words have universal reference. The word dog refers to the whole species of dogs and to every individual canine specimen.

Only words have anything universal. There are no real universals. There are no universal concepts like doghood or dogness.

There are just words that have a universal reference to a whole class of dogs. And that was as far as Rosling went, and he only went that far because he was embroiled in a metaphysical dispute. What is the reality of his universals? Nothing.

No things, no concepts, only words, and really they are particular words with universal reference. Now, when you come to William of Ock, he lays emphasis on words, terms, yes. But his interest is less in the metaphysical question and more in logical questions.

Logical questions because of those problems with Aristotelian, Aristotle's logic, which Scotus' mentioned. But in the determinism of Ockham, you see, the term somehow or other stands for a whole array, a whole variety of individuals. How can that be? How can one word have universal reference? Well, you'll find in the reading that our editor distinguishes between two views, Ockham's first view and Ockham's second view.

Ockham's first view is that the term that has universal reference, the term brings with it an image, a particular mental image. Which is our mental picture, indiscriminately, of the whole class of individuals. So if we're talking about the term human, then that term refers without any differentiating qualities to our mental picture of all individuals.

It's going to be a very, very, very thick, not much more than a stick person. Not going to be much more than that, human being. Very vague image.

But he wasn't happy with that. Because it implied that if the term refers to an image or an idea, a particular idea of a very vague sort, then our knowledge of those particulars is indirect by means of the ideas. And following Stiles, he wants to emphasize direct awareness.

So his second view avoids this playing around with the mental ideas we may have. But we have a direct awareness of individuals and all classes. And in that sense, the term refers not to a representative idea, but rather to the mental act.

To the mental act of referring, of intentional reference. So when I say human being, I'm not just using a word that is a symbol for an idea. When I say human being, I'm engaging in an act of referring, of mental reference.

I'm pointing to every one of you and every other one I have seen or shall see. The mental act. And because the mental act has that external reference, consequently, the term is not simply a term for a particular action.

It's a term used to refer, to point to the mental act, rather than the mental image. So that's the way in which he develops it. And then has far-reaching ramifications.

As a terminist, a nominalist, he rejects all real universals. And if he's rejecting all universals, then he's rejecting the whole hierarchical structure of medieval philosophy. The most radical change.

There is no longer the Logos theology, the archetypal ideas in the mind of the Logos. This is no longer the best of all possible worlds, this choreographed creation. It's no longer something which, in all of its integral parts, is a necessary whole with images of the divine goodness.

No. No. Instead of a teleological world, Ockham essentially has a mechanistic worldview in line with the science that is beginning to emerge in the 14th century.

Because without formal causes, universals, there are no in-built final causes. All you're left with is material causes, bodies. Efficient causes, forces.

Which is precisely what the mechanistic science of the scientific revolution picked up. So, without universals, he's going to have to be much more empirical in his study of particulars. Without universals, his worldview is going to be mechanistic rather than teleological.

And so William of Ockham opens the doors to the new science. And the result is, essentially, the disintegration of the medieval synthesis. Get the picture? Well, that's the picture that I'm hoping Dallas Willard will help us with next time.

And in any case, I want to pick up on and develop.