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William of Ockham's Divine Command Theory

Matthew Dee
University of South Florida, mattdee89@gmail.com

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William of Ockham's Divine Command Theory

by

Matthew Dee

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Thomas Williams, Ph.D.
Roger Ariew, Ph.D.
Colin Heydt, Ph.D.
Mor Segev, Ph.D.

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Dedication

To the wife of my youth, who patiently postponed

her calling and endlessly encouraged me to chase mine.

And to God, the source of all wisdom.

"Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.

Though it cost all you have, get understanding."

Proverbs 4:7

Soli Deo Glori

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Abstract

There was a long-standing consensus that Ockham was a Divine Command Theorist - one who holds that all of morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands. But contrary to this long-standing consensus, three arguments have recently surfaced that Ockham is not a divine command theorist. The thesis of this dissertation is that, contrary to these three arguments, Ockham is a divine command theorist. The first half of the dissertation is an analysis of the three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for virtuous action, whereas the second half is a response to the three contemporary arguments that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist. In a way, the first half of the dissertation gives a *prima facie* case that Ockham is a divine command theorist; the second half concludes so *ultima facie*.

Introduction

There was a long-standing consensus that William of Ockham (1285-1347) was a Divine Command Theorist – one who holds that all of morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands.[1] For example, Maurice De Wulf, near the start of the twentieth century, describes the will of God, for Ockham, as "the sovereign arbiter of moral good and evil."[2] Around the same time Otto von Gierke contrasts two medieval views of natural law – Realist and Nominalist – describing Aquinas as the former and Ockham as the latter, saying the Realists "explained the Lex Naturalis as an intellectual act independent of will – as a mere lex indicativa, in which God was not lawgiver but a teacher working by means of Reason….The opposite proposition, proceeding from pure Nominalism, saw in the Law of Nature a mere divine command, which was right and binding merely because God was the lawgiver."[3]

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[1] Concerning the definition of Divine Command Theory, Janine Marie Itziak says "a 'divine command moralist' is one who maintains that the content of morality…is directly and solely dependent upon the commands and prohibitions of God" (*Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* [New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979], 1). Marilyn McCord Adams similarly defines divine command theory as the view "according to which moral norms are entirely a function of the arbitrary choices of the free will of an omnipotent God" ("The Structure of Ockham's Moral Theory" *Franciscan Studies* 46 (1986): 1-35, here 1).

[2] Maurice De Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, trans P. Coffey (Longmans, Green, and Co, 1909), 425.

[3] Otto von Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, trans Maitland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 173, n. 256.

Similar descriptions of Ockham as a divine command theorist continued well

into the middle of the 20th century. Armand Maurer contrasts the metaphysical

foundations of Aquinas's ethics with the separation of metaphysics from ethics in

Ockham's divine command theory:

> The scholastics prior to Ockham looked upon goodness as a property of
> being. St. Thomas, for example, speaks of goodness as the perfection of
> being that renders it desirable. Because God is all-perfect and supremely
> desirable, he is supremely good. A creature is good to the extent that it
> achieves the perfection demanded by its nature. Moral goodness consists
> in man's acting in accordance with his nature, with a view to attaining his
> final end (happiness), which is identical with the perfection of his being.
> For St. Thomas, therefore morality has a metaphysical foundation, and it
> links man with God, giving him a share in the divine goodness and
> perfection.
> Ockham, on the other hand, severs the bond between metaphysics and
> ethics and bases morality not upon the perfection of human nature (whose
> reality he denies), nor upon the teleological relation between man and
> God, but upon man's obligation to follow the laws freely laid down for
> him by God.[4]

David Knowles describes Ockham's ethics as stemming from his views of God's

absolute power and freedom:

> The methodological use of the absolute power of God is corollary of the
> emphasis on the absolute freedom of God first emphasized in a
> tendentious manner by Scotus. Ockham followed Duns here, stressing the
> primacy of the will and the concept of freedom both in God and
> man….Acts are not good or bad in themselves, but solely because they are
> commanded or prohibited by God.[5]

But contrary to this long-standing consensus,[6] three arguments have recently

surfaced that Ockham is *not* a divine command theorist. The first argument – call it the

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[4] Armand A. Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1962), 286.

[5] David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (Random House, 1962), 324.

[6] For further examples of scholars who characterize Ockham as a divine command theorist, see
Itziak, *Divine Command Morality*, 3; D.E. Luscombe, "Natural Morality and Natural Law" in *The Cambridge*

Loving God is Fundamental Argument – says that the act of loving God (rather than divine commands) is fundamental for Ockham's ethics.

Something is *fundamental* if there is nothing more basic that justifies it.[7] On this schema, here's an example of a non-fundamental rule for Kantian ethics: (C) forbidding children from belittling their unpopular classmates. (C) isn't fundamental because there is something more basic that justifies it: (B) showing respect to others. It's not as if *because* belittling unpopular classmates is forbidden, *therefore* we should show respect to others. Rather the reverse is true: *because* we should show respect to others, *therefore* we shouldn't belittle our classmates. (B) is a more basic moral rule that justifies (C). But just because (B) is more basic than (C), it doesn't follow that (B) is fundamental. After all, there could be some more basic rule that justifies (B). Turns out, for Kant, that there is: (A) always treat a human as an end and never as a mere means. (A) is fundamental for Kant because there is no more basic moral rule that justifies it. This is because, in Shafer-Landau's words, "Moral questioning, like all other lines of investigation, must stop somewhere. Fundamental moral rules mark that stopping point."[8]

Relating this back to whether Ockham is a divine command theorist or not, the long-standing consensus held that divine commands are fundamental for Ockham's ethics. But this new interpretation has replaced divine commands with the act of loving

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History of Later Medieval Philosophy, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 705-720, here 717; Paul Helm, *Divine Commands and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1-13, here 3.

[7] I owe this sense of *fundamental* to Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 219.

[8] Shafer-Landau, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, 219.

God as fundamental. One presentation in print of the Loving God is Fundamental Argument comes from Peter King: "The act of loving God above all else for his own sake is good in itself and generates or tends to generate a virtuous habit in the agent's will….This act is good whenever it is elicited, and it is the intrinsic good on which the goodness of other acts depends."[9] Thus, "For Ockham, then, the core of ethics is the love of God (the intrinsically good act)."[10]

One further presentation comes from Lucan Freppert, who asks, "Is the divine precept, then, the basis for the obligation to love God? Or on the contrary, is the love of God itself the basis for obeying his precept that he must be loved?....it is the love of God, above all and for Himself, that is basic."[11] Freppert here explicitly states that, for Ockham, God's commands aren't fundamental because they're further justified by what is "basic" – i.e., the love of God. To be clear, it's consistent with King and Freppert that God's commands can justify moral rules, like "Don't murder," "Don't steal," and such. But God's commands aren't fundamental, on their account. Rather, the love of God is the ultimate justification for Ockham's ethics. Instead of a Divine Command Theorist, perhaps Ockham should be characterized as some novel Divine Love Theorist.

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[9] Peter King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 227-244, here 232.

[10] King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," 237. Paul Spade and Claude Panaccio agree that the act of loving God is the "intrinsically virtuous act" ("William of Ockham", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ockham/>). And Richard Cross similarly states, "the scope of God's possible commands is very wide: God can command anything other than hatred of himself. The reason for this last restriction is simply that loving God is the one necessarily good act" (*The Medieval Philosophers*, [London: Tauris, 2013], 203).

[11] Lucan Freppert, *The Basis of Morality According to William Ockham* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1988), 121-22.

The second argument – call it the Right Reason Argument – is that Ockham is no divine command theorist because his account of ethics includes a role for right reason. Rega Wood makes this argument when she says that scholars have mistakenly concluded that Ockham "is a divine-command theorist of morality, who defines goodness and moral virtue solely in terms of the dictates of God's arbitrary will. This is not the case. Ockham maintains that acts of moral virtue must be elicited in conformity with right reason."[12] Marilyn McCord Adams makes a similar version of this argument:

> For Ockham, it is a necessary truth that divine commands are a derivative norm in non-positive morality, but that does not make his theory an authoritarian 'Divine Command Ethics'….Because Ockham's ethics begins with right reason and is led thereby to divine commands…his theory might be better labeled 'Modified Right Reason Theory.'[13]

And the third argument – call it the Non-Positive Moral Law Argument – claims that since there's a certain portion of the moral law – what Ockham calls non-positive moral science – that is independent of God's commands, Ockham isn't a divine command theorist.[14] Recall, divine command theory is the view that *all of morality* is ultimately grounded in God's commands. So, the argument goes, even if Ockham grounds some portion of the moral law in divine commands, he doesn't ground all of morality in God's commands, so he's not a divine command theorist.

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[12] Rega Wood, *Ockham on the Virtues* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1997), 32.

[13] Adams, "Ockham's Moral Theory," 33-4.

[14] Thomas Osborne recently wrote an excellent paper arguing that Ockham is a divine command theorist. See his "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist" *Religious Studies* 41 (2005): 1-22. While he directly engages with the first and second arguments, he only indirectly engages with the Nonpositive Moral Law Argument.

Adams also advocates the Non-Positive Moral Law Argument when she states

that despite Ockham's ethics appearing to conclude that "moral demands will be

arbitrary and contingent, even changeable," caution is in order because "Ockham

retains the distinction between nonpositive morality or ethics – which is based on

principles known per se or through experience quite apart from the commands of any

authority – and positive morality – which pertains to human or divine laws having to

do with matters that are neither good nor bad except insofar as they are commanded or

prohibited by the authority."[15] Scott MacDonald also advocates this third argument

when he says that

> Scotus and Ockham maintain that nonpositive moral laws command or
> forbid actions the rightness of which is independent of the divine
> will….Not even God can alter the moral value of acts dictated by this sort
> of moral science because to do so would involve a contradiction. So
> Scotus and Ockham agree with Aquinas that some moral precepts are
> right because they are in accordance with right reason but disagree with
> him about the scope of natural law.[16]

Thus, even if divine commands justify some of the moral law, divine commands don't

justify non-positive moral law. Thus, the argument concludes, Ockham isn't a divine

command theorist.

The heart of this dissertation is to argue that, contrary to these three arguments,

the long-standing consensus was right: Ockham is a divine command theorist. That is,

Ockham holds that all of morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands. And by

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[15] Marily McCord Adams, "Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 245-272, here 246.

[16] Scott MacDonald, "Later Medieval Ethics" in *A History of Western Ethics*, ed. Charlotte B. Becker (New York: Routledge, 2003), 52-9, here 58-9. MacDonald's italics omitted.

"God's commands," following Thomas Osborne, I mean not only God's explicit commands (the Ten Commandments, say) but also God's free decisions to make any specific acts right or wrong.[17]

This dissertation can be divided into two halves. The first half – Chapters One and Two – is an exposition of Ockham's account of ethics, whereas the second half – Chapters Three and Four – is a response to the three contemporary arguments that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist. In a way, the first half of this dissertation gives a *prima facie* case that Ockham is a divine command theorist; the second half concludes so *ultima facie*.

The first half is an analysis of Ockham's three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for virtuous action. As Ockham scholars have noted, one of the difficulties with understanding his account of ethics is that it's not systematically presented in any of his works. Rather, it must be assembled from discussions and remarks spread across his writings.[18] One such remark summarizes the three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for virtuous action: "activity of an act of prudence and activity of the will are necessarily required for virtuous action, so that those two causes, together with God, are the partial causes for virtuous action."[19] Thus, the three necessary and jointly

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[17] Osborne, "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist," 3.

[18] E.g., King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," 227.

[19] *Quaestiones Variae* (hereafter *QV*) 7.3 in *Opera Theologica* (hereafter *OT*) VIII (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1984), 363.515-18: "*ad actum virtuosum necessario requiritur activitas actus prudentiae et activitas voluntatis, ita quod illae duae causae sunt causae partiales cum Deo respectu actus virtuosi.*" Similarly, Ockham states elsewhere, "…if activity of the will or an act of prudence is suspended, such an act will in no sense be called virtuous" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 417.198-200: "*quod suspensa activitate voluntatis vel actus prudentiae, nullo modo dicetur talis actus virtuosus*). He also states that "no one acts virtuously unless

sufficient conditions for virtuous action are an act of prudence, a corresponding act of will, and God's concurring with the act. Chapter One analyzes the first condition – Ockham's account of prudence. Chapter Two analyzes the second and third – Ockham's account of an act of will and God's concurring with the act. Chapter Three seeks to undermine the first of three contemporary arguments that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist – the Loving God is Fundamental Argument. Chapter Four seeks to undermine the second and third – the Right Reason Argument and the Non-Positive Moral Law Argument.

Ockham's ethics is seriously understudied at present. Perhaps one reason for this is that the majority of contemporary philosophers – adhering to the long-standing consensus because they aren't acquainted with recent Ockham scholarship – (rightly) think that Ockham is a divine command theorist. But as Bonnie Kent has pointed out, "Understanding is the first challenge, judgment the second."[20] This project fits under the former, for there is still much more to be understood about the history of ethics in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, let alone Ockham's ethics in particular.

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he acts knowingly and freely" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 362.500-1: "*nullus virtuose agit nisi scienter agat et ex libertate*"). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[20] Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 35.

Chapter One:

Ockham's Account of Prudence

As mentioned in the Introduction, the first half of this dissertation – the exposition of Ockham's account of ethics – is an analysis of Ockham's three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for virtuous action: an act of prudence, a corresponding act of will, and God's concurring with the act. Ockham states, "activity of an act of prudence and activity of the will are necessarily required for virtuous action, so that those two causes, together with God, are the partial causes for virtuous action."[21] This chapter analyzes the first condition – Ockham's account of prudence – the next chapter analyzes the second and third.

Prudence became commonplace in Scholastic ethical theories (along with a nexus of terms about moral knowledge, like right reason, conscience, synderesis, and others) after the complete translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the early thirteenth

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[21] *Quaestiones Variae* (hereafter *QV*) 7.3 in *Opera Theologica* (hereafter *OT*) VIII (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1984), 363.515-18: "*ad actum virtuosum necessario requiritur activitas actus prudentiae et activitas voluntatis, ita quod illae duae causae sunt causae partials cum Deo respect actus virtuosi.*" Similarly, Ockham states elsewhere, "…if activity of the will or an act of prudence is suspended, such an act will in no sense be called virtuous" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 417.198-200: "*quod suspensa activitate voluntatis vel actus prudentiae, nullo modo dicetur talis actus virtuosus*"). He also states that "no one acts virtuously unless he acts knowingly and freely" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 362.500-1: "*nullus virtuose agit nisi scienter agat et ex libertate*"). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

century.[22] But while these terms are firmly established throughout Scholasticism, their definitions aren't. Clark's remarks about right reason could equally apply to the other terms when he says "The phrase seems to have had a generic and flexible meaning….All too easily, contrasts and variations in the meaning of right reason go unnoticed although they announced fundamental changes in the medieval history of moral theory."[23]

Ockham's account of prudence is no exception. Typically sensitive to terminology (being the incisive logician he is), Ockham is uncharacteristically lax when it comes to prudence and its nexus of terms. As will be shown below, Ockham uses prudence in multiple senses, but sometimes neglects to explicitly distinguish its particular sense. He also seems, at times, to use prudence and right reason interchangeably, but distinguishes them at other times. Despite such uncharacteristic imprecision, a careful and thorough analysis of Ockham's account of prudence bears essential fruit for understanding Ockham's ethics as a whole. The analysis in this paper is broken up into three stages: (1) distinguishing prudence from right reason, (2) distinguishing prudence from craft, and (3) distinguishing prudence from moral science.

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[22] E.g., David Clark, "William of Ockham on Right Reason," *Speculum* 48.1 (1973): 13-36, here 13; M.V. Dougherty, "Practical Reasoning" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Ethics*, ed. Thomas Williams (Forthcoming, Cambridge University Press).

[23] Clark, "Ockham on Right Reason," 13.

Stage 1: Prudence Distinguished from Right Reason

Some commentators have explicitly stated that prudence and right reason are the same thing for Ockham,[24] while others have implied as much.[25] And there's ample evidence in Ockham for such a view. As already mentioned, Ockham seems to use them interchangeably at times saying "*right reason or prudence*." For example, when discussing perfect virtues he says that "one perfect virtue, together with the will and *right reason or prudence*, inclines sufficiently to the first act of another virtue."[26] Such surprisingly common imprecision in Ockham,[27] can also be found in Scotus. For one example, Scotus says, "Now these two causes [i.e., the moral habit and prudence], concurring at the same time in eliciting the act, can bestow moral goodness on the act, which the secondary habit could not bestow by itself, if it were apart from *prudence or right reason*."[28]

The imprecision in Ockham continues, for at other times he uses one term at one point in an argument, and the other term at another point in the same argument. For one such argument, Ockham says:

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[24] E.g., Linwood Urban, "William of Ockham's Theological Ethics," *Franciscan Studies* 33 (1973): 310-350, here 321.

[25] Gordon Leff, *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 481; Lucan Freppert, *The Basis of Morality According to William Ockham* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 50.

[26] *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 347.154-6: "*una virtus perfecta sufficienter cum voluntate et recta ratione sive prudentia inclinat ad primum actum alterius virtutis.*"

[27] For similar instances of "right reason or prudence," see *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 362.498-509; *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 398.522-3.

[28] Scotus, *Ord* I, d.17, qq.1-2, n. 95 in *John Duns Scotus: Selected Writings on Ethics*, trans. Thomas Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). My emphasis.

it should be known that in order for a right act to be elicited by the will, some *right reason* is necessarily required in the intellect. This is clear on the basis of (i) reason and (ii) authority. On account of (i) reason, since that will which can, as it is in virtue of itself, indifferently act well and badly, because it's not right in virtue of itself, necessarily requires some rule other than itself giving direction in order for it to act rightly. This is clear, because the reason the divine will does not require any rule giving direction is that it itself is the first directing rule and cannot act badly. But our will is such that it can act rightly and non-rightly. Therefore, it requires some [rule] giving direction by *right reason*. On account of (ii) authority, it's clear through the definition of virtue, in [Aristotle's] *Ethics*, Book II, that a virtue is an elective habit consisting in a mean determined by reason etc. And there are many other authorities in favor of the view that [an act of will] cannot be right and virtuous unless it has *right reason*. Therefore, taking it as settled that a right and virtuous act of the will is necessarily conformed with an act of *prudence*, then...[29]

We needn't follow Ockham's argument any further to notice that Ockham uses *right reason* in his premises, but switches to *prudence* in his conclusion. If Ockham wasn't using these terms synonymously, he'd be committing the (schoolboy's) fallacy of equivocation. And again, such common imprecision in Ockham[30] can also be found in Scotus.[31]

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[29] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 409.16-410.31: "*sciendum est quod ad hoc quod actus rectus eliciatur a voluntate necessario requiritur aliqua recta ratio in intellectu. Hoc patet per rationem et auctoritatem. Per rationem, quia illa voluntas quae potest, quantum est de se, indifferenter bene agere et male, quia de se non est recta, necessario ad hoc quod recte agat, indiget aliqua regula dirigente alia a se. Hoc patet, quia ideo voluntas divina non indiget aliquo dirigente quia ipsa est prima regula directiva et non potest male agere. Sed voluntas nostra est huiusmodi quod potest recte et non recte agere. Igitur indiget aliqua ratione recta dirigente. Per auctoritatem patet per definitionem virtutis, II* Ethicorum, *quod virtus est habitus electives consistens in medio determinata ratione etc. Et multae aliae auctoritates sunt ad hoc quod non potest esse rectus et virtuosus nisi habeat rationem rectam.*
Hoc igitur supposito tamquam certo quod actus rectus et virtuosus voluntatis necessario conformatur actui prudentiae, tunc."

[30] E.g., *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 362.493-7; *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 394.429-42; *Reportatio* (herafter *Rep*) 3.12, in *Opera Theologica* VI (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1982), 422.1-5.

[31] E.g., Scotus, *Ord* I, d.17, qq.1-2, n. 65; *Ord* III, d. 36, q.un., nn. 80, 84.

In the Scholastics' defense, perhaps one explanation for such imprecision is that it stems back to Aristotle himself. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, when discussing the relationship between prudence and virtue, Aristotle (rather confusingly) says,

> Whenever people now define virtue, they all say what state it is and what it is related to, and then add that it is the state in accord with the correct [or right] reason. Now the correct reason is the reason in accord with prudence; it would seem, then, that they all in a way intuitively believe that the state in accord with prudence is virtue.
> But we must make a slight change [to what all people say]. For it is not merely the state in accord with the correct reason, but the state involving the correct reason, that is virtue. And it is prudence that is the correct reason in this area.[32]

It's far beyond the scope of this chapter to give an adequate gloss of Aristotle here.[33] Rather, this passage is simply introduced to suggest that the confusingly close relationship between right reason and prudence found in Ockham, and his uncharacteristic imprecision regarding these terms, may reflect the Philosopher he strove so hard to imitate.

But while there's ample evidence that Ockham uses prudence and right reason synonymously, there are also occasions in Ockham, albeit seldom, that suggest otherwise. For one example, Ockham says that "there is a different right reason, or a different prudence – *by extending the name*."[34] Unlike his common use of equating them, Ockham here suggests that prudence (when not in its extended sense) is distinct from

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[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 1144b23-9. Cf. 1107a1-3.

[33] For a helpful discussion of Aristotle's right reason, see Joseph Owens, "How Flexible is Aristotelian 'Right Reason' in *The Georgetown Symposium on Ethics*, ed. Rocco Porreco (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 49-66.

[34] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 274.54-6: "*Et alia est recta ratio…sive alia prudentia – extendendo nomen.*"

right reason, though he (unhelpfully) doesn't elaborate on the way(s) in which they are distinct.

And there are other times when, again, unlike his seeming equivocations above, he mentions one term at the exclusion of the other term concerning some related topic. For example, on numerous occasions Ockham distinguishes prudence from craft,[35] or prudence from moral science,[36] but he never distinguishes right reason from craft or from moral science.

Thus, it's important, in understanding Ockham's account of prudence, to first get clear on the relationship between prudence and right reason. I'll argue, contrary to the commentators, that they aren't the same thing, strictly speaking. Rather, a close reading of Ockham reveals that right reason is an intellectual act of assent of a certain sort,[37] while prudence is the habit generated from such acts.[38] They're no more the same thing than an act of courage is the same as the habit of courage. But it follows from their close relationship that Ockham's remarks concerning one of the terms is informative for the other term: that when right reason is characterized in such-and-such a way, its corresponding habit of prudence is also so characterized, and vice-versa.

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[35] E.g., *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 420.3-10; *Ordinatio, Prologus* (hereafter *Ord Prol*), q.11, *Opera Theologica* I (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1967), 316.8-317.5; *Ordinatio* (hereafter *Ord*), d.35, q.6, *Opera Theologica* IV (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 2000), 509.14-511.5.

[36] E.g., *Ord*, *Prol*, q.11, *OT* I, 321.1-5; *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 281.219-284.280; *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 331.20-6.

[37] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 393.419-20.

[38] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 423.2-3.

To begin, let's first turn to Ord, Prol, Q.1, where Ockham distinguishes the intellectual acts of apprehension and assent.[39] There he says,

> One act of the intellect is an act of apprehension. This act concerns anything whatever that can terminate an act of the intellective power, whether it is complex or non-complex. For we not only apprehend non-complexes but also propositions and demonstrations and impossibilities and necessaries and universally all things that are considered by the power of the intellect. The other act is an act of judgment, in which the intellect does not merely apprehend the object but also assents to it or dissents from it. This act only concerns a complex, since we assent through the intellect only to what we consider true and dissent only what we regard as false.[40]

By *complex* Ockham means a proposition (like "Plato loves Socrates"), whereas *non-complex* means a singular term (like "Plato" or "Socrates").[41] So, while apprehension concerns anything the intellect can consider, whether propositions or singular terms, judgment concerns propositions alone. There are two kinds of judgment, assent and dissent: the former considers a complex true, the latter considers a complex false. Ockham further claims that "an act of apprehension can exist without an act of judgment," for one can abstain from judgment about an apprehended proposition (by

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[39] See also Bleakley's helpful discussion, "Some Additional Thoughts on Ockham's Right Reason: An Addendum to Coleman" *History of Political Thought* 21.4 (2000): 565-605, here 575.

[40] *Ord. Prol.* q.1, *OT* I, 16.6-16: "*inter actus intellectus sunt duo actus quorum unus est apprehensivus, et est respectu cuiuslibet quod potest terminare actum potentiae intellectivae, sive sit complexum sive incomplexum; quia apprehendimus non tantum incomplexa sed etiam propositiones et demonstrationes et impossibilia et necessaria et universaliter omnia quae respiciuntur a potentia intellectiva. Alius actus potest dici iudicativus, quo intellectus non tantum apprehendit obiectum sed etiam illi assentit vel dissentit. Et iste actus est tantum respectu complexi, quia nulli assentimus per intellectum nisi quod verum reputamus, nec dissentimus nisi quod falsum aestimamus.*"

[41] See, e.g., *Ord. Prol.* q.1, *OT* I, 19.13-21.4. See also Armand Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham: In the Light of Its Principles* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999), 473.

remaining neutral, say), but one must apprehend a proposition in order to judge about it.[42]

As a brief aside, relating this distinction to acts of will which will be further discussed in the next chapter, Ockham is clear that apprehension (not judgment) is necessary for acts of will. He says in QV 8 that "Nothing is actually willed unless it's actually apprehended by the intellect."[43] Elsewhere he states that "the will, when willing, does not depend on the intellect more than the sensitive appetite [depends] on the cognitive faculty itself. But the sensitive appetite can perform its act when the object is merely shown, without any judgment or dictate. Therefore, so much more the will [can perform its act when the object is merely shown, without any judgment or dictate]."[44] Ockham isn't saying that the will's willing needn't depend on the intellect at all (the will must have some cognition to will *about*), but rather that the will's willing (like the sensitive appetite's appetizing) doesn't require the intellect's judgment or dictate, but merely the intellect's apprehension. More explicitly still, Ockham states, "it seems that no more is required for causing an act of will than God, the will itself, and apprehension of the object; and those suffice for causing, as partial causes, every act of

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[42] *Ord*. *Prol*. q.1, *OT* I, 17.24-18.1: "*Et ille actus apprehensivus potest esse sine iudicativo et non e converso*." Cf. *Quodlibeta* (hereafter *Quod*) 5.6, *Opera Theologica* IX (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1980), 502.59-503.75.

[43] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 425.362-63: "*nihil est actualiter volitum nisi actualiter apprehensum ab intellectu*." Ockham similarly states that "the will can never actually will or will-against something except what is actually cognized" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 364.17-8: "*numquam potest actualiter aliquid velle vel nolle nisi actualiter cognitum*").

[44] *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 368.636-39: "*Praeterea non plus dependet voluntas in volendo ab intellectu quam appetitus sensitivus a sua cognitiva; sed appetitus sensitivus potest in actum suum facta sola ostensione obiecti sine omni iudicio vel dictamine; igitur multo magis voluntas*."

willing."[45] Thus, the three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of an act of will

are the will itself, God, and mere apprehension, not judgement.[46]

But relating this distinction back to right reason, Ockham says that right reason is

an intellectual act of assent. He reveals this when he says, "right reason, *or the act of*

assenting which is called right reason."[47] In other places he contrasts right reason with

mere apprehension. For example, in QV 7.4, Ockham says,

> no act is perfectly virtuous unless the will wills that act dictated by right
> reason because it's dictated by right reason; for if it wills what's dictated
> by right reason, not because it's dictated, but because it's enjoyable or for
> some other reason (*causam*), it would will what's dictated if it were merely
> shown by apprehension without right reason. And consequently that act
> would not be virtuous because it would not be elicited in conformity with
> right reason.[48]

In a similar statement in Quod 3.16, Ockham gives an example of merely apprehending,

as opposed to assenting to, the proposition that abstinence should be willed. He says,

> the will can will abstinence on account of God in [such-and-such] a place
> and time with the mere apprehension, without any assent, of this
> proposition 'abstinence should be willed on account of God in [such-and-
> such] a place and time.' If this is supposed, then I ask whether that
> volition is intrinsically virtuous or not. If so, [I reply] on the contrary: it's

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[45] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 393.412-15: "*ad causandum actum voluntatis non videntur plura requiri quam Deus et ipsa voluntas et apprehensio obiecti; et ista sufficiunt ad causandum, sicut causae partiales, omnem actum volendi.*"

[46] Note too the close similarity between the necessary and sufficient conditions of an act of will (the will, God, and *apprehension*) and a virtuous act (the will, God, and *prudence*). This is further justification that understanding these terms is important for understanding Ockham's account of ethics.

[47] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 393.419-20: "*recta ratio, sive actus assentiendi qui vocatur recta ratio.*"

[48] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 395.451-7: "*nullus actus est perfecte virtuosus, nisi voluntas per illum actum velit dictatum a recta ratione propter hoc quod est dictatum a recta ratione, quia si vellet dictatum a ratione, non quia dictatum, sed quia delectabile vel propter aliam causam, iam vellet illud dictatum si solum esset ostensum per apprehensionem sine recta ratione; et per consequens ille actus non esset virtuosus, quia non eliceretur conformiter rationi rectae.*"

not elicited in conformity with right reason, which is necessarily required for an intrinsically virtuous act.[49]

What Ockham is saying in these two passages fits with what was said above, that an act of will doesn't require assent, but mere apprehension. But what Ockham adds here is that such an act of will wouldn't be virtuous because it lacks assent or right reason. Apprehension of the proposition "abstinence should be willed" is sufficient for the will to will abstinence.[50] But in order to will abstinence *virtuously*, one must additionally *assent* that the proposition is true.

While it's clear from what's been said that right reason is an intellectual act of assent, it will become clear below that right reason is assent *of a certain sort*; put differently, every dictate of right reason is an act of assent, but not every act of assent is a dictate of right reason. For one brief example, considering the complex "God is three" as true is assent, but it's not right reason, for reasons that will become clear below.

And while Ockham says that right reason is an intellectual act of assent of a certain sort, prudence is the habit generated *from* that assent. In Rep 3.12, Ockham says that "it's to be known that the intellect's act of dictating isn't formally complex, but it's an act of assenting or dissenting with a complex already formed. And *prudence is*

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[49] *Quod* 3.16, *OT* IX, 263.30-8: "*voluntas potest velle abstinere propter Deum loco et tempore mediante actu dictativo intellectus, ita potest velle abstinere propter Deum loco et tempore cum sola apprehensione istius propositionis 'volendum est abstinere propter Deum loco et tempore' sine omni assensu respectu eiusdem. Hoc supposito tunc quaero: aut ista volition est virtuosa intrinsece, aut non; si sic, contra: non elicitur conformiter rectae rationi, quod necessario requiritur ad actum intrinsece virtuosum.*"

[50] So long as God concurs with the act. Cf. *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 393.412-15. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

generated from that act of assenting."[51] Later in that same question, as elsewhere,

prudence is referred to as a habit.[52] As for what Ockham means by *habit*, he defines it

earlier in the same question saying "something is properly called a habit only because

either (i) it inclines to an act of some power or (ii) it is an inclination caused by acts and

remaining in the absence of those acts."[53] Habits can be in natural powers (e.g., the

intellect or sensitive appetite) and free powers (i.e., the will alone).[54] And Ockham

holds that habits are generated from actions.[55] He explains in Rep 3.11, "every power

that, after actions often repeated, can elicit similar acts and not contrary acts, acquires a

habit inclining to such acts….And consequently, it follows that something is left behind

there from the actions which previously had not been there."[56] Habits not only increase

inclination to similar acts, but also the ease with which one performs such acts.[57] Thus,

prudence as a habit, being generated from intellectual acts of assent, is thereby located

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[51] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 422.21-423.3: "*Et sciendum quod actus dictandi intellectus non est formaliter complexum, sed est actus assentiendi vel dissentiendi complexo iam formato. Et ex illo actu assentiendi generatur prudentia.*"

[52] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 419.11: "a habit of prudence" (*habitus prudentiae*); cf., *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 425.355; *Ord*, *Prol*, q.11, *OT* I, 321.1-5.

[53] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 396.1-3: "*habitus proprie non dicitur nisi quia vel inclinat ad actus alicuius potentiae vel quia est inclinativum causatum ex actibus et remanens in absentia actuum.*"

[54] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 356.11-357.15; *Quod* 3.20, *OT* IX, 281.1-284.79. More will be said in the next chapter about what Ockham means by "free" and "natural" powers.

[55] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 397.9-398.10, 403.1, *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 324.27, 324.37-325.1.

[56] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 359.1-8: "*omnis potentia quae post actus frequentatos potest in consimiles et non in contrarios, adquirit habitum inclinantem ad tales actus….Et per consequens sequitur quod aliquid ex actibus derelinquitur ibi quod prius non fuit ibi.*"

[57] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 365.3-5.

in the intellect and inclines the intellect to such assent with increased ease.[58]

Additionally, since prudence is located in the natural (as opposed to) free power of the

intellect, it's a natural habit. Thus, acts of prudence are natural acts.[59]

And Ockham isn't alone in such a conception of prudence. Scotus, for another

Scholastic example, similarly states that prudence is a habit of the intellect generated

from the dictates of right reason. He says, "For a correct dictate unqualifiedly precedes

prudence, since the first degree of prudence is generated through a correct dictate….Yet

once prudence has been generated by this first act or by a number of other correct

dictates, it inclines more to eliciting similar dictates."[60] Elsewhere Scotus says, "yet no

one denies that a habit for judging rightly – namely, prudence – is generated in the

intellect from frequent acts."[61] Thus Ockham isn't alone in conceiving of prudence as

the habit generated from the dictates of right reason.

Thus, it's clear that right reason and prudence aren't, strictly speaking, the same

thing for Ockham. Right reason is an intellectual act of assent of a certain sort, and

prudence is the intellectual habit generated from, and inclining to, such acts of assent.

In short, prudence is habituated right reason. As mentioned above, the close

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[58] E.g., *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 412.77-84; *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 374.773-6;

[59] In *Quod* 3.16, Ockham explicitly states, "that act of prudence is merely natural and in no way in our power" (*Quod* 3.16, *OT* IX, 264.68-9: "*actus ille prudentiae sit mere naturalis et nullo modo in potestate nostra*"). Similarly, in *QV* 7.4, Ockham says, "an act of prudence, according to him [i.e., Scotus] and in accordance with the truth, is a merely natural act and in no way in our power any more than an act of seeing" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 380.99-102: "*actus prudentiae secundum eum et secundum veritatem est solum actus naturalis et nullo modo in potestate nostra plus quam actus videndi*").

[60] Scotus, *Ord* I, d.17, part 1, qq.1-2, n. 93.

[61] Scotus, *Ord* III, d.33, q.un., n. 24. Cf., *Ord* III, d.33, q.un., n. 43; *Ord* III, d.36, q.un., n. 72.

relationship between them is mutually informing, just as details about what makes up a courageous act would be informative for what makes up a habit of courage and vice versa. Thus, though the next two sections directly concern Ockham's account of prudence, they simultaneously fill in details of Ockham's account of right reason as well.

<div align="center">Stage 2: Prudence Distinguished from Craft</div>

The distinction between prudence and craft is yet another pervasive scholastic distinction stemming back to Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Aristotle sets out five habits of the intellect related to what's true: craft, scientific knowledge, prudence, wisdom, and understanding.[62] Concerning craft, Aristotle says that it's "a certain state [or habit] involving reason concerned with production" (*NE*, 1140a7-8), whereas prudence is "a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action" (*NE*, 1140b5-6). Thus, Aristotle thinks they're distinct: "And so the state involving reason and concerned with action is different from the state involving reason and concerned with production" (*NE*, 1140a3-5).[63]

To see Ockham's own version of this distinction, he states in Rep 3.12, "But then what is the difference between craft and prudence? I answer: prudence gives a dictate (*dictat*) concerning some of our operations, but craft does not."[64] He then adds that

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[62] Aristotle, *NE*, 1139b15-18. Cf., *Ord*, *Prol*, q.2, *OT* I, 87.20-89.4.

[63] For Aquinas's version of this distinction, Stump claims that "prudence is right reason about things to be done, and art [or craft] is right reason about things to be made" (*Aquinas* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 225).

[64] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI 420.3-5: "*Sed quae est tunc differentia inter artem et prudentiam? Respondeo: prudentia dictat de aliquo operabili a nobis, sed ars non.*"

though craft doesn't give a dictate, it gives "direction" (*dirigit*).[65] In numerous other

places, Ockham describes prudence as giving direction,[66] so it appears that while

prudence gives both direction and dictates, craft gives only direction. And though

there may be instances where Ockham uses the terms *dictate* and *direct* synonymously,[67]

he distinguishes them here with an example of building a house. He says, "the craft of

building a house doesn't give a dictate that the house should be built, but that the house

ought to be so composed from wood and stone or arranged in such-and-such a way.

And accordingly it gives direction insofar as, if the house is built, it directs the builder

to build it in such-and-such a way."[68] Thus, while prudence gives a dictate *that* the

house should be built, craft merely gives direction that *if* a house is built, then it ought

to be built with such materials (wood and stone, rather than, say, flour and sugar), by

such a craftsman (of homes, rather than cakes, say).

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[65] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 420.5-7: "I say that it [i.e., craft] is practical since it directs in praxis or in some of our operations, although it doesn't dictate concerning elicited praxis" (*Dico quod est practica quia dirigit in praxi vel in aliquo operabili a nobis, licet non dictet de praxi elicienda*).

[66] For two examples we'll look at closely in the next section, see *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 283.252-284.280 and *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 330.1-331.38.

[67] To see this, there are at least two places where Ockham characterizes giving direction as causing action (*QV* 6.10 and *QV* 7.3), which seems to be the same characterization Ockham ascribes to giving a dictate in *QV* 8. Though this may be evidence that Ockham occasionally uses these terms synonymously, further examination may find a thin distinction between them. After all, Ockham says in *QV* 7.3 that "to give direction is only to cause an act" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 374.785: "*dirigere non est nisi causare actum*") and in *QV* 6.10 that "to give direction in praxis is only to cause praxis" (*QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 284.272: "*dirigere in praxim non est nisi causare praxim*"), but when Ockham characterizes giving a dictate in *QV* 8 he says that "'to give a dictate' or 'to give a regulation' is nothing other than to cause that act [of will] in a special way, just as is clear in the other question" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, QV 8, 418.209-210: "'*dictare' sive 'regulare' non est aliud quam speciali modo illum actum causare sicut in alio quaterno patet*"). I'm unaware of this "other question" Ockham's referring to, but perhaps this dictate's "special way" of causing an act of will is distinct from the way giving direction causes action.

[68] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 420.7-10: "*Exemplum: ars faciendi domum non dictat quod domus sit facienda, sed quod domus debet componi ex lignis et lapidibus sic vel sic dispositis. Et ita dirigit quatenus, si domus fiat, dirigit facientem ut sic vel sic faciat.*"

Ockham elsewhere employs this same analogy of house-building when

distinguishing two kinds of practical knowledge – ostensive and dictative. He says,

> Yet practical [knowledge] can be distinguished, for some is dictative and
> some merely ostensive. The first is that which, by a determination, gives a
> dictate for something to be done or not to be done; and the Philosopher
> speaks in this sense in *Ethics* VI and *De Anima* III. And in this sense
> neither logic nor grammar nor rhetoric is practical, nor even any
> mechanical crafts, since none of them give a dictate for something to be
> done or left undone, as mechanical craft does not give a dictate that a
> house is to be built, but this pertains to prudence whereby it's known
> when it should be built and when not, and when something should be
> done and when not. The second practical knowledge is merely ostensive,
> since it does not give a dictate for something to be left undone or to be
> followed, but merely shows in which way the work can be done; by virtue
> of that [dictative practical] knowledge, if the intellect gives a dictate for
> that to be done and the will wills [it], it can then be carried out rightly.
> For example, the edificatory craft of building shows that a home is made-
> up of wood and stones and such-and-such a foundation, walls, and roof,
> and so on concerning the other [parts of the home], yet it does not give a
> dictate that the house should be built nor when it should be built, but it
> pertains to prudence to give a dictate that it should be built at such a time,
> or it should be done in this way or that. And in the same way logic and
> the other crafts merely show but don't give a dictate. Yet they give
> direction.[69]

Thus, while craft – being ostensive and giving direction – concerns the way in which the

work *can* be done, prudence – being dictative – concerns whether *it is* done or left

undone. And what Ockham says here regarding practical knowledge fits what he says

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[69] *Ord*, *Prol*, q.11, *OT* I, 316.8-317.2: "*Potest tamen distingui de practica, quia quaedam est dictativa et quaedam tantum ostensiva. Prima est illa qua determinate dictator aliquid esse faciendum vel non faciendum; et sic loquitur Philosophus VI* Ethicorum *et III* De Anima. *Et isto modo nec logica nec grammatica nec rhetorica est practica, nec etiam ars quaecumque mechanica, quia nulla istarum dictat aliquid esse faciendum vel fugiendum, sicut ars mechanica non dictat quod domus est facienda, sed hoc pertinet ad prudentiam qua scitur quando est facienda et quando non, et quando est operandum et quando non. Secunda notitia practica est tantum ostensiva, quia non dictat aliquid fugiendum aut prosequendum, sed tantum ostendit opus quomodo fieri potest; virtute cuius notitiae, si intellectus dictet illud esse faciendum et voluntas velit, statim potest recte operari. Sicut ars aedificatoria ostendit quod domus componitur ex lignis et lapidibus et ex fundamento tali et talibus parietibus et tali tecto, et sic de aliis, et non dictat quod domus est facienda nec quando est facienda, sed ad prudentiam pertinet dictare quod tali tempore est facienda, vel sic est agendum vel sic. Et eodem modo logica et aliae artes sunt tantum ostensivae et non dictativae. Sunt tamen directivae.*"

in Rep 3.12, that "every prudence is practical [knowledge], but not vice versa,"[70] for, as we learn here, prudence is practical knowledge of the dictative sort, but not, as is craft, of the ostensive sort.

By *practical knowledge*, Ockham echoes the well-entrenched Scholastic distinction between practical and speculative knowledge (also stemming back to Aristotle), when Ockham says that "they all distinguish practical knowledge from speculative, since practical is about our operations, whereas speculative is not."[71] Elsewhere he adds that "the end of practical knowledge is activity or acting, and the end of speculative [knowledge] is to consider."[72] So, for example, home-building concerns our operations and, thus, is practical knowledge, whereas some doctrines of the faith, such as that God is three, don't and are thus speculative knowledge.

Thus, applying what we've learned here about Ockham's distinction between prudence and craft helps to further specify the certain sort of assent that is right reason. Recall that all dictates of right reason are acts of assent, but not all acts of assent are dictates of right reason. Recall also, that assent is an intellectual act that considers a proposition true. Thus, considering the proposition "God is three" as true is assent, but not right reason because that proposition is speculative knowledge, whereas right

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[70] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 420.2: "*Unde omnis prudentia est practica, sed non e converso.*"

[71] *Ord*, *Prol*, q.10, *OT* I, 279.10-11: "*omnes distinguunt notitiam practicam a speculativa, quia practica est de operibus nostris, non autem speculativa.*" Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 993b20-21; *De Anima* 433a14-17. See also Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham*, 145-8.

[72] *Ord*, *Prol*, q.11, *OT* I, 308.21-2: "*finis scientiae practicae est opus vel operari, et finis speculativae est considerare*" Cf., Aquinas, who thinks prudence and craft concern practical knowledge, while scientific knowledge, wisdom, and understanding concern speculative knowledge (Stump, *Aquinas*, 225).

reason (and its corresponding habit of prudence) is practical knowledge. Further still, while considering the proposition "a house is so composed of a foundation, walls, and roof" as true is assent, that's not right reason either because that proposition merely gives direction in the way a work is done, whereas right reason gives a dictate whether it is, in fact, done or not.

Stage 3: Prudence Distinguished from Moral Science

The two main questions where Ockham distinguishes prudence from moral science are QV 6.10 and QV 7.2. Let's begin in QV 6.10 where Ockham distinguishes two senses of moral science – call them moral science[i] and moral science[ii] – and two senses of prudence – call them, similarly, prudence[i] and prudence[ii]. Concerning the two senses of moral science, Ockham says,

> It should be understood that moral science is taken in two ways. In one way it's taken for any scientific knowledge that can evidently be had through learning (*doctrinam*). And this [moral science] proceeds from principles known per se….In another way [moral science] is taken for evident scientific knowledge that is only had, and can [only] be had, through experience, and in no way evidently through learning.[73]

Thus, moral science[i] is scientific knowledge evidently known per se, whereas moral science[ii] is scientific knowledge evidently known through experience. In order to better understand these two senses of moral science, let's get clear on what Ockham means by *evident* and *scientific knowledge*.

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[73] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 281.220-282.227: "*Intelligendum est quod scientia moralis accipitur dupliciter. Uno modo accipitur pro omni notitia scientifica quae evidenter haberi potest per doctrinam. Et haec procedit ex principiis per se notis….Alio modo accipitur pro notitia scientifica evidenti quae solum habetur et haberi potest per experientiam et nullo modo evidenter per doctrinam.*"

As for *evident*, it's a technical term for a propositional attitude that's distinct from opinion or faith.[74] Opinion, according to Freddoso and Kelley, is a person's intellectual assent to a proposition because the proposition has sufficient warrant to rule out the person's wavering between the proposition and its negation.[75] Faith is a person's intellectual assent to a proposition because the person trusts the testimony of authoritative witnesses.[76] Two examples of faith are found in Ockham's *Exposition of the Physics*. He says, "We say we know that Rome is a great city, yet we have not seen it. And similarly I say that I know him to be my father and her to be my mother, and so on for others that are not evidently known. Yet since we adhere to them without any doubt and they are true, we are said to know them."[77] Ockham also thinks that there are numerous claims of theology only known through faith, such as that God is three, incarnate, omnipotent, etc.[78] The fact that faith is non-evident knowledge for Ockham will prove important below.

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[74] For a helpful discussion of Ockham's three cognitions – evident knowledge, opinion, and faith –, see Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley, *William of Ockham: Quodlibetal Questions*, vol. 1 & 2, trans by Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 402-4, nn. 4, 7, and 10. See also Bleakley's "Ockham's Right Reason," 574-5.

[75] Freddoso and Kelley, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 403, n.7.

[76] Freddoso and Kelley, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 192, n.24, 403, n.7.

[77] *Prologus* (hereafter *Prol*), in *Opera Philosophica* (hereafter *OP*) IV (St. Bonaventure University NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1985), 5.30-4: "*dicimus nos scire quod Roma est magna civitas, quam tamen non vidimus; et similiter dico quod scio istum esse patrem meum et istam esse matrem meam, et sic de aliis quae non sunt evidenter nota; quia tamen eis sine omni dubitatione adhaeremus et sunt vera, dicimur scire illa.*"

[78] *Ord*, *Prol*, q.1, *OT* I, 7.15; *Quod* 1.1, *OT* IX, 12.230-31.

Evident knowledge, in contrast, is "the highest grade of epistemic appraisal, so that an evident proposition is one that is as certain as any proposition can be."[79] Ockham defines evident knowledge as "cognition of any true complex that is apt to be sufficiently caused, mediately or immediately, by the non-complex cognition of the terms."[80] Thus, when cognition of the terms is sufficient for causing cognition of the complex (and the complex is true), cognition of the complex counts as evident knowledge.

As already mentioned in QV 6.10, Ockham thinks evident knowledge is known either per se or through experience. Concerning the first, Ockham says that "a proposition known per se is precisely cognized through knowledge of the terms."[81] Translated literally, something known per se is known "through itself," or, in more modern terms, something that's self-evident. In Quod 2.14, Ockham gives two examples of propositions known per se: "The will ought to conform itself with right reason," and "Every blameworthy evil should be avoided."[82] Here in QV 6.10, Ockham's example of moral science[i] is the universal proposition "Every benefactor should be benefited."[83]

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[79] Freddoso and Kelley, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 5, n. 1.

[80] *Ord*, *Prol*, q.1, *OT* I, 5.19-21: "*notitia evidens est cognitio alicuius veri complexi, ex notitia terminorum incomplexa immediate vel mediate nata sufficienter causari.*"

[81] *Ord*, *Prol*, q.2, *OT* I, 81.20-21: "*propositio per se nota praecise cognoscitur ex notitia terminorum.*"

[82] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 178.40-41: "*voluntas debet se conformare rectae rationi, omne malum vituperabile est fugiendum.*"

[83] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 281.223-4: "*omni benefactori est benefaciendum.*"

But not all *evident* knowledge is *self-evident* for Ockham, because some evident

knowledge is known only through experience. One such example, also from *Exposition*

of the Physics, is about seeing a white wall. Ockham says, "if no one were to tell me that

the wall is white, from the very fact that I see the whiteness that is on the wall, I would

know that the wall is white. And it is so concerning other [examples of evident

knowledge from experience]."[84] Here in QV 6.10, Ockham's example of moral science[ii]

is the universal proposition "Any irascible person should, on such an occasion [when

he's angry, say], be soothed and calmed with fine words."[85] One doesn't learn this

through knowledge of its terms, but rather through multiple instances of similar

experiences; or, in Ockham's words, "that this [person] should be calmed and that

[person too], and so on concerning [other] singular [experiences]."[86] After enough

particular experiences with irascible people, one can evidently know through

experience that any irascible person should be so treated. To sum up, what Ockham

means by *evident* is that it's knowledge of the highest epistemic degree, known either

per se or through experience.

Concerning what Ockham means by *scientific knowledge*, though he uses the term

in multiple senses,[87] here he seems to be referring to the Aristotelian habit of scientific

knowledge mentioned above that's about universal propositions (*NE*, 1140b30). This is

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[84] *Prol, OP* IV, 6.38-40: "*si nullus narraret mihi quod paries est albus, ex hoc ipso quod video albedinem quae est in pariete, scirem, quod paries est albus; et ita est de aliis.*"

[85] *QV 6.10, OT* VIII, 282.227-9: "*Verbi gratia, haec 'quilibet iracundus ex tali occasione est per pulcra verba leniendus et mitigandus.'*"

[86] *QV 6.10, OT* VIII, 282.231-2: "*puta quod iste sit mitigandus et ille et sic de singulis.*"

[87] *Prol, OP* IV, 5.27-6.61.

clear from the examples Ockham gives for moral science[i] and moral science[ii] already

mentioned: the universal propositions "*Every* benefactor should be benefitted" and

"*Any* irascible person should, on such an occasion [when he's irascible], be soothed and

calmed with fine words." These universal propositions are what the Scholastics called

"major" premises in practical syllogisms.[88] Aristotle's influential views of the practical

syllogism first became available to the Scholastics in the mid-thirteenth century with the

full translation of his *Nicomachean Ethics* into Latin. The conclusion of a practical

syllogism, following from what were called the major and minor premises, "expresses a

judgement regarding what should be done by the agent."[89] The Dominican Albert the

Great, one of the first to appropriate Aristotle's newly-available text, offered a simple

example of a practical syllogism:[90]

Major premise: Every good should be done.

Minor premise: This is good.

Conclusion: Therefore, this should be done.

Since Albert thought the conclusion of a practical syllogism represented an

agent's conscience (*conscientia*), directing what should be done, he called it

"conscience." He called the source of the major premise "synderesis" – a general

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[88] For two particularly helpful discussions of the Scholastics' use of the practical syllogism, see M.V. Dougherty, "Practical Reasoning," forthcoming; and Bonnie Kent's "Transitory Vice: Thomas Aquinas on Incontinence," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27.2, (1989): 199-223, here 200. And for a helpful discussion of contemporary and Aristotelian syllogistic logic, see Harry Gensler's *Introduction to Logic*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 7-33.

[89] Dougherty, "Practical Reasoning," forthcoming. See also Kent, "Transitory Vice," 200.

[90] Found in Dougherty, forthcoming.

knowledge of right and wrong – and the source of the minor premise "reason."[91] And

Aquinas, who adopted Albert's account of the practical syllogism, further clarified that

synderesis is an infallible habit that provides agents general moral propositions that are

self-evident.[92] The examples Ockham gives for what he calls moral science (in either

sense) resemble Albert and Aquinas's synderesis in two ways. They are both major

premises of practical syllogisms, and they are both of high epistemic standing.

Moving on to the two senses of prudence found in QV 6.10, Ockham says,

"Similarly, prudence is taken in two ways. In one way strictly (*proprie*) for evident

knowledge of some singular proposition which is had only by means of experience….In

another way [prudence] is broadly (*communiter*) taken for evident knowledge of any

universal practical [proposition] which is evidently known only through experience."[93]

Thus, both prudence[i] and prudence[ii] are evident through experience, though the former

is a singular proposition and the latter a universal proposition. What Ockham means

by *singular proposition* is clarified by his example: "this [person] should be [soothed and]

calmed with fine words."[94] Note that this is the conclusion of the practical syllogism

starting with the major premise mentioned for moral science[ii]. The complete syllogism

would be as follows:

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[91] Dougherty, forthcoming.

[92] Dougherty, forthcoming.

[93] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 282.233-240: "*Similiter prudentia accipitur dupliciter. Uno modo proprie pro notitia evidenti alicuius propositionis singularis quae solum habetur mediante experientia….Alio modo accipitur communiter pro notitia evidenti alicuius universalis practicae quae solum evidenter cognoscitur per experientiam.*"

[94] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 282.236: "*'iste est mitigandus per pulcra verba.'*"

Major premise: Any irascible person should be soothed and calmed with fine words.

Minor premise: This person is an irascible person.

Conclusion: This person should be (soothed and) calmed with fine words. Thus, prudence^i is the conclusion of a practical syllogism evident through experience. While Ockham doesn't follow Albert and Aquinas here in labeling the conclusion conscience, he's not the only Scholastic to call the conclusion prudence.[95]

Concerning prudence^ii, it's the same thing as moral science^ii. Ockham's explicit about this. He says, "If moral science is taken in the second way, moral science and prudence in the broader sense are the same."[96] Ockham even gives the same example for prudence^ii: "Every irascible person should be soothed in this way [with fair words]."[97] Thus, prudence^ii is the major premise of a practical syllogism evident through experience. It may come as a surprise that Ockham, who's distinguishing prudence from moral science, collapses this distinction for moral science^ii and prudence^ii. But it appears that Ockham is simply trying to imitate the Philosopher here, for Aristotle says that science is "about universals" (*NE*1140b30), whereas prudence (rather confusingly) is "concerned with particulars as well as universals" (*NE* 1142a13-

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[95] Duns Scotus similarly states that "once prudence has been generated by this first act [conformed to right reason] or by a number of other correct dictates, it inclines more to eliciting similar dictates, that is, to drawing *correct conclusions of practical syllogisms* concerning all the circumstances that ought to be present in the act that is to be elicited" (*Ord*. 1, d.17, part 1, qq.1-2, n. 93). Emphasis mine. Cf. *Ord* IV, d.46, qq.1-3, n.37.

[96] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 282.246-8: "*Accipiendo scientiam moralem secondo modo, sic scientia moralis et prudentia communiter dicta sunt idem.*"

[97] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 282.241: "*omnis iracundus est sic leniendus.*"

4). Thus, for Ockham, while moral science (in either sense) concerns universals, prudence is about both particulars (prudence[i]) and universals (prudence[ii]).[98] Moreover, Ockham speaks elsewhere of both universal right reason and particular right reason.[99]

It's not entirely clear why Ockham, here in QV 6.10, characterizes prudence in either sense as "acquired only through experience,"[100] for, as will become clear later in this section, Ockham gives examples of both prudence and right reason known in ways other than through experience, such as faith.[101] Perhaps one explanation stems back to Aristotle yet again, when he says, concerning prudence, that "particulars become known from experience" (*NE* 1142a14-5). One other explanation may be that prudence, being habituated right reason, only comes about from multiple experiences of reasoning rightly, regardless of whether that reasoning is from evident or non-evident knowledge.[102]

One further thing to note before moving to QV 7.2 is that some commentators claim that prudence[i] – i.e., the conclusion of a practical syllogism evident through experience – is Ockham's "proper" sense of prudence, since he characterizes it as "*proprie*."[103] And while it's true that when Ockham distinguishes multiple senses of a

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[98] Cf., *Ord*, *Prol*, q.11, *OT* I, 321.1-9.

[99] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 424.336-425.354; *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 285.304-286.326; 278.146-151. Cf., *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 337.174-77.

[100] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 282.245-6: "*Quia qualitercumque accipitur prudentia, potest solum adquiri per experientiam.*"

[101] E.g., *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 360.8-361.7, 362.17-21; *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 345.95-101.

[102] Cf., *Ord*, *Prol*, q.11, *OT* I, 317.14-318.9.

[103] E.g., Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 22; Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 712.

term, his characterization of one of them as "*proprie*" generally indicates both his acceptance of that sense and his rejection of the other sense(s),[104] Ockham isn't using "*proprie*" in that way here. This is clear for four reasons. First, Ockham explicitly calls major premises "prudences" in Rep 3.12;[105] so while he accepts prudence[i], he clearly accepts prudence[ii] as well. Second, as already mentioned and will become apparent below, Ockham gives ample examples of both prudence and right reason known in ways other than through experience, such as faith, which would be a sense of prudence beyond either prudence[i] or prudence[ii]. Third, this wouldn't be the only instance where Ockham accepts multiple senses of a term.[106] And fourth, there's good contextual reason in QV 6.10 that Ockham is simply contrasting prudence[i] – the "singular" proposition characterized as "*proprie*" or "strictly" – with prudence[ii] – the "universal" proposition characterized as "*communiter*" or "broadly." But let's now turn to QV 7.2, Ockham's second main passage for distinguishing prudence from moral science, in order to get further clarity concerning their relationship.

In QV 7.2 Ockham distinguishes four senses of prudence – call them prudence[1], prudence[2], prudence[3], and prudence[4]. Concerning prudence[1], Ockham says,

> In one sense, [prudence] is taken for any knowledge giving direction with respect to any possible actions, mediately or immediately, just as Augustine takes prudence in *On Free Choice*, Book I. And in this [first] sense prudence is both (i) evident knowledge of some universal proposition which is cognized evidently through instruction since it

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[104] E.g., *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 401.8-402.9; *Ord*, d.1, q.6, *OT* I, 506.14-507.7; Cf. *Ord*, d.1, q.6, *OT* I, 501.13-502.15.

[105] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 424.6-426.3.

[106] For one example, see his discussion of the four senses of praxis in *Ord*, *Prol*, q.10, *OT* I, 287.12-290.9.

proceeds from propositions known per se – that scientific knowledge is properly moral science –, and (ii) evident knowledge of a universal proposition which is cognized evidently through experience alone – that [scientific] knowledge is also moral science.[107]

Thus, prudence[1], being a "universal proposition," is the major premise of a practical syllogism, whether evident per se or through experience. Hence prudence[1], here in QV 7.2, is simply the conjunction of moral science[i] and moral science[ii] (and thereby also prudence[ii]) from QV 6.10. He even gives the exact same examples: "Every benefactor should be benefitted" and "Any irascible person should be soothed with fine words."[108]

And he characterizes prudence[1], the only sense of prudence here in QV 7.2 that's about universals alone, as "properly moral science." Thus, Ockham here, as with QV 6.10, maintains Aristotle's distinction that science is about universals, whereas prudence is about both universals (namely, prudence[1]) and particulars (namely, prudence[2] and prudence[3] as we'll see shortly).

Concerning prudence[2], Ockham says:

In a second sense, [prudence] is taken for knowledge immediately giving direction concerning some possible action in particular, and this for knowledge of some particular proposition which evidently follows from a universal proposition in a major [premise] known per se as on account of learning. For example: "This person should be benefitted," which follows evidently from "Every benefactor" etc.[109]

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[107] *QV 7.2, OT VIII, 330.3-11: "uno modo, accipitur pro omni notitia directiva respectu cuiuscumque agibilis mediate vel immediate, sicut accipit Augustinus prudentiam, I De libero arbitrio. Et isto modo tam notitia evidens alicuius universalis propositionis quae evidenter cognoscitur per doctrinam, quia procedit ex propositionibus per se notis, quae notitia scientifica proprie est scientia moralis, quam notitia evidens propositionis universalis quae solum evidenter cognoscitur per experientiam, quae notitia etiam est scientia moralis, est prudentia."*

[108] *QV 7.2, OT VIII, 330.11-13: "Exemplum primi: 'omni benefactori est benefaciendum;' exemplum secondi: 'quilibet iracundus per pulchra verba est leniendus.'"*

[109] *QV 7.2, OT VIII, 330.14-331.19: "Alio modo, accipitur pro notitia evidenti immediate directiva circa aliquod agibile particulare, et hoc pro notitia alicuius propositionis particularis quae evidenter sequitur ex universali*

Thus, prudence² is the conclusion of a practical syllogism evident on the basis of a

major premise known per se. The complete syllogism would be as follows:

Major premise: Every benefactor should be benefitted.

Minor premise: This person is a benefactor.

Conclusion: This person should be benefitted.

Back in QV 6.10, Ockham discounts this very conclusion as a possibility for prudence.

He says,

> For someone can have evident knowledge of some universal proposition
> through learning, such as 'Every benefactor should be benefitted,' and
> evident knowledge, through experience, of some contingent proposition
> falling under the universal proposition, such as that this [person] is a
> benefactor because I have seen him act in such-and-such a [benefitting]
> way, the knowledge of which is not prudence because it doesn't give
> direction. And from these [two propositions] it is evidently concluded
> that this [person] should be so benefitted….And yet the knowledge of this
> conclusion isn't prudence because it's acquired through instruction and
> not through experience.[110]

There are three things that should be noted about Ockham's remarks here. First,

note that Ockham explicitly states that the minor premise here is known through

experience, whereas Albert attributes, as mentioned above, the source of knowledge of

minor premises to reason.[111] Second, note that Ockham's rationale for why the minor

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*propositione per se nota tamquam maiori et per doctrinam. Exemplum: 'isti est sic benefaciendum,' quae sequitur
evidenter ex ista 'omni benefactor' etc."*

[110] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 283.257-67: "*Quia aliquis potest habere notitiam evidentem alicuius propositionis
universalis per doctrinam, ut huiusmodi 'omni benefactori est benefaciendum,' et notitiam evidentem alicuius
propositionis contingentis sumptae sub propositione universali et hoc per experientiam, puta quod iste est benefactor
quia vidi eum sic facere, cuius notitia non est prudentia quia non est directiva. Et ex istis evidenter concluditur
quod isti sic est benefaciendum….Et tamen notitia huius conclusionis non est prudentia quia ista adquiritur per
doctrinam et non per experientiam.*"

[111] Dougherty, forthcoming. For another passage where Ockham explicitly states that the minor
premise is known through experience, see *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 367.596-603.

premise isn't prudence is that it doesn't give direction. It merely states *that* this person

is a benefactor, not that this person *should* (or *shouldn't*) be benefitted. And third,

Ockham states that the conclusion of this practical syllogism isn't prudence because it's

evident per se, not evident through experience. As mentioned above, while it's not

clear why Ockham restricts prudence in QV 6.10 to knowledge evident from experience,

it is clear that this restriction is loosened in QV 7.2, as evidenced from prudence[2] (and

prudence[4] as will be seen shortly). One possible explanation for this is that Ockham

changed his view from the earlier QV 6.10 to the later QV 7.2, though this seems less

likely due to the close proximity of writing between the two works.[112] Another

explanation is that Ockham simply didn't mention all of the (numerous) senses of

prudence in QV 6.10. Perhaps this explanation is more likely in light of the Scholastics'

flexible use of the term.[113] Regardless, prudence[2] here in QV 7.2 is the conclusion of a

practical syllogism evident on the basis of a major premise known per se.

Concerning prudence[3], Ockham says:

> In a third sense, [prudence] is taken for knowledge immediately giving
> direction with respect to some possible action, when received through
> experience alone. For example: 'This irascible person should be soothed
> through fine words.' And this knowledge is only with respect to some
> particular proposition cognized through experience.[114]

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[112] Spade dates *QV* 6.10 to after the *Reportatio*, which dates to 1317-1318AD, but before *QV* 7.2, which dates to 1319AD (*Cambridge Companion to Ockham,* 5, 7).

[113] On such a hypothesis, Ockham's remark that "in either sense prudence is taken, it can be acquired only through experience" (*QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 282.245-6) is to be understood as stipulative rather than exhaustive.

[114] *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 331.20-4: "*Tertio modo, accipitur pro notitia immediate directiva accepta per experientiam solum respectu alicuius agibilis. Exemplum: 'iste iracundus est leniendus per pulchra verba.' Et haec notitia est solum respectu alicuius propositionis particularis cognitae per experientiam.*"

Thus, prudence[3] – the same as prudence[i] – is the conclusion of a practical syllogism evident through experience. Ockham then states that "this seems to be prudence properly speaking according to the intention of the Philosopher, as it is distinguished from moral science."[115] Again, this is not, contrary to some commentators,[116] Ockham's acknowledgement that prudence[3] (or its QV 6.10 equivalent prudence[i]) is the "proper" sense *for Ockham*, but merely that it's the "proper" sense *for Aristotle*. Thus, while prudence[1], which concerns universals, is "properly moral science," prudence[3], which concerns particulars evident through experience, is "distinguished from moral science." Again, Ockham appears to be trying to capture Aristotle's distinction that science is "about universals," while prudence is "concerned with particulars as well as universals, and particulars become known from experience" (*NE* 1140b30, 1142a13-5).

Concerning prudence[4], Ockham says,

> In the fourth sense, [prudence] is taken as an aggregate of all knowledge giving direction immediately, whether it is had through learning or through experience, concerning every human operation required to live well simpliciter. And in this sense prudence is not merely a single knowledge, but it includes as many knowledges as there are moral virtues required to live well simpliciter, for any moral virtue whatever has [its] own (*propriam*) prudence and knowledge giving direction.[117]

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[115] *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 331.24-6: "*haec videtur esse prudentia proprie dicta secundum intentionem Philosophi, prout distinguitur a scientia morali.*"

[116] See footnote 103.

[117] *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 331.27-30: "*Quarto modo, accipitur pro aliquo aggregato ex omni notitia immediate directiva, sive habeatur per doctrinam sive per experientiam, circa omnia opera humana requisita ad bene vivere simpliciter. Et isto modo prudentia non est una notitia tantum, sed includit tot notitias quot sunt virtutes morales requisitae ad simpliciter bene vivere, quia quaelibet virtus moralis habet propriam prudentiam et notitiam directivam.*"

Three things should be noted about prudence[4]. First, prudence[4] is either major premises or conclusions of practical syllogisms evident either per se or through experience. This is clear for two reasons. First, Ockham later clarifies that prudence[4] "includes prudence taken in the first three senses,"[118] which includes major premises (i.e., prudence[1]) and conclusions (i.e., prudence[2] and prudence[3]). And second, Ockham characterizes prudence[4] as "some aggregate of any knowledge giving direction;" knowledge that gives direction includes major premises and conclusions, though it excludes minor premises (like "This is a benefactor") since they don't give direction. So Freppert is mistaken to consider the first sense of prudence "the widest sense."[119] On the contrary, the fourth sense is widest because it encompasses the other three senses.

Second, what Ockham says here regarding prudence[4] also introduces his view about another standard scholastic discussion stemming back to Aristotle: the connection of the virtues. Aristotle's account is that the virtues are connected in such a way that they're inseparable (i.e., that one can't have one virtue without having them all), that what connects them is prudence, and that prudence is one single state or habit.[120] Ockham's account, on the other hand, rejects the view that the virtues are inseparable, maintains that what connects them is prudence, but conceives of prudence as multiple habits corresponding to their respective virtues.

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[118] *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 375.793-4: "…prudence taken in this [fourth] sense includes prudence taken in the first three senses (*prudentia sic accepta includit prudentiam tribus primis modis acceptam*").

[119] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 20.

[120] See *NE*, 1145a1-2; 1178a17-20. See also Adams helpful discussion in her "Scotus and Ockham on the Connection of the Virtues," in *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics*, ed. Ludger Honnefelder (Leiden: Brill, 1996): 499-522, here 500-1.

The virtues are separable for Ockham because, since virtues are generated from actions, and someone can have the opportunity for certain virtuous acts (like courage) without others (like governance, for Ockham's example), it follows that someone can generate one virtue without another.[121] And while the virtues aren't inseparable, they're still connected through what Ockham calls "universal principles." In QV 7.3 Ockham states "all moral virtues are connected in certain universal principles, such as 'every honorable thing should be done,' 'every good thing should be loved,' 'everything dictated by right reason should be done'….And the numerically same principle can be the major premise with different minor premises for deriving different particular conclusions."[122] In Rep 3.12, Ockham similarly states that the universal principles "are part of the premises implying practical conclusions. Acts of virtue can be elicited in the will if, and only if, such practical conclusions are possessed."[123] He then provides a practical syllogism for illustration: "Thus if it's argued [that] 'everything dictated by right reason should be loved; and it's dictated by right reason that one's father or mother or God should be loved; therefore, one's father [or mother or God] should be loved,' the actual knowledge of the principle – namely, the major premise – is an efficient partial cause with respect to actual knowledge of that conclusion 'one's father

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[121] *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 284.285-6; *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 342.38-44, 345.106-346.140.

[122] *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 347.142-50: "*virtutes morales omnes connectuntur in quibusdam principiis universalibus, puta 'omne honestum est faciendum', 'omne bonum est diligendum', 'omne dictatum a recta ratione est faciendum'….Et potest idem principium numero esse maior cum diversis minoribus acceptis sub, ad concludendum diversas conclusiones particulares.*" Though Ockham doesn't explicitly state that these major premises are evidently known, it seems that Ockham, like Albert and Aquinas before him, conceives of all major premises of practical syllogisms as evidently known. Cf., *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 365.555-68.

[123] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 425.3-5: "*principia sunt praemissae partiales inferentes conclusiones practicas quibus habitis possunt in voluntate elici actus virtutis, et sine illis non.*"

[or mother or God] should be loved.'"[124] Thus, the virtues are connected by these

universal principles in the sense that the same universal principle (such as "everything

dictated by right reason should be loved"), coupled with different minor premises

(regarding one's mother, God, etc.) can conclude different actions (such as "one's

mother should be loved," "one's God should be loved," etc.). Importantly, in Rep 3.12

Ockham calls these principles, when habituated, "prudences." He says, "And just as

these principles are universal, so the habits of those principles – which we call

prudences – are universal, so that the knowledge of these universal principles is a

partial immediate cause of the knowledge of the conclusion in particular."[125] And the

plural forms of prudence found in both Rep 3.12 and QV 7.3 fit well with what Ockham

says in his discussion of prudence[4] in QV 7.2 that "any moral virtue whatever has [its]

own prudence."[126] Thus, prudence isn't a single habit, for Ockham, but multiple habits

corresponding to their respective virtues.[127]

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[124] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 425.14-19: "*Ut si arguatur 'omne dictatum a recta ratione esse diligendum; sed patrem vel matrem vel Deum esse diligendum est dictatum a recta ratione; igitur pater est diligendus', notitia actualis principii, puta maioris, est causa efficiens partialis respectu notitiae actualis istius conclusionis 'pater est diligendus.'*"

[125] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 425.10-13: "*Et sicut ista principia sunt communia, ita habitus sunt communes istorum principiorum qui vocantur prudentiae, ita quod notitia istius principii communis est causa partialis immediata notitiae conclusionis in speciali.*" Note also that this is the passage where Ockham uses (and thereby seems to affirm) prudence in the sense of major premises. But in the parallel *QV* 7.3 passage, Ockham interestingly calls the conclusions, rather than the universal principles, "prudences." This is further support that Ockham simply accepts multiple senses of prudence, which can refer to major premises or conclusions of practical syllogisms.

[126] *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 331.32-3: "*quaelibet virtus moralis habet propriam prudentiam.*"

[127] This fits with Ockham's claim that virtues are distinguished because they have different right reasons. Ockham says, "And there is different right reason (or different prudence – by extending the name)….And those right reasons are specifically distinguished, therefore virtues having those objects are also specifically distinguished" (*QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 274.54-275.65: "*Et alia est recta ratio et distincta secundum speciem quae est obiectum istius temperantiae et continentiae, sive alia pruentia – extendendo nomen….Et istae rationes rectae distinguuntur specie, igitur et virtutes habentes istas pro obiectis distinguuntur specie*").

Third, while Ockham characterizes prudence[4], following suit from the first three senses of prudence, as "had through learning or experience," he doesn't appear to restrict prudence[4] only to those two kinds of knowledge. This is clear because one of his examples of prudence[4] is known from faith, not evident knowledge: namely, that "he should voluntarily die in defense of this article 'God is three and one.'"[128] Ockham is clear elsewhere that this article is only acquired through faith, it's not evidently known, and yet Ockham here considers it an example of prudence[4]. It's clear that Ockham accepts this fourth sense of prudence because an argument he gives in QV 7.3 presumes it.[129] And there are numerous passages where right reason concerns what is known by faith, not merely what is known evidently.[130] Thus, it seems that prudence[4], the sense that includes the previous three, also includes non-evident knowledge, such as knowledge from faith.

Summing up what we've learned in this section, moral science is about major premises of practical syllogisms (moral science[i] and moral science[ii]) while prudence is about both major premises (prudence[ii], prudence[1], and prudence[4]) and conclusions

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[128] *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 332.45-7: "*pro defensione huius articuli 'Deus est trinus et unus' est moriendum voluntarie.*"

[129] *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 346.131-347.139.

[130] For one obvious example concerning the virtue of temperance, Ockham says Eleazar, who died rather than violate the Levitical law against eating pork, "thus sustained death according to the dictates of right reason" (*QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 280.190-1: "*ideo secundum dictamen rationis rectae sustinuit mortem*"). Cf., 2 *Maccabees* 6:18-31; *Leviticus* 11:7-8. Such a dictate of right reason includes non-evident knowledge, for one only knows not to eat pork from faith – namely, the Levitical law – which isn't evident knowledge. Two other examples are praying to God and walking to church according to the dictates of right reason (e.g., *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 381.16-382.14; *Quod* 3.16, *OT* IX, 266.111-267.123). These examples will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter, but it's important to point out here that those dictates of right reason include non-evident knowledge – namely, that one should pray in church on the Lord's day or walk to church on account of God's glory instead of one's own – which are only known from faith.

(prudence[i], prudence[2], prudence[3], and prudence[4]). Ockham uses prudence to refer to major premises evidently known either per se (prudence[1]) or through experience (prudence[ii] or prudence[1]) and conclusions derived from major premises that are known either per se (prudence[2]), through experience (prudence[i] or prudence[3]), or even non-evidently (prudence[4]). Prudence gives direction, which is why minor premises aren't called prudence. And prudence isn't a single habit, but multiple habits corresponding to their respective virtues.

Conclusion

Wrapping up the analysis of Ockham's first necessary condition for virtuous action, prudence, for Ockham, is habituated right reason. And right reason is the intellectual act of assent of dictative practical knowledge. It's an act of the intellect and is thereby a natural act. It's an act of assent, which is a judgement that a proposition is true. It's assent of practical knowledge because right reason concerns our operations. And it's dictative practical knowledge because it dictates *that* something should be done, as opposed to ostensive practical knowledge which merely concerns the way something *can* be done. And lastly, both prudence and right reason refer to major premises and conclusions of practical syllogisms.

Chapter Two:

Ockham's Account of an Act of Will and God's Concurring with the Act

As mentioned in the last chapter, Ockham thinks there are three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for virtuous action: an act of prudence, a corresponding act of will, and God's concurring with the act.[131] The last chapter analyzed the role of prudence in Ockham's ethics. This chapter will analyze the remaining two – the act of will and God concurring with the act – in reverse order. After this some concluding remarks will be made concerning the *prima facie* case that Ockham is a divine command theorist.

Stage 1: God Coincides with Virtuous Action

It may seem surprising that, on Ockham's account, *God* has any role to play in a *creature's* virtuous action. It might (rather commonsensically) be asked: if a creature performs a virtuous act – which is thereby in its power – then what part could God possibly play in that act? As it turns out for Ockham, God has a role to play in all *human* acts, and the reason for that is because God has a role to play in *all acts*. As

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[131] Ockham says, "activity of an act of prudence and activity of the will are necessarily required for a virtuous act, so that those two causes, together with God, are partial causes concerning a virtuous act" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 363.515-18: "*ad actum virtuosum necessario requiritur activitas actus prudentiae et activitas voluntatis, ita quod illae duae causae sunt causae partials cum Deo respectu actus virtuosi*"). Similarly, Ockham states elsewhere, "if activity of the will or an act of prudence is suspended, such an act is in no sense called virtuous" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 417.198-200: "*quod suspensa activitate voluntatis vel actus prudentiae, nullo modo dicetur talis actus virtuosus*"). He also states that "no one acts virtuously unless he acts knowingly and freely" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 362.500-1: "*nullus virtuose agit nisi scienter agat et ex libertate*").

Freddoso and Kelley explain, Ockham "reflects the common view among medieval Aristotelians that every effect occurring in the created world has God as a general cause who acts with created agents to bring about their characteristic effects. If God fails to act in this way, then no effect is produced, even if all the other conditions for the effects being brought about are satisfied."[132] Thus, for Ockham, God is a necessary partial cause, along with every created agent, for bringing about the effect of every act.[133] It follows, then, that God is also a necessary partial cause, along with every *human* agent, for bringing about every effect of *human acts*, including virtuous acts. Even if the other two necessary conditions for a virtuous act – an act of will and an act of prudence – are satisfied, the act wouldn't be produced if God didn't "co-cause" the act.[134]

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[132] Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley, *William of Ockham: Quodlibetal Questions*, vol. 1 & 2, trans by Alred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 37, n.42.

[133] Ockham says that "God is a partial cause with respect to anything positive, especially of something absolute produced by a creature" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 342.25-6: "*Sed respectu cuiuslibet positivi, maxime absoluti producti a creatura, est Deus causa partialis*"). Elsewhere he states "Therefore, it's clear that God is the immediate cause of any effect whatever" (*Rep* 2.3-4, *OT* V, 62.21-2: "*Sic igitur patet quod Deus est causa immediata cuiuslibet effectus*"). And just above this, Ockham explains that an immediate cause is necessary for its effect when he says, "That [God] is an immediate cause is clear, for that cause is called immediate which when it's posited the effect can be posited and when it's not posited [the effect] cannot be posited" (*Rep* 2.3-4, *OT* V, 60.22-5: "*Quod autem sit immediate causa patet, quia illa causa dicitur immediata qua posita potest poni effectus et qua non posita non potest poni*").

    Though this is beyond the purposes of my argument here, Ockham not only thinks that God is a necessary *partial* cause of all effects, but (more strongly) that God can be the *total* cause for all effects. He states, "God can be the total cause of whatever He is a partial cause….and consequently he can totally produce the effect without another cause" (*Rep* 2.3-4, *OT* V, 63.10-14: *cuiuscumque potest Deus esse causa totalis respectu cuius est causa partialis….et per consequens potest eius actionem supplere, et per consequens sine alia causa potest effectum totaliter producere*). Cf., *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 342.22-5; 350.4-7. Not only does Ockham think God *can* be the total cause of some acts, but that God *is* the total cause of some acts – for example, some acts of good and wicked angels, the blessed, and the damned, which accounts for the "confirmation" (*confirmationis*) of the good and the "obstinance" (*obstinationis*) of the wicked. See *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 339.14-353.2.

[134] Ockham claims this is, in part, why wicked angels can't elicit good acts. He explains that God "does not will to concur with a wicked angel for causing a good act….Thus, [a wicked angel] can be called obstinate, since it cannot elicit any good act" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 343.11-15: "*non vult concurrere cum angelo malo ad causandum actum bonum….Ideo potest dici obstinatus, quia non potest elicere aliquem actum bonum*"). On the other hand, Ockham claims that good angels are incapable of sinning, in part, because

1.1: One Worry

One worry for seeing God as a partial cause of every human act is that God would be a partial cause of humans' sinful acts. It would seem, then, that God would commit acts of sin. Ockham mentions this worry in numerous places, and his response is telling for his account of ethics. In QV 7.4, Ockham says:

> If we speak about a sin of commission, the created will is not the only efficient cause of that act, but God himself [also], who immediately causes every act, as any second cause whatever. And accordingly he is a positive cause of the deformity in such an act….And if someone objects that God, then, would sin by causing such a deformed act, just as a created will sins because it causes such an act. I respond: God is a debtor to no one, and thus he is not obligated to cause either that act or the opposite act, nor not to cause that act, and thus he does not sin however much he causes that act. A created will, however, is obligated through a divine command not to cause that act, and consequently sins by causing that act, since it does what it ought not to do. Hence if the created will wasn't obligated not to cause that act or the opposite, whenever it would cause that [act], it would never sin just as God doesn't.[135]

Thus, Ockham's solution to this worry is that God doesn't sin because he, unlike creatures, has no obligations. So he can concur with a creature's act of sin, while not himself sinning. And Ockham's remarks here about obligation don't merely apply to sins of commission. He similarly states elsewhere, "no human sins unless because he is

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God "doesn't co-act for causing a wicked act in them" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 345.22-3: "*non coagit ad causandum actum malum in eis*").

[135] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 389.310-390.330: "*Si autem loquamur de peccato commissionis, sic non tantum voluntas creata est causa efficiens illius actus, sed ipse Deus, qui omnem actum immediate causat, sicut quaecumque causa secunda; et ita est causa positiva deformitatis in tali actu….Et si dicis quod tunc Deus peccaret causando talem actum deformem, sicut voluntas creata peccat quia causat talem actum: respondeo: Deus nullius est debitor, et ideo nec tenetur illum actum causare nec oppositum actum, nec illum actum non causare, et ideo non peccat quantumcumque illum actum causet. Voluntas autem creata tenetur per praeceptum divinum illum actum non causare, et per consequens in causando illum actum peccat, quia facit quod non debet facere. Unde si voluntas creata non obligaretur ad non causandum illum actum vel oppositum, quantumcumque causaret illum, numquam peccaret sicut nec Deus.*"

obligated to do what he does not do or because he does what he is obligated not to do.

For that reason a human is made a debtor. God, however, is in no way obligated nor is

he obligated as a debtor, and thus he cannot do what he is obligated not to do or not do

what he is obligated to do."[136]

Ockham's remarks in these two passages are telling in two important ways.

First, sin is possible because of obligations (which is why God, lacking obligations, can't

sin). There are two kinds of sin for Ockham.[137] One is a sin of commission: doing what

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[136] *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 343.17-22: "*nunquam homo peccat nisi quia tenetur facere quod non facit vel quia facit quod non debet facere. Per istam [rationem] fit homo debitor; Deus autem nulli tenetur nec obligatur tanquam debitor, et ideo non potest facere quod non debet facere nec non facere quod debet facere.*" For a similar example, Ockham says that "no one sins unless because he is obligated to the opposite of that which he acts" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 431.504-5: "*nullus peccat nisi quia tenetur ad oppositum illius quod facit*"). For two other examples, he states in *Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 355.15-8: "For permitting that God could cause every positive thing in an act of sin, still he wouldn't sin, for he is not obligated for causing its opposite like a creature. Thus, he wouldn't sin if he caused this or its opposite" (*Quia licet Deus posset causare omne positivum in actu peccati, non tamen peccaret, quia non obligatur ad eius oppositum causandum sicut creatura, ideo non peccaret si causaret hoc vel eius oppositum*). And he states in *Ord* 1.47.1, *OT* IV, 683.7-9: "yet God does not perform evil evilly, since he does not perform what he is obligated not to perform. And in the same way he does not will evil evilly, and thus he is not evil even though he wills evil" (*non tamen Deus facit male malum, quia non facit quod tenetur non facere. Et eodem modo non vult malum male, et ideo non est malus quamvis velit malum*).

[137] There are several places other than *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 343.16-22 where Ockham says this. For example, he says that "the will elicits an act which it ought not to elicit because [it is] contrary to the divine will and precept. And similarly the will does not elicit a right act which it ought to elicit according to divine precept. And accordingly the will sins by a sin of commission and [a sin] of omission" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 383.158-61: "*voluntas elicit actum quem non debuit elicere quia contra voluntatem et praeceptum divinum, et similiter non elicit actum rectum quem debuit elicere secundum praeceptum divinum, et ita peccat peccato commissionis et omissionis*"). For another example, he says, "there's no positive cause of a sin of omission, because there's no positive thing in it itself; rather it merely has a defective cause. And that is the will which is obligated to elicit, but does not elicit, the act opposite from that deficiency. If, however, we speak about a sin of commission, in that case the created will isn't the only efficient cause of that act, but God himself, who causes every act immediately, as any second cause whatever. Accordingly he is a positive cause of the deformity in such an act, just as the substance of the act itself. For, as is mentioned, the deformity in an act of commission is nothing but the act itself elicited contrary to the divine precept" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 389.307-16: "*peccati omissionis nulla est causa positiva, quia ipsum nihil est positivum, sed tantum habet causam defectivam; et illa est voluntas quae tenetur actum oppositum illi carentiae elicere, et non elicit. Si autem loquamur de peccato commissionis sic non tantum voluntas creata est causa efficiens illius actus, sed ipse Deus, qui omnem actum immediate causat, sicut quaecumque causa secunda; et ita est causa positiva deformitatis in tali actu sicut ipsius substantiae actus, quia sicut dictum est, deformitas in actu commissionis non est nisi ipsemet actus elicitus contra praeceptum divinum*"). Cf., *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 386.233-41; 387.256-61.

one is obligated not to do. And the other is a sin of omission: not doing what one is

obligated to do. And both kinds of sin become possible because of obligations.

Second, Ockham introduces a norm – by that I mean the metaphysical *source* of

moral obligation, what *makes* an act morally right or wrong – for his ethical theory:

namely, divine commands. Sin becomes possible, for Ockham, because of obligations,

and one source of obligations is divine commands.   Ockham is explicit about this: one's

obligated by divine command not to cause that act – call it *A* – and sins by causing *A*;

additionally, one wouldn't sin by causing *A* if one wasn't obligated not to cause *A*.[138]

Thus, the norm or source of obligation not to cause *A*, what grounds or makes *A* an act

of sin for Ockham, is God's command.

And Ockham reiterates this view – that divine commands are a norm of morality

– in numerous places. One important passage (where Ockham says that the obligation

to love God is because of divine command[139]) will be more closely examined in the next

chapter, but there are many other examples. Here are just three. First, he says in Rep

4.16 that "everything that can be a right action on earth, also [can be a right action] in

heaven. But to hate God can be a right action on earth – such as if it is commanded by

God – therefore [it can be a right action] in heaven."[140] Second, he says in QV 8 that

"the will always sins by a sin of commission when it elicits some act contrary to what it

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[138] Again, see *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 390.325-330.

[139] *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 353.3-18.

[140] *Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 352.8-10: "*omne quod potest esse actus rectus in via, et in patria. Sed odire Deum potest esse actus rectus in via, puta si praecipiatur a Deo, igitur in patria.*"

is obligated to do by a divine command or divine ordination."[141] And third, he says in

QV 7.4 that "the will elicits an act which it ought not to elicit because it is contrary to the

divine will and command, and similarly it does not elicit a right act which it ought to

elicit according to the divine command, and accordingly it sins by a sin of commission

and a sin of omission."[142] It's clear, then, that divine commands are a norm of morality

for Ockham.

1.2: Two Clarifications

Two clarifications should be made at this point. First, just because divine

commands are *a* norm of morality for Ockham doesn't show that divine commands are

the *only* norm for Ockham. In fact, I'll argue in Chapter 4 that divine commands *aren't*

the only norm, that there's a second norm in Ockham's ethics (but that second norm in

no way precludes Ockham from being a divine command theorist, as will be explained

in that chapter).

And second, just because divine commands are a source of morality

metaphysically, it doesn't follow that they're a source of morality *epistemologically*. Put

differently, just because some morality comes to *be* from divine commands, it doesn't

follow that it comes to be *known* from divine commands. That may be the case, but it

doesn't have to be. At the very least, this is a logically possible version of divine

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[141] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 428.434-36: "*quia semper peccat voluntas peccato commissionis quando elicit aliquem actum ad cuius oppositum obligatur per praeceptum divinum vel ordinationem divinam.*" What's meant by "divine ordination" will become clear below.

[142] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 383.158-61: "*voluntas elicit actum quem non debuit elicere quia contra voluntatem et praeceptum divinum, et similiter non elicit actum rectum quem debuit elicere secundum praeceptum divinum, et ita peccat peccato commissionis et omissionis.*"

command theory – the view that morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands. This view makes no commitments about how morality comes to be known, merely how morality comes to be.[143]

Not only is this a logically possible version of divine command theory, it's the version I think Ockham adopts. This claim will also be further discussed in Chapter 4, but at least one of Ockham's remarks can briefly be mentioned here. He says in QV 7.4:

> I say that there can be moral virtue about a supernatural object. Indeed, there is no perfect virtue unless it inclines to an act about a supernatural object, as is previously shown. Yet the Philosopher wouldn't suppose moral virtue to be about a supernatural object as we do. For he doesn't suppose that abstinence or continence should be willed on account of divine honor as the end, in the way a good Christian wills – or [that] these and similar [acts] are commanded by God –, but he merely supposes that such [acts] should be willed for honor or the preservation of [human] nature or some other merely natural [end]."[144]

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[143] It seems that many contemporary philosophers mistakenly presume that if morality comes to be from divine commands, it must also come to be known from divine commands. For one example from the excellent philosopher Thomas Nagel, he objects against grounding morality in divine commands as follows: "plenty of people who don't believe in God still make judgments of right and wrong" (*What Does it All Mean: a Very Short Introduction to Philosophy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], 62). It's not entirely clear how this objection (he neglects to elaborate upon) is supposed to work. But if one couples it with an implied premise – the mistaken presumption – his argument could charitably be re-constructed as follows:

1) If morality comes to be from divine commands, then it comes to be known from divine commands.

2) Morality doesn't come to be known from divine commands (since there are plenty of people who know morality but don't believe in God).

3) Therefore, morality doesn't come to be from divine commands.

(3) seems to be the kind of conclusion Nagel's after. And while (2) seems true from experience, a divine command theorist can easily reject (3) by rejecting (1), the mistaken presumption. Divine command theory merely states that morality comes to be from divine commands, not (further) that morality comes to be known from divine commands.

[144] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 402.634-403.643: "*dico quod respectu obiecti supernaturalis potest esse virtus moralis, immo nulla est perfecta virtus nisi inclinet ad actum respectu obiecti supernaturalis, sicut prius ostensum est. Philosophus tamen non poneret virtutem moralem esse respectu obiecti supernaturalis sicut nos ponimus, quia non ponit quod abstinentia vel continentia sit volenda propter honorem divinum tamquam propter finem, – nec talia*

Notice that Ockham characterizes "the Philosopher" Aristotle as knowing *that*

abstinence, continence, and other similar acts are virtuous, without further knowing

that God commands them. Again, just because morality comes to *be* from divine

commands, it needn't follow that morality comes to be *known* from divine commands.

1.3: God's Absolute Power and God's Ordained Power

One further related topic about this third condition of virtuous acts is Ockham's

distinction between God's absolute power and God's ordained power. In Quod 6.1

Ockham explains,

> I say that God can do certain things by ordained power and certain things
> by absolute power. This distinction should not be understood [to mean]
> that there are really two powers in God, one of which is ordained and the
> other absolute. For there is in God a single power which is in every way
> God himself….Neither should it be understood that God can do some
> things ordinately and other things absolutely and not ordinately. For God
> can do nothing inordinately.
> But [the distinction] should be understood [to mean] that "able to do
> something" is sometimes taken according to the laws ordained and
> instituted by God, and God is said to be able to do these things by his
> ordained power. In a different sense "able [to do something]" is taken for
> power to do anything that can be done which does not include a
> contradiction, whether or not God has ordained that he will do it. For
> God can do many things that he doesn't will to do, according to the
> Master of the Sentences, book 1, dist. 43. And these things God is said to
> be able to do by his absolute power.[145]

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et similia sunt praecepta a Deo –, quo modo bonus christianus vult talia, sed tantum ponit talia esse volenda quia honesta vel conservativa naturae vel aliquid aliud mere naturale."

[145] *Quod 6.1, OT IX, 585.14-586.30: "dico quod quaedam potest Deus facere de potentia ordinata et aliqua de potentia absoluta. Haec distinctio non est sic intelligenda quod in Deo sint realiter duae potentiae quarum una sit ordinata et alia absoluta, quia unica potentia est in Deo…quae omni modo est ipse Deus. Nec sic est intelligenda quod aliqua potest Deus ordinate facere, et aliqua potest absolute et non ordinate, quia Deus nihil potest facere inordinate.*
    Sed est sic intelligenda quod 'posse aliquid' quandoque accipitur secundum leges ordinatas et institutas a Deo, et illa dicitur Deus posse facere de potentia ordinata. Aliter accipitur 'posse' pro posse facere omne illud quod non includit contradictionem fieri, sive Deus ordinaverit se hoc facturum sive non, quia multa potest Deus facere

Thus, Ockham thinks "able to do something" can be taken in two ways: (i) able to do something in accordance with the laws ordained by God (i.e., concerning his *ordained* power) or (ii) able to do something in accordance with the law of non-contradiction (i.e., concerning his *absolute* power).[146] Ockham thinks that God can, since he's omnipotent, do whatever doesn't include a contradiction.[147] And since God is a free contingent cause, he can do other than he does.[148] Thus, Ockham's distinction between God's

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quae non vult facere, secundum Magistrum Sententiarum, lib. I, d. 43; et illa dicitur Deus posse de potentia absoluta." Cf., *Summa Logicae*, 3-4.6, *OP* I, 779.232-780.242.

[146] For a helpful discussion of the history of this distinction, and how Ockham employs it, see William Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition: a History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power* (P. Lubrina, 1990), especially 119.

[147] Regarding the article of faith "I believe in God the Father Almighty (*omnipotentem*)," Ockham says: "I understand this to mean that whatever doesn't include an obvious contradiction should be attributed to the divine power" (*Quod* 6.6, *OT* IX, 604.13-16: "'*Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem.' Quem sic intelligo quod quodlibet est divinae potentiae attribuendum quod non includit manifestam contradictionem*"). Elsewhere Ockham says, "everything that doesn't include a contradiction or blameworthy evil can be performed by God" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 342.19-21: "*omne quod non includit contradictionem, nec malum culpae, potest fieri a Deo*"); the second disjunct is empty because, as Ockham explains later in *Rep* 2.15, God can do no blameworthy evil: "But God is not obligated for causing any act; thus, he can cause any absolute act and its opposite without any blameworthy evil" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 353.11-13: "*Sed Deus ad nullum actum causandum obligatur, ideo quemlibet actum absolutum potest sine omni malo culpae causare et eius oppositum*"). Cf., *Ord* 1.38.1, *OT* IV, 581.14-7.

[148] Ockham says, "…God can do something that he does not do, because a free cause contingently acting can do other than it does. And God is such. Therefore etc." (*Ord* 1.43.1, *OT* IV, 636.21-637.1: "*Deus potest facere aliqua quae non facit, quia causa libera contingenter agens potest facere aliter quam facit*"). While Ockham believes God is free, Ockham doesn't think God's freedom can be demonstrated, though a "persuasive" argument can be given. He explains, "Thus, that God is a free cause with respect to all things is to be held as a belief, because it cannot be demonstrated through an argument to which an unbeliever could not respond. Nonetheless a persuasive argument can be given as follows: every unhinderable cause that has equally to do with many or infinite things is a contingent and free cause if it does one of them and not another in some instant. For, in virtue of the fact that it's unhinderable and has equally, and equally primarily, to do with them all, there seems to be no reason why it produces one rather than another except because of its freedom. But God is such a cause with respect to all things that can be produced by him eternally; therefore etc." (*Rep* 2.3-4, *OT* V, 55.16-56.5: "*Ideo quod Deus sit causa libera respectu omnium, tenendum est tanquam creditum, quia non potest demonstrari per aliquam rationem ad quam non responderet unus infidelis. Persuaderi tamen potest sic: omnis causa non impedibilis aequaliter respiciens multa sive infinita si agat unum illorum in aliquo instanti et non aliud, est causa contingens et libera. Quia ex quo non est impedibilis et aequaliter respicit omnia et aeque primo, non videtur ratio quare plus producit unum quam aliud nisi propter libertatem suam. Sed Deus est huiusmodi causa respectu omnium producibilium ab eo ab aeterno, igitur etc.*").

absolute and ordinate powers distinguish what God can do *according to* what he has

ordained, from what God can do *regardless of* what he has ordained.

This absolute/ordinate distinction often surfaces in Ockham's ethics, whether

explicitly or implicitly. For one explicit example, Ockham says that "God can,

concerning his absolute power, inflict punishment on anyone without preceding

fault….yet God doesn't, in fact and concerning ordained power, inflict punishment

without preceding fault."[149] For an implicit example, Ockham says, "It should be said

that if God wills that parents shouldn't be honored, neither by their son nor by someone

else, the son sins if he honors his parents. Yet if God wills that someone else shouldn't

honor them but their son should, the son doesn't sin when he honors them, nor is he out

of conformity with the divine will, but he is in conformity with the divine will."[150] It's

clear that the absolute/ordinate distinction is at work here, for while God has ordained

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[149] *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 358.12-17: "*dico quod Deus de potentia sua absoluta potest alicui infligere poenam sine culpa praecedente….tamen de facto et de potentia ordinata Deus non infligit poenam sine culpa praecedente.*" For other examples, Ockham says in Quod 6.4, "presupposing the distinction between the absolute and ordained powers of God, I say first that God can, concerning his absolute power if it pleases him, remit all blame, both original and actual, without infused created grace….Third, I say that according to the laws now ordained by God, God cannot remit blame nor punishment without infused grace" (*Quod* 6.4, *OT* IX, 596.13-598.70: "*praesupposita una distinctione de potentia Dei absoluta et ordinata, dico primo quod Deus de potentia sua absoluta potest, si sibi placeat, omnem culpam tam originalem quam actualem remittere sine infusione gratiae createa….Tertio dico quod secundum leges iam ordinatas a Deo non potest Deus remittere culpam nec poenam sine infusione gratiae*"). Cf., *Quod* 3.10, *OT* IX, 241.35-43. He also says in *Rep* 2.19 "In this way we say that it is incompatible for two bodies to exist in the same place, for it can't be done through a created power, yet it can properly be done through divine power" (*Rep* 2.19, *OT* V, 417.22-418.2: *Hoc modo dicimus quod duo corpora sunt incompossibilia esse in eodem loco, quia per virtutem creatam non potest fieri, tamen per potentiam divinam bene potest fieri*"). Though Ockham uses "divine power" (*per potentiam divinam*) here, Courtenay claims the following concerning Ockham's use of the distinction: "Often the phrases *per potentiam divinam* or *per potentiam Dei* appear as shortened forms of *de potential absoluta*" (*Capacity and Volition*, 119).

[150] *Ord* 1.48.1, *OT* IV, 690.21-691.3: "*Dicendum est quod si Deus vult eos non honorari, nec ab isto nec ab alio, iste peccat in honorando parentes suos. Si tamen Deus vult eos non honorari ab alio, sed vult eos honorari ab isto, iste in honorando non peccat, nec est difformis voluntati divinae, sed est conformis voluntati divinae.*"

(explicitly in the Ten Commandments) that children are to honor their parents,[151] Ockham clearly states that God can (presumably from his absolute power) will for a son not to honor his parents.[152]

In light of the absolute/ordinate distinction, one important feature of Ockham's account of prudence can now be seen. And it's this: though prudence is *necessary* for virtuous action, it's being necessary is *contingent* upon God's ordination. Ockham clearly states in QV 7.3, "If you ask about an act of prudence, in which kind of cause it's related to a virtuous act….I respond that it is an efficient cause necessarily required for a virtuous act, without which it is impossible for an act to be virtuous, *so long as the present divine ordination remains*."[153] Elsewhere he similarly states, "no act is perfectly virtuous unless it is elicited in conformity with right reason actually inhering [in the

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[151] *Exodus* 20:12; *Deuteronomy* 5:16.

[152] It may also be relevant that Ockham (rather confusingly) states earlier in *Ord* 1.48.1 that "it should be known that certain things are willed by God *as if* by absolute power (*quasi absolute*)." (*Ord* 1.48.1, *OT* IV, 687.18-20: "*sciendum quod quaedam sunt volita a Deo quasi absolute, cuiusmodi sunt omnia bona quae nec sunt mala culpae nec poenae*"). Perhaps this applies to his remark about willing a son not to honor his parents: God has ordained (in the Ten Commandments) that sons should honor their parents, but God could (*as if* by absolute power) will that some son shouldn't honor his parents.
 For another implicit example, Ockham says, "I say permitting that hatred, to steal, to commit adultery and similar [acts] have an evil circumstance attached concerning common law, insofar as they are done by someone who is obligated by divine command to the opposite, yet as for every absolute thing in those actions, they can be done by God without any evil circumstance attached. Moreover they can also be done meritoriously by a wayfarer [i.e., a human on earth, as opposed to a human in heaven] if they happened under divine command, as now, in fact, their opposites happen under divine command. But as long as the divine command remains for their opposites, someone couldn't exercise such acts meritoriously or properly, for they would not be exercised meritoriously unless they happened under divine command" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 352.3-12: "*dico quod licet odium, furari, adulterari et similia habeant malam circumstantiam annexam de communi lege, quatenus fiunt ab aliquo qui ex praecepto divino obligatur ad contrarium, tamen quantum ad omne absolutum in illis actibus possunt fieri a Deo sine omni circumstantia mala annexa. Et etiam meritorie possunt fieri a viatore si caderent sub praecepto divino, sicut nunc de facto eorum opposita cadunt sub praecepto. Sed stante praecepto divino ad eorum opposita non posset aliquis tales actus meritorie nec bene exercere, quia non possent [exerceri] meritorie nisi caderent sub praecepto divino*").
[153] *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 363.510-515: "*Si quaeras de actu prudentiae, in quo genere causae se habet ad actum virtuosum….respondeo quod est causa efficiens necessario requisita ad actum virtuosum, sine qua impossibile est actum esse virtuosum, stante ordinatione divina quae nunc est.*"

will], *so long as the present ordination remains.*"[154] Thus, Ockham's account of prudence,

though one necessary condition of virtuous action, is merely necessary according to

God's present ordination; and God could, according to his absolute power, ordain

differently. As we'll see in the next section, when we analyze the role of the will, this

means that prudence's being necessary for virtuous action is, in fact, contingent on the

free choice of the divine will.

Stage 2: An Act of Will

As already mentioned, Ockham clearly thinks that an act of will is a necessary

condition for virtuous action. Even if the other two conditions – an act of prudence and

God concurring with the act – were satisfied without the will's involvement, that act

wouldn't be virtuous.[155] And, also mentioned in the last chapter, the three necessary

and jointly sufficient conditions for an act of will are God, the will itself, and the

intellect's apprehension of the object.[156] The third condition is required for, as also

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[154] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 394.440-2: "*stante ordinatione quae nunc est, nullus actus est perfecte virtuosus nisi eliciatur conformiter rectae rationi actualiter inhaerenti.*"

[155] Ockham says that "if God was to perform an act in conformity with right reason in my will, when the will does nothing, that act wouldn't be meritorious or virtuous. And thus, it's required for the goodness of an act that it's in the power of the will that possesses that act" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 389.19-22: "*si Deus faceret in voluntate mea actum conformem rationi rectae, voluntate nihil agente, non esset ille actus meritorius nec virtuosus. Et ideo requiritur ad bonitatem actus quod sit in potestate voluntatis habentis illum actum*"). Elsewhere he states, "some act is indifferent in the will if it's totally caused by God, for then it's neither called morally good or wicked, for those names connote activity of the will" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 389.6-9: "*aliquis actus sit indifferens in voluntate si causetur totaliter a Deo, quia tunc nec dicetur bonus moraliter nec malus, quia ista nomina connotant activitatem voluntatis*"). He similarly states that "if [the will] were caused naturally and sufficiently by something else, it wouldn't be in our power. Therefore it's disproved that such an act [caused naturally and sufficiently by something else] is in some sense effectively from the will" (*Exposition of Aristotle's Physics* 7.1, in *Opera Philosophica* (hereafter *OP*) V, 598.95-7: "*si causaretur ab aliquo alio naturaliter et sufficienter, non esset in nostra potestate. Relinquitur ergo quod talis actus est aliquo modo effective a voluntate*").

[156] Ockham says, "it seems that no more is required for causing an act of will than God, the will itself, and apprehension of the object; and those suffice for causing, as partial causes, every act of willing"

mentioned in the last chapter, the will must have some cognition to will *about*. The first

condition is required for, as explained above in this chapter, God is a necessary partial

cause, alongside every created agent, for bringing about every act's effect.[157] And the

second condition is required because the will itself, as we'll see in this section, is the

source of freedom for Ockham. But before looking at the details of Ockham's account

of freedom in particular, let's take a step back to note the broader Scholastic discussion

concerning freedom in general.

2.1: The Scholastics On Freedom

Though the Scholastics agreed *that* humans are free, they disagreed about *the*

source of freedom.[158] They agreed that humans are free because, for one (rather

commonsensical) reason, humans are held responsible for their actions. Bonnie Kent

explains, "Christian thinkers had long argued that human beings must be free, that we

must have *liberum arbitrium* ['free choice' or 'free decision']. The basic reasoning was

simple: If we are praised for virtue and blamed for vice, we must be master of our acts;

and we cannot be master of our acts unless we have free decision."[159] We are, in fact,

praised and blamed for virtue and vice by those around us and (more importantly for

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(*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 393.412-15: "*ad causandum actum voluntatis non videntur plura requiri quam Deus et ipsa voluntas et apprehensio obiecti; et ista sufficiunt ad causandum, sicut causae partiales, omnem actum volendi*").

[157] See footnote 133 above.

[158] Scott MacDonald, "Later Medieval Ethics," in *A History of Western Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 52-9, here 55.

[159] Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 110.

the medievals) by God in the Bible. Thus, it follows (by *modus ponens*) that we are master of our acts and we have free choice.[160]

But, as already mentioned, the source of freedom was far from settled. The Scholastics, following Aristotle, agreed both that rationality is distinctive of human nature and that the two capacities distinctive of rationality are intellect and will.[161] We can see the first because, while humans share *nutritive* activities with plants and animals (such as absorbing nutrients and water from the soil for plants, or digesting vegetables or meat for animals and humans), and humans share *sensory* activities with other animals (like the five senses of taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing), *rational* activities are unique to humans; it's their distinctive function.

To see the second we need to turn briefly to Aristotle's moral psychology. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Chapter 13, Aristotle says there are two parts to the human psyche (or soul): a non-rational part and a rational part. The non-rational part, "the cause of nutrition and growth, would seem to be plantlike and shared [with all living things]," so it's not the distinctive capacity of humans.[162] He then further divides the rational part into two parts, the part that "has reason in itself" and the part that "shares in reason."[163] Aristotle explains, "for while the plantlike [part] shares in reason not at

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[160] Kent says that versions of this commonsensical argument are frequent throughout the medieval philosophers (*Virtues of the Will*, 110).

[161] MacDonald, "Later Medieval Ethics," 55.

[162] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1102a35-1102b2. Irwin's brackets.

[163] For a helpful discussion of Aristotle's parts of the soul, see David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18-19.

all, the [part] with appetites and in general desires shares in reason in a way, insofar as it both listens to reason and obeys it."[164]

Aristotle thinks there must be these two parts of the rational part because humans can experience inner conflict. David Bostock explains, "Aristotle introduces it [i.e., the distinction between the two parts of the rational part] by pointing to a certain kind of *conflict* in the soul, very roughly a conflict between 'reason' and 'desire,' where one pulls in one way and the other in another."[165] Think of finding a stranger's wallet: in some sense you *know* you should turn it in, but you may *want* to keep it for yourself. Such conflict is precisely what leads Aristotle to posit these two powers within the rational part of the soul. And the medievals, adopting the basic structure of Aristotle's moral psychology, referred to these two powers as "intellect" and "will." Tying this back to the Scholastic debate about the source of freedom, some Scholastics advocated Intellectualism: the view that humans act freely in virtue of the intellect, while others advocated Voluntarism (from the Latin *voluntas* or will): the view that humans act freely in virtue of the will.[166]

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[164] Aristotle, *NE*, 1102b30-33. Translator's brackets. As we'll see below, concerning the part that shares in reason, the Scholastics disagreed about the extent to which that part obeys reason.

[165] Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 33. Bostock's italics.

[166] For helpful discussions on voluntarism and intellectualism, see Jeffrey Hause, "Thomas Aquinas and the Voluntarists," *Medeival Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997): 167-82, here 168; and Colleen McCluskey's *Thomas Aquinas on Moral Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 34, n. 63;

2.2: Ockham's Voluntarism

Returning to Ockham's particular account of freedom, it's clear that he's a voluntarist, that humans act freely in virtue of the will. To see this, let's begin by getting clear on what Ockham means by freedom. In Quod 4.1, contrasting free agents with natural agents, he says that a free agent "is no more inclined from its nature to one effect than another," whereas a natural agent "is so inclined from its nature to one determined effect that it can't cause the opposite effect."[167] Borrowing his example of a natural agent, fire is so inclined from its nature to cause heat that it can't cause cold.[168] Elsewhere he explicitly defines freedom as "the power by which I can indifferently and contingently posit diverse things, so that I can cause and not cause the same effect even though nothing else is different anywhere outside that power."[169]

And Ockham thinks it's clear that the will is such a free power. He states in Rep 4.16 that "[the will] itself, on account of its freedom, can indifferently perform one or the other of opposites."[170] More explicitly still, he states that even if the other two necessary conditions for an act of will – i.e., God and apprehension – are met, the will can still elicit that act, not elicit it, or elicit its opposite. He explains: "when every necessary and

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[167] *Quod* 4.1, *OT* IX, 300.152-6: "*de agente libero, quod non plus inclinatur ex natura sua ad unum effectum quam ad alium; sed de agente naturali non concludit, quia tale agens ex natura sua sic inclinatur ad unum determinatum effectum quod non potest causare oppositum effectum.*"

[168] *Quod* 4.1, *OT* IX, 300.156-7.

[169] *Quod* 1.16, *OT* IX, 87.12-5: "*sciendum quod voco libertatem potestatem qua possum indifferenter et contingenter diversa ponere, ita quod possum eumdem effectum causare et non causare, nulla diversitate existente alibi extra illam potentiam.*"

[170] *Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 358.4-5: "*[voluntas] ipsa propter libertatem suam potest indifferenter agere unum oppositorum vel reliquum.*"

sufficient thing required for such an act (say, an act of will) is posited – if the object is

cognized, and God wills to coincide with the will for causing when it pleases the will –

the will can *in virtue of its freedom*, without any other actual or habitual determination,

elicit or not elicit that act or its opposite."[171] Thus, it's clear that the will is a free power

for Ockham.[172]

And while the will is a free power for Ockham, the intellect is a natural power.

He says in Quod 2.2, "Just as an act of intellect is a natural and necessary cause for

volition, still the volition is caused freely; for the will is a partial and contingent cause of

that [volition], and its being contingent is sufficient for the effect's being contingent."[173]

In other words, while both the intellect and the will are partial causes for a free and

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[171] *Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 359.3-10: "*posito omni sufficienti et necessario requisito ad talem actum, puta ad actum [voluntatis], si obiectum cognoscatur, et Deus velit concurrere cum voluntate ad causandum quando placet voluntati, potest voluntas ex sua libertate – sine omni alia determinatione actuali vel habituali – actum illum vel eius oppositum elicere vel non elicere.*"

[172] For further support, Ockham often states that the will can will anything. For example, he says that "the will acts freely and contingently with respect to any object whatever" (*Ord* 1.1.2, *OT* I, 399.10-11: "*voluntas respectu cuiuscumque obiecti libere et contingenter agit*"). For another example he says that the will "can will-against anything possible in itself, – and it's certain that it can will-against anything impossible in itself –, therefore it can will-against anything whatever" (*Ord* 1.1.6, *OT* I, 503.22-4: "*potest nolle omne sibi possibile, – et certum est quod potest nolle omne sibi impossibile –, ergo quidlibet potest nolle*"). For yet another example, he says that "the will is no more necessitated to willing anything whatever than to willing the impossible. But [the will] can will and will-against the impossible. Therefore, in the same way [the will can will or will-against] anything else whatever (*Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 353.15-17: "*Praeterea, non magis necessitatur voluntas ad volendum quodcumque quam ad volendum impossibile. Sed potest velle et nolle impossibile, igitur eodem modo quodcumque aliud*").

[173] *Quod* 2.2, *OT* IX, 116.107-110: "*Sicut actus intelligendi naturaliter et necessario causat volitionem, et tamen volitio libere causatur, quia voluntas est causa partialis illius et contingens, cuius contingentia sufficit ad hoc quod effectus sit contingens.*" Freddoso and Kelley comment on this passage: "Ockham's point here is that an act of understanding is a partial cause of an act of willing, a partial cause that acts by natural necessity. But an act of willing also has a partial cause that is free, viz., the will itself, and it is because of this partial cause that the act is free and contingent" (*Quodlibetal Questions*, 99, n.11). Additionally, Ockham discusses natural and free powers in *Rep* 3.11, where he gives the intellect as an example of a natural power. See *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 356.14-5.

contingent act of the will, the former is a natural and necessary cause whereas the latter is a free and contingent cause.

Recall also, as mentioned in the last chapter, that Ockham says an act of prudence (which is an act of the intellect) is "a merely natural act and in no way in our power any more than an act of seeing."[174] Ockham's remark concerning vision seems to mean that even if it's in one's power *that* one sees (say, by opening or closing one's eyes), it's not in one's power *what* one sees. One can't see a cup of coffee when it's not there, or not see it when it is there. *When* one sees, *what* one sees is beyond one's control. And, at least for truth-tracking purposes, one wouldn't want vision any other way.[175] Vision wouldn't be veridical if, borrowing David Gallagher's example, one could make a red barn look blue.[176] Ockham thinks the same goes for acts of prudence (and all other acts of intellect, in fact). A valid practical syllogism wouldn't be veridical if one could make the conclusion false when the major and minor premises were true. Thus, Ockham thinks the intellect is a natural (as opposed to free) power.

Not only does Ockham think that the will is free while the intellect is natural, he thinks that the will can go against the intellect's dictates. This is contrary to Aquinas who, being an Intellectualist, thought that the will must obey the intellect.[177] But

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[174] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 380.100-2: "*solum actus naturalis et nullo modo in potestate nostra plus quam actus videndi.*" Ockham similarly states in *Quod* 3.16, "that act of prudence is merely natural and in no way in our power" (*Quod* 3.16, *OT* IX, 264.68-9: "*actus ille prudentiae sit mere naturalis et nullo modo in potestate nostra*").

[175] I owe this point to Colleen McCluskey, *Thomas Aquinas on Moral Wrongdoing*, 30.

[176] David M. Gallagher, "Free Choice and Free Judgement in Thomas Aquinas" *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994): 247-77, here 248.

[177] It's actually contentious whether Aquinas was an Intellectualist and thought the will had to obey the intellect, or whether he was a Voluntarist and thought the will could go against the intellect. For

Ockham claims it's evident from experience that the will can will against the intellect's

dictate. He states, "a human experiences that however much reason dictates something,

the will can still will that thing or not will it or will against it."[178] Elsewhere he

elaborates,

> for a free power, which is receptive of two contrary acts, has the power for
> one act and the opposite. And the will, as a free power, is receptive to will
> and to will-against with respect to any object whatever. Therefore, if [the
> will] can will with respect to God, [the will] can, by the same reason, will-
> against God.
> Likewise, a power able to err (*obliquabilis*) which isn't necessarily
> conformed with right reason, which is able by nature to the opposite of
> one dictate from the intellect, is able by the same nature to the opposite of
> another dictate. But the created will is able to err, and is able to the
> opposite of one dictate in this earthly life. It's clear from experience.[179]

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an excellent exposition and defense of Aquinas as an Intellectualist, see Colleen McCluskey, "Happiness
and Freedom in Aquinas's Theory of Action," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9 (2000): 69-90. Others
who see Aquinas as an Intellectualist include Scott MacDonald, "Aquinas's Libertarian Account of Free
Choice" *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 52 (1998): 309-28; Jeffrey Hause, "Thomas Aquinas and the
Voluntarists," *Medeival Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997), 167-182; Thomas Williams, "Human Freedom
and Agency" in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2012), 199-208. For an excellent exposition and defense of Aquinas as a Voluntarist, see
David M. Gallagher, "Free Choice and Free Judgment in Thomas Aquinas" *Archiv fur Geschichte der
Philosophie* 76 (1994): 247-77. Others who see Aquinas as a Voluntarist include Eleonore Stump and
Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 353-82; Eleonore Stump,
"Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," *The Monist* 80 (1997): 576-97.

But for our purposes, we can set aside this (important) contemporary debate because Ockham
thought Aquinas was an Intellectualist. See *Rep* 2.3-4, *OT* V, 52.13-53.3; *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 367.597-603;
368.627-35.

[178] *Quod* 1.16, *OT* IX, 88.25-8: "*Potest tamen evidenter cognosci per experientiam, per hoc quod homo
experitur quod quantumcumque ratio dictet aliquid, potest tamen voluntas hoc velle vel non velle vel nolle.*" He
makes similar claims elsewhere. For example, he says in *QV* 7.3 that " when the intellect dictates
something in particular, the will can [do] the contrary" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 371.694-5: "*dictante intellectu de
aliquo in particulari, potest voluntas in contrarium etc*"). And in *Quod* 7.14, he says "For from the fact that the
will is naturally guided by cognition, permitting it could, from its freedom, [do] the opposite (*Quod* 7.14,
OT IX, 754.38-9: "*Nam ex quo voluntas nata est sequi cogitationem, licet de libertate sua possit in oppositum*").

[179] *Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 350.16-351.3: "*quia potentia libera quae est receptiva duorum actuum contrariorum,
qua ratione potest in unum et in reliquum. Sed voluntas tamquam potentia libera est receptiva nolle et velle
respectu cuiuscumque obiecti, igitur si potest in velle respectu Dei, eadem ratione potest in nolle respectu Dei.*
*Item, potentia obliquabilis quae non necessario conformatur rationi rectae, qua ratione potest in oppositum
unius dictati ab intellectu eadem ratione potest in oppositum alterius dictati. Sed voluntas creata est obliquabilis, et
potest in oppositum unius dictati hic in via, patet per experientiam.*"

Thus, Ockham thinks it's true both definitionally and experientially that the will can will-against the intellect's dictate. It's definitionally true because the will, being a free power, is capable of willing the intellect's dictate or its opposite without any other change outside the will's power. And it's experientially true that no matter how strongly the intellect dictates something, the will can will it, abstain from willing it, or even will-against it.

Three brief clarifications should be made at this point. First, just because Ockham thinks the will can will *against* the intellect's dictate, he doesn't (further) think that the will can will without the intellect *at all*. The will needs the intellect's apprehension (for there must be some cognized object for the will to will *about*). But, second, it doesn't follow from the fact that the will need's the intellect's *apprehension*, that the will needs to obey the intellect's *dictate of right reason*. Recall the difference between apprehension and right reason from the last chapter. Apprehension concerns anything the intellect can consider, whether propositions or singular terms. Right reason is the intellect's judgement that a dictative proposition is true. And since one must apprehend something in order to make a judgement about it, but not vice-versa, apprehension is (by far) the larger set. Thus, an act of will needs the intellect's apprehension (for there must be some cognized object for the will to will *about*), but it needn't obey the intellect's dictate of right reason.

Third, though Ockham thinks the will can will-against the intellect's dictate, he doesn't think it can do so *virtuously*, for a virtuous act requires right reason – it's one necessary condition for virtuous action (at least according to God's present ordination).

Keep in mind, here, the difference between an act of will and a virtuous act: the former requires mere apprehension whereas the latter requires right reason.[180] Thus, though the will can will-against right reason, the will can't will-against right reason virtuously. Note that this further explains right reason's role in virtuous action, for Ockham. Recall from the last chapter that he says,

> it should be known that in order for a right act to be elicited by the will, some right reason is necessarily required in the intellect….for that will which can, as it is in virtue of itself, indifferently act well and badly, because it's not right in virtue of itself, necessarily requires some rule other than itself giving direction in order for it to act rightly. This is clear, because the divine will does not require any [rule] giving direction since it itself is the first directing rule and cannot act badly. But our will is such that it can act rightly and non-rightly. Therefore, it requires some [rule] giving direction by right reason.[181]

In short, since the human will can act rightly and non-rightly, it requires some rule – namely, right reason – in order to act rightly. But as we've learned in this section, the will can, from its freedom, go against right reason. Thus, while the will can go against right reason *freely*, it can't do so *rightly* or *virtuously*.[182]

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[180] Recall that an act of will requires the will, God, and *apprehension*, whereas a virtuous act requires the will, God, and *prudence*. See *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 393.412-15; *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 363.510-20; *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 417.198-200.

[181] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 409.16-410.31: "*sciendum est quod ad hoc quod actus rectus eliciatur a voluntate necessario requiritur aliqua recta ratio in intellectu….quia illa voluntas quae potest, quantum est de se, indifferenter bene agree et male, quia de se non est recta, necessario ad hoc quod recte agat, indigent aliqua regula dirigente alia a se. Hoc patet, quia ideo voluntas divina non indigent aliquo dirigente quia ipsa est prima regula directiva et non potest male agere. Sed voluntas nostra est huiusmodi quod potest recte et non recte agere. Igitur indiget aliqua ratione recta dirigente.*"

[182] Again, *according to the present divine ordination* right reason is necessary for virtuous action.

2.3: Acts of Will Alone Are Virtuous

Since the will is the source of freedom for Ockham, and one is only praised or

blamed for what's in one's power, it's unsurprising that Ockham locates the virtues in

the will.[183] He clearly states, "only an act of will is virtuous. It's proven: for only an act

of will is praiseworthy or blameworthy; therefore, only that act is virtuous. Thus, only

a habit generated from such an act is a virtue. It's confirmed through the Philosopher,

in *Ethics*, Book III, where he says that no act is blameworthy unless it's in our power."[184]

Thus, since an act of will alone is praiseworthy or blameworthy, an act of will alone is

virtuous. And since an act of will alone is virtuous, the habits generated from such acts

alone are virtues. Recall from the last chapter that habits (i) are generated from acts,[185]

(ii) increase inclination and ease with which to perform such acts,[186] and (iii) are in

natural powers (e.g., the intellect and sensitive appetite) and free powers (i.e., the will

alone).[187] But while there are habits outside the will, there aren't any *virtuous* habits

outside the will. And that's because, as we now understand, the will alone is free and,

thereby, praiseworthy and blameworthy.[188] But while Ockham claims in numerous

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[183] For a helpful discussion about the location of the virtues in Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, see Adams, "Scotus and Ockham on the Connection of the Virtues" in *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics*, ed. Honnefelder, Wood, and Dreyer (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 499-522, here 500-501.

[184] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 366.3-7: "*solus actus voluntatis est laudabilis vel vituperabilis; igitur solus ille est virtuosus. Igitur solum habitus generatus ex tali actu est virtus. Confirmatur per Philosophum, III* Ethicorum, *ubi dicit quod nullus actus est viruperabilis nisi sit in potestate nostra.*"

[185] *Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 397.9-398.10, 403.1, *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 324.27, 324.37-325.1.

[186] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 365.3-5.

[187] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 356.11-357.15; *Quod* 3.20, *OT* IX, 281.1-284.79.

[188] Ockham states on numerous occasions that virtues are only in the will. For example, in *Rep* 3.11, he says, "a habit of will alone is properly virtuous" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 358.22: "*solus habitus voluntatis est proprie virtus*"). In *QV* 7.2 he says that "some habit is a virtue simpliciter and primarily, and [this is]

places that acts of will alone are virtuous, he ends up qualifying this claim. To see this,

we need to turn to Ockham's necessarily and intrinsically virtuous action.

2.4: Necessarily and Intrinsically Virtuous Action

The two main passages where Ockham discusses necessarily and intrinsically

virtuous action are QV 7.1 and Quod 3.14, though a thorough examination of the latter

will be saved for the next chapter. In QV 7.1 Ockham gives a proof that *some act* is

intrinsically and necessarily virtuous. He argues,

> The third conclusion is that some act is necessarily and intrinsically
> virtuous. This is proven, for it's impossible that some contingently
> virtuous act, – that is, in the sense that it can indifferently be called
> virtuous or vicious – be made determinately virtuous on account of some
> new act [that's] not necessarily virtuous. For through no contingently
> virtuous act in the sense just mentioned is another act made or
> denominated determinately virtuous. For if so, that second act, which is
> contingently virtuous, will be determinately virtuous through some other
> [third] act which is either (i) necessarily virtuous or (ii) contingently
> virtuous. If in the first way, then by the same reasoning the process could
> have stopped at the second [act], and then I'll have what I set out to prove,
> that there is some necessarily virtuous human act. If in the second way, it
> will proceed to infinity, or it will be stopped at some necessarily virtuous
> act, and in this way I'll have what I set out to prove.[189]

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only the will, for no act generative of such a habit is primarily virtuous except an act of will" (*QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 340.248-50: "*aliquis habitus est simpliciter virtus et primo, et non nisi voluntatis, quia nullus actus generativus habitus talis est primo virtuosus nisi actus voluntatis.*"). In *Ord Prol.* q.10 he says, "nor yet, on account of this, will a moral habit be in the intellect properly speaking, for every moral habit properly speaking is in the will" (*Ord Prol.* q.10, *OT* I, 299.2-4: "*nec tamen propter hoc habitus moralis erit in intellectu proprie loquendo, quia proprie loquendo omnis habitus moralis est in voluntate*"). And since virtues are only in the will, vices are too. Ockham says that "vice properly is only in the will, for according to Augustine, sin is so greatly voluntary that if it's not voluntary, it's not sin" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 390.16-18: "*vitium proprie non est nisi in voluntate, quia secundum Augustinum, peccatum adeo est voluntarium quod si non sit voluntarium, non est peccatum*").

[189] *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 327.99-328.112: "*Tertia conclusio est quod aliquis actus est necessario et intrinsece virtuosus. Hoc probatur, quia impossibile est quod aliquis actus contingenter virtuosus, – sic scilicet quod potest indifferenter dici virtuosus vel vitiosus –, fiat determinate virtuosus propter novitatem alicuius actus non necessario virtuosi, quia per nullum actum contingenter virtuosum modo praedicto fit alius actus sive denominator determinate virtuosus. Quia si sic, aut ille secundus actus, qui est contingenter virtuosus, erit determinate virtuosus per aliquem alium actum qui est necessario virtuosus, aut per actum contingenter virtuosum. Si primo modo, tunc eadem ratione esset standum in secundo, et similiter tunc habetur propositum, quod est aliquis actus in*

Thus, in brief, Ockham thinks that a contingently virtuous act – i.e., one that can indifferently be called virtuous or vicious[190] – entails some necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act. Ockham is ultimately going to argue that a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act is (unsurprisingly) an act of the will. But before looking at his argument, it's important to note here at the beginning that such a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act is still contingent upon divine ordination. Ockham clearly states this later in QV 7.4: "there is some act of will which is intrinsically and necessarily virtuous and in no sense contingently virtuous, *so long as the present divine ordination remains*."[191] Thus, just like right reason's being necessary for virtuous action, so too an action's being necessarily and intrinsically virtuous is contingent upon God's present ordination. It's not as if it's necessarily and intrinsically virtuous in such a way that God can't, from his absolute power, ordain differently.

Returning to QV 7.1, Ockham next gives a (rather terse) argument that exterior acts and acts of intellect are disqualified as candidates for some necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act because they're contingently virtuous. He says,

> But human acts, both exterior and interior (that is, to intellect and to will – when to will is an indifferent act) are contingently virtuous. For example: to walk to church on account of an obligated end is first a virtuous act,

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homine necessario virtuosus. Si secundo modo, erit processus in infinitum, vel stabitur ad aliquem actum necessario virtuosum, et sic habetur propositum." Cf., *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.46-58.

[190] Ockham reiterates this definition elsewhere saying, "some contingently virtuous act, so that it can indifferently be called virtuous or vicious" (*Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.48-9: "*aliquis actus contingenter virtuosus, ita quod indifferenter potest dici virtuosus vel vitiosus*").

[191] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 393.403-5: "*aliquis est actus voluntatis qui est intrinsece et necessario virtuosus, stante ordinatione divina quae nunc est, et nullo modo contingenter virtuosus.*"

and while [the act of] walking to church remains the same, it's vicious on account of an evil end. Consequently it's contingently virtuous.[192]

By *exterior act* Ockham means a bodily act (like walking, talking, and eating), whereas an *interior act* is an act of the internal powers of the soul (an act of the intellect or an act of the will).[193] Hence, concerning the exterior act of walking to church, Ockham argues it's contingently virtuous – that is, it can indifferently be called virtuous or vicious – because that act can, while remaining the same or indifferent act, be virtuous (when done on account of an obligated end) and vicious (when done on account of an evil end). In Rep 3.11 he gives this same example with greater detail. He says,

> someone can walk to church to worship or pray on account of the glory and praise of God. That act of walking, then, is called virtuous. And he can continue the same act of walking entirely unchanged, and change only the act of will and intend an evil end – say, that he wills to walk to church to worship and pray on account of vain glory. Then that numerically

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[192] *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 328.113-18: "*Sed actus hominis tam exteriores quam interiores, puta intelligere et velle, – secundum quod velle est actus indifferens –, sunt contingenter virtuosi. Exemplum: ire ad ecclesiam propter finem debitum primo est actus virtuosus et, stante eodem ire ad ecclesiam, propter malum finem est vitiosus, et per consequens est contingenter virtuosus.*" Ockham is clear that acts of will can be indifferent when they lack the necessary circumstances for virtuous or vicious action, as will be explained below. See also *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 383.16-387.7; *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 338.200-210.

[193] One passage where Ockham distinguishes exterior and interior acts is *Rep* 4.16. There he explains, "I respond that an action convening in a human is twofold, namely exterior and interior" (*Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 358.13-4: "*Respondeo quod duplex est actio conveniens homini, scilicet exterior et interior*"). Just after this he gives an example of the will (an interior act) causing the exterior acts of walking and eating (*Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 358.14-17). Still further below he adds, "An interior operation is twofold: one, which is immediately in the power of the will, as volition. Another, which is not in the power of the will except by an intermediate first act, as intellection. And thus, if the first act is destroyed, that [second] act is not in the power of the soul. And thus, the soul elicits the one act freely and contingently, but the other [act] naturally" (*Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 358.21-359.2: "*Operatio interior duplex est: una, quae immediate est in potestate voluntatis, sicut volitio; alia, quae non est in potestate voluntatis nisi mediante primo actu, et ideo primo actu destructo, ille actus non est in potestate animae sicut intellectio. Et ideo unum actum elicit anima libere et contingenter, et alium naturaliter*"). Ockham elsewhere briefly states, "of the twofold interior powers – namely, of the will and intellect – and of the exterior [powers]" (*QV* 4, *OT* VIII, 145.968-9: "*potentiae interioris duplicis – puta voluntatis et intellectus – quam exterioris*"). Cf., *Ord Prol*, q.10, *OT* I, 300.20. For a helpful discussion of Ockham's distinction between exterior and interior acts, see Freppert, *Basis of Morality*, 36.

identical act [of walking], not having been changed in itself, which was previously called virtuous, is [now] called vicious.[194]

Ockham states here that the same exterior act of walking to church can remain with different acts of will.[195] And, importantly, that same exterior act is virtuous with one act of will (intending it for God's glory) but vicious with another (intending it for vainglory).[196] Thus, walking to church (along with all other exterior acts, in fact) is contingently virtuous or vicious – that is, it can indifferently, or while remaining the same act, be called virtuous or vicious. Thus, it's disqualified as a candidate for a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act.

Continuing in QV 7.1, Ockham next rules out acts of intellect for the same reason.

He states,

> It's the same concerning intellection and speculation [as it was for exterior acts]: that [act] of intellection will first be virtuous on account of an obligated end. And afterwards that intellection, while remaining the same act in the intellect, will be vicious if the intention changes, so that such an

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[194] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 360.8-17: "*aliquis potest ire ad ecclesiam ut celebret vel oret propter gloriam et laudem Dei. Iste actus ambulandi dicitur tunc virtuosus. Et potest eundem actum ambulandi omnino invariatum continuare et solum mutare actum voluntatis et intendere malum finem, puta quod vult ambulare ad ecclesiam ad celebrandum et orandum propter vanam gloriam. Tunc iste actus dicitur vitiosus idem numero non variatus in se qui prius dicitur virtuosus.*" Ockham also gives a second example here. He says, "For if someone on bended-knee speaks or sings, and first wills that on account of God's honor, and while remaining the same act of speaking and singing, changes the will so that it wills that to be done on account of vain glory, or wills the good to be reputed, the numerically same act of the sensitive part which was previously called virtuous is now called vicious, and this is solely by some extrinsic denomination" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 361.1-7: "*Si enim aliquis genu flexo oret vel cantet, et primo velit illud propter honorem Dei, et stante eodem actu orandi et cantandi mutet voluntatem quod velit illud facere propter vanam gloriam, vel vult bonus reputari, idem actus numero partis sensitivae qui prius dicebatur virtuosus nunc dicitur vitiosus, et hoc solum est quadam denominatione extrinseca*").

[195] Further below in *Rep* 3.11 Ockham explicitly states that an exterior act "can remain the same with respect to multiple acts of the will" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 383.3-4: "*potest idem manere respectu multorum actuum voluntatis*").

[196] Though implicit here, Ockham elsewhere explicitly states that an intention is an act of the will. See *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 329.141-2.

act is continued on account of a prohibited end. Consequently that intellection is contingently virtuous.[197]

For an example in line with the exterior act of walking to church, one act of intellect could be contemplating the nature of motion itself. But that act of intellect, just like the exterior act of walking to church, is virtuous with one act of the will (intending it for God's glory, say) but vicious with another (like intending it for vain glory). Thus, acts of intellect, like exterior acts, are contingently virtuous and thereby disqualified from being necessarily and intrinsically virtuous.

By process of elimination, since exterior acts and acts of intellect are both disqualified, the only remaining candidate for some necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act is an act of the will. And that's exactly what Ockham concludes. He states:

> The fourth conclusion is that an act primarily and necessarily virtuous is an act of the will. This is clear first, because that [act of will] alone is primarily praiseworthy and blameworthy, but the other [acts are] only secondarily and through some extrinsic denomination – namely, from the fact that they are elicited in conformity with an act of will. Moreover, any other act than an act of will can, while remaining the same, be vicious or virtuous, but that [act of will] alone is virtuous in the sense that it can't be made vicious.[198]

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[197] *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 328.18-23: "*Eodem modo est de intelligere et speculari: primo propter debitum finem, erit istud intelligere virtuosum, et post, stante eodem actu in intellectu, mutata intentione, scilicet quod talis actus continuetur propter indebitum finem, erit illa speculatio vitiosa, et per consequens est contingenter virtuosa illa speculatio.*" Elsewhere Ockham similarly states, "an act primarily, essentially, and intrinsically virtuous cannot, while remaining the same, be vicious. But an act of the intellect can while remaining the same. Therefore etc. The assumption is clear, for someone first understanding something with a good intention, can continue the same act with a wicked intention. That act of understanding, while remaining numerically identical, is first virtuous and afterwards vicious" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 364.542-7: "*actus primo et essentialiter et intrinsece virtuosus non potest idem manens esse vitiosus; sed actus intellectus idem manens potest; igitur etc. Assumptum patet, quia aliquis primo intelligens aliquid cum bona intentione, potest eundem actum continuare cum mala intentione; iste actus intelligendi idem numero manens est primo virtuosus et post vitiosus*").

[198] *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 329.132-143: "*Quarta conclusio est quod actus primo et necessario virtuosus est actus voluntatis. Hoc patet primo, quia ille solus est primo laudabilis vel vituperabilis, alii autem non nisi secundario et per quandam denominationem extrinsecam, puta per hoc quod eliciuntur conformiter actui voluntatis.*

Recall from above that Ockham elsewhere states that acts of will alone are praiseworthy and blameworthy (since the will is the source of freedom). Here he qualifies this: acts of will alone are *primarily* praiseworthy and blameworthy, other acts are *secondarily* so from the fact that they're elicited in conformity with an act of will. Importantly, the same goes for virtuous acts. Recall from above that Ockham claims acts of will alone are virtuous. He qualifies this too. Elsewhere he states, "an act can be called virtuous either *intrinsically* or *extrinsically*,"[199] and that "no act is extrinsically good unless because it's in conformity with some intrinsically good act."[200] Here in QV 7.1 he implies that acts of will alone can be *intrinsically* virtuous; other acts are *extrinsically* virtuous from the fact that they're elicited in conformity with some intrinsically virtuous act of will. And Ockham's explicit about this later in QV 7.4:

> Moreover, an act that's not intrinsically virtuous can't become virtuous except through an intrinsically virtuous act. It can't become virtuous only through an extrinsically and contingently virtuous act because otherwise it would proceed to infinity, as was made clear above. And as was also mentioned above, only an act of will is intrinsically virtuous or vicious. No other act is virtuous except by extrinsic denomination. For any other act whatever – whether an act of intellect or an exterior act – can, while remaining the same, be done successively with a good intention and a wicked intention. Consequently [any other act is] contingently good or wicked, not necessarily and intrinsically.[201]

Praeterea quilibet alius actus ab actu voluntatis potest idem manens esse vitiosus vel virtuosus, iste autem solus sic est virtuosus quod non potest fieri vitiosus."

[199] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 384.184-5: "*actus potest dici virtuosus vel intrinsece vel extrinsece.*"

[200] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 385.206-8: "*numquam actus est extrinsece bonus nisi quia conformatur alicui actui intrinsece bono.*"

[201] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 381.105-13: "*Praeterea numquam de actu non virtuoso intrinsece potest fieri virtuosus nisi per actum intrinsece virtuosum, et non solum extrinsece et contingenter, quia aliter esset processus in infinitum, sicut patet supra; sed sicut supra dictum est, solus actus voluntatis est intrinsece virtuosus vel vitiosus, et nullus alius nisi extrinseca denominatione, quia quilibet alius, – tam actus intellectus quam exterior –,*

Thus, exterior acts and acts of intellect are extrinsically virtuous; they're virtuous in conformity with an intrinsically virtuous act of will. And they're contingently virtuous; they can be called virtuous or vicious while remaining the same act.

But while exterior acts and acts of intellect can be called virtuous or vicious while remaining the same acts, acts of will can't. Ockham (obviously) thinks acts of will can be virtuous *or* vicious, but he doesn't think an act of will can be virtuous or vicious *while remaining the same act*. That's why Ockham thinks an act of will is the right candidate for a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act, because an act of will can't indifferently be called virtuous or vicious; it can't be virtuous or vicious while remaining the same act. To better see this, let's turn to Ockham's novel view that circumstances are partial objects of acts of will.

First concerning circumstances, the Scholastics commonly thought, borrowing once again from Aristotle, that circumstances of an act (like the end, time, place, and manner) can affect the moral character of the act, making it virtuous or vicious.[202]

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potest idem manens fieri successive bona intentione et mala, et per consequens est contingenter bonus vel malus, et non necessario et intrinsece."

[202] Ockham states that "according to the Philosopher, many circumstances are required for a praiseworthy act of virtue, i.e., that in such an act it's in agreement both with place and time, and that it's done when necessary and as necessary and where necessary, and so concerning the other circumstances" (*Rep* 3.12, *OT* VI, 412.7-11: "*secundum Philosophum, ad actum virtutis laudabilem requiruntur multae circumstantiae, scilicet quod in tali actu sit tam convenientia loci quam temporis, et quod fiat quando oportet et ut oportet et ubi oportet, et sic de aliis circumstantiis*"). Cf., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b17-1107a6. Elsewhere Ockham gives an example of loving someone. He states, "For example, if I love some human, neither on account of some good or evil end, neither in accordance with, or contrary to, right reason, neither in a place or time obligated or prohibited, and accordingly concerning the other virtuous and vicious circumstances, that act is neither morally good or evil but [is] neutral and indifferent. Therefore, in order for it to become good or evil, it's necessary for it to be circumstanced with virtuous or vicious circumstances – say, that the will loves that human on account of such-and-such an end, and at an obligated time, and so on concerning the other [circumstances]" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 384.6-13: "*Puta si diligam aliquem hominem, non propter aliquem finem bonum vel malum, nec secundum rectam rationem nec contra, nec loco nec tempore debito nec non [debito], et ita de aliis circumstantiis virtuosis et vitiosis, iste actus nec est bonus moraliter nec malus sed neuter et indifferens. Ad hoc igitur quod fiat bonus vel malus, oportet eum*

Having sex, to borrow Ockham's example, can be virtuous in some circumstances (say, *when* one is married and in a private *place*) and vicious in others (say, when one's not married or at a public park).[203] The Scholastics thought it was the intellect's role to judge the morally relevant circumstances, abbreviated as the requirement that virtuous action is done in accordance with right reason.[204]

Next concerning objects, Williams explains that the object of an act is "generally designated by the direct object of the active verb that represents the action."[205] So, for example, if I praise God, God is the object of my act of praise. Importantly, if the object of an act changes, even specifically, the act itself changes. So praising God and praising

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circumstantionari circumstantiis virtuosis vel vitiosis, puta quod voluntas diligat illum hominem propter finem talem, et tempore debito, et sic de aliis"). For helpful discussions of circumstances, see Scott MacDonald, "Later Medieval Ethics" in *A History of Wester Ethics*, ed. Becker (New York: Routledge, 2003), 52-9, here 57-8; and Thomas Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism in Duns Scotus: a Pseudo-Problem Dissolved," *The Modern Schoolman*, vol. 74 (1997): 73-94, here 80-83.

[203] Ockham says, "For it's clear that to will sex is a virtuous act if willed in [some] place and time, and not [virtuous] otherwise, but even vicious" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 396.479-81: "*Patet enim quod velle coire est actus virtuosus si velit loco et tempore, et aliter non, sed magis vitiosus.*"

[204] MacDonald explains, "Since the determination of suitability or appropriateness is a matter for reason, the requirement that an action have an appropriate end and be done in an appropriate way in appropriate circumstances if it is to be morally good is often abbreviated as the requirement that it be in accordance with right reason: a morally good action is an action done in accordance with right reason" ("Later Medieval Ethics," 57). And Ockham adopts a voluntaristic version of this general Scholastic view. For one clear example, Ockham states "a volition is called perfectly virtuous because it's elicited in conformity with right reason. For if [a volition] were elicited in conformity with right reason in some respect but not others, then it wouldn't be perfectly virtuous. For example, if someone wills a carnal act on account of an end dictated by right reason, but not with respect to a place and time, even though these were dictated by reason, that volition wouldn't be perfectly virtuous but rather vicious or indifferent. Thus, if right reason dictates that such an act should be willed in a place and time, a perfectly virtuous will ought to will that act in [that] place and time" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 397.496-507: "*volitio dicitur perfecte virtuosa quia in omnibus conformiter elicitur rationi rectae, quia si in aliquo conformiter eliceretur et in aliquo non, iam non esset perfecte virtuosa. Exemplum: si aliquis vellet actum carnalem propter talem finem dictatum a ratione recta, et nullum actum volendi haberet respectu loci et temporis, quamquam ista dictentur a ratione, ista volitio non est perfecte virtuosa sed potius vitiosa vel indifferens; igitur ad hoc quod sit perfecte virtuosa, oportet quod conformetur rationi rectae et omnibus dictatis a ratione recta sibi debere competere; igitur si recta ratio dictet quod talis actus sit volendus loco et tempore, voluntas perfecte virtuosa debet velle talem actum in loco et tempore*").

[205] Williams, "Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism," 79.

one's neighbor, though both within the genus of acts of praise, are specifically different acts because they have specifically different objects. In contrast, a difference in circumstances doesn't change *the act* (praising God, for example, is the same act when done at one time or another) but can change the act's *moral character*, making it virtuous (like when done for the end of God's glory) or vicious (when done for the end of one's own glory).

Ockham agrees that a difference of objects entails a difference of acts. But he also thinks that the circumstances of acts of will are "partial objects," so that when the circumstances of an act of will change, the act of will itself changes. He states, "If you say that the end is a circumstance of a moral act, so it's not an object; I respond: all of the circumstances of an act of will are partial objects."[206] Elsewhere he states, "I posit that what others call the circumstances of virtues are partial and secondary objects of a virtuous act itself. And, therefore, when such objects vary according to species, their acts and habits vary according to species."[207] Thus, when the circumstances of acts of will (being partial objects) change, the act itself changes.

One reason Ockham gives for thinking this is that it's clear that acts of will change when their circumstances change. He illustrates this in Rep 3.11 with his (now quite familiar) example of walking to church:

> "For example, if I first will to walk to church for God's honor, 'walk to
> church' is the common object and 'honor' is the circumstance. But if

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[206] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 381.11-13: "*Si dicas quod finis est circumstantia actus moralis, igitur non obiectum, respondeo: omnes circumstantiae actus voluntatis sunt obiecta partialia.*"

[207] QV 7.2, OT VIII, 337.183-7: "*pono quod illa quae ponuntur circumstantiae virtutum ab aliis, sunt obiecta partialia et secundaria ipsius actus virtuosi, et ideo quando talia obiecta variantur secundum speciem, actus et habitus istorum variantur secundum speciem.*"

afterwards I will to walk at an established time, then the [interior] act of will is changed but the [exterior] act of walking can remain the same. Furthermore, if I will to walk on account of God's honor at an established time and according to right reason, and this throughout the entire walk, that exterior act always remains the same, but the act of willing is changed. And thus [the exterior act] is called the common object, since it can be the object of multiple acts of willing, and it can remain the same together with circumstances and without circumstances. And from this it's clear that whenever any circumstance is changed with respect to an act of willing, that act of will is licitly changed [but] not the exterior [act].[208]

Thus, since acts of will change whenever the circumstances change, the circumstances of acts of will are partial objects. And this is unique to acts of will. That is, circumstances aren't partial objects of exterior acts because a change in circumstance doesn't bring about a change in exterior action, only a change in an act of will.

Note that Ockham calls the exterior act the *common* object, for it can stay the same with different acts of will. Elsewhere he calls the end – that for the sake of which the act is done – the *principal* or *primary* object, whereas time, place, and the other circumstances are *secondary* objects.[209] These distinctions will prove important shortly.

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[208] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 383. 4-15: "*Puta, si primo velim ire ad ecclesiam pro honore Dei, hoc 'ambulare ad ecclesiam' est obiectum commune, et 'honor' circumstantia. Sed si post velim ire tempore statuto, tunc variatur actus voluntatis, et potest manere idem actus ambulandi. Si adhuc velim ire propter honorem Dei tempore statuto et secundum rectam rationem, et hoc semper in ambulando, semper iste actus exterior manet idem, tamen actus volendi variatur. Et ideo dicitur obiectum commune, quia potest esse obiectum multorum actuum volendi, et potest manere idem cum circumstantiis et sine circumstantiis. Et ex hoc patet quod quandocumque variatur circumstantia aliqua respectu actus volendi, variatur ipse actus voluntatis licet non exterior.*"

[209] For one example, he states, "for if an act of will whereby someone wills to pray to God is perfectly virtuous, these circumstances are necessarily required: that it wills to pray on account of God's honor, according to the dictates of right reason, in the established time, such as the Lord's day, in the obligated place, such as church, then that virtuous act has God's honor for the principal object, the act of praying for the common object, right reason, the Lord's day and the church for secondary and partial objects, so that with respect to the act of will, these circumstances are objects and partial efficient causes with respect to that act. But with respect to the exterior act – the act which is called the common object – there are no partial objects, for an act of praying or walking or some such exterior act does not have time, place, right reason, or the end for objects, as the other [act of will does]. For example, an act of eating has food for its object, an act of walking, a path" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 381.16-382.12: "*si enim ad hoc quod actus voluntatis quo aliquis vult orare Deum sit perfecte virtuosus requirantur necessario istae circumstantiae: quod velit orare propter honorem Dei, secundum rectum dictamen rationis, in tempore statuto, puta die dominico, in loco*

Now it can be understood why Ockham thinks an act of will is the right candidate for a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act, whereas exterior acts and acts of intellect aren't. Exterior acts and acts of intellect are contingently virtuous; they can be virtuous or vicious while remaining the same act. But acts of will can't. They can be virtuous or vicious, but they can't be virtuous or vicious *while remaining the same act* because any change in an act of will, even a change in its circumstances, changes the act itself. Thus, an act of will alone is the right candidate for a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act.

But while every necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act is an act of will, not every act of will is a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act. In QV 7.2 Ockham says that acts of will can be intrinsically virtuous, intrinsically vicious, and morally indifferent. He states,

> some acts are intrinsically morally good, some intrinsically morally wicked and vicious, [and] some morally neutral or indifferent. An example of the first: to will to pray on account of God's honor and because it's commanded by God in accordance with right reason etc. An example of the second: to will to pray on account of vain glory and because [it's] contrary to God's command and contrary to right reason. An example of the third: to will simply to pray, without any circumstance dictated by reason, on account of no end, whether good or wicked. And such an [indifferent] act, whether interior or exterior, is only called good or vicious by extrinsic denomination and in no way intrinsically.[210]

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debito, puta in ecclesia, tunc iste actus sic virtuosus habet honorem Dei pro obiecto principali, actum orandi pro obiecto communi, rectam rationem, diem dominicum et ecclesiam pro obiectis secundariis et partialibus, ita quod respectu actus voluntatis istae circumstantiae sunt obiecta et causae effectivae partiales respectu illius actus. Sed respectu actus exterioris non sunt obiecta partialia, qui actus dicitur obiectum commune, quia actus orandi vel ambulandi vel aliquis talis exterior actus non habet tempus pro obiecto nec locum nec rectam rationem ne finem, sicut alius, puta actus comedendi habet cibum pro obiecto, actus ambulandi, viam"). Note also that right reason is a secondary partial object of a virtuous act of will. This will prove important in Chapter 4.

[210] *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 338.200-210: "*aliquis actus est intrinsece bonus moraliter, aliquis intrinsece malus et vitiosus, aliquis neuter sive indifferens. Exemplum primi: velle orare propter honorem Dei et quia praeceptum est a*

Note the difference between these three examples. The intrinsically virtuous act of will

has "to pray" for its common object, "God's honor" for its primary object, and God's

command, right reason, and the other circumstances for secondary objects. The

intrinsically vicious act of will has the same common object (i.e., to pray) but a different

primary object (i.e., vain glory) and different secondary objects (i.e., contrary to God's

command and contrary to right reason). The morally indifferent act of will has the

same common object (i.e., to pray) but lacks any primary or secondary objects.[211] Thus,

what distinguishes these three acts isn't the common object, but the circumstances – the

primary and secondary objects. Importantly, the difference between an intrinsically

vicious act of will and an intrinsically *virtuous* act of will is the circumstances. And

Ockham explicitly states this in QV 7.1:

> I say that there should be some primarily [and] necessarily virtuous act,
> which is an act primarily praiseworthy and perfectly circumstanced,
> which is virtuous in such a way that it cannot be made vicious, such as to
> will to do something because it's a divine command. It's virtuous in such
> a way that it cannot be made vicious while the divine command
> remains."[212]

Deo secundum rectam rationem etc. Exemplum secondi: velle orare propter vanam gloriam et quia contra praeceptum Dei et contra rectam rationem. Exemplum tertii: velle simpliciter orare sine aliqua circumstantia dictata a ratione, quia nec propter bonum finem nec propter malum, quia propter nullum finem; et talis actus, sive interior sive exterior, solum dicitur bonus denominatione extrinseca et nullo modo intrinsece, nec vitiosus."

[211] Recall from above that Ockham says, "that act of will is indifferent which is elicited concerning an object convening in such an act, yet without the required circumstances for the act's goodness and wickedness" (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 384.3-6: "*actus ille voluntatis est indifferens qui elicitur circa obiectum conveniens tali actui, sine tamen circumstantiis requisitis ad bonitatem et malitiam actus*").

[212] *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 328.124-8: "*dico quod est dare aliquem actum necessario primo virtuosum, qui est actus primo laudabilis et perfecte circumstantionatus, qui est ita virtuosus quod non potest fieri vitiosus, sicut velle facere aliquid quia est praeceptum divinum, est ita virtuosus quod non potest fieri vitiosus, stante praecepto divino.*"

Three things should be noted here. First, a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act is, in brief, an act of will rightly circumstanced. This can be seen from the three characterizations Ockham mentions here concerning a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act: it's (1) primarily praiseworthy, (2) perfectly circumstanced, and (3) virtuous in such a way that it can't be made vicious. It's primarily praiseworthy, so that rules out all acts other than acts of will (for, as mentioned above, acts of will alone are primarily praiseworthy; other acts are only secondarily so). It's perfectly circumstanced, which rules out acts of will that are morally indifferent or intrinsically vicious. And it's virtuous in such a way that it can't be made vicious for, being an act of will, if any circumstance changes, the act itself changes. Thus, all acts of will that are rightly circumstanced are necessarily and intrinsically virtuous acts.

Second, note that Ockham qualifies the third characterization, saying a necessarily virtuous act can't be made vicious *while the divine command remains*. This further enforces Ockham's claim in QV 7.4 that a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act is still contingent upon divine ordination.

And third, it seems that Ockham thinks willing to do something because it's a divine command is the kind of act that's always rightly circumstanced. If, for example, God commands that he be praised for his own sake in church on Sundays, that act of will that only wills that common object (God be praised) and that primary object (for God's own sake) and those secondary objects (the place being church and the time being Sundays), is the only act of will that's rightly circumstanced.

But one should be cautious about placing too much emphasis on Ockham's example of willing to do something because it's a divine command (or the example Ockham gives in his parallel Quod 3.14 passage which some have overemphasized, as I'll argue in the next chapter). It's clear that an act of willing something because God commands it is *one* example of a necessarily and intrinsically virtuous act, but it's not the *only* example. As already mentioned above, Ockham says an act of willing to pray can be intrinsically virtuous when done in the right circumstances.[213] And it's not as if only seemingly pious acts like prayer can be necessarily and intrinsically virtuous. Any extrinsically virtuous act – even seemingly mundane exterior acts like eating[214] and studying[215] – must have some intrinsically virtuous act of will in order for the exterior act to be extrinsically virtuous. For just one example, before wrapping up this section, Ockham states in Rep 3.11:

> if I will to eat on account of God and in accordance with right reason and the other circumstances, and if I eat, that [exterior act of] eating is virtuous by extrinsic denomination, for it's elicited in conformity with right reason and a perfectly and intrinsically virtuous volition. Similarly, just as while the same numerical act of eating remains, if an act of will is changed – for instance that I will to eat on account of an evil end, such as incontinence, and contrary to right reason – the same numerical [exterior] act of eating which was denominated virtuous is called vicious, for it's elicited in conformity with a volition of evil and contrary to the judgment of reason. Thus it's vicious by extrinsic denomination.[216]

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[213] See footnote 210 above.

[214] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 386.11-21.

[215] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 384.184-385.209.

[216] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 386.11-21: "*si velim comedere propter Deum et secundum rectam rationem et alias circumstantias, et comedam, ista comestio est virtuosa denominatione extrinseca, quia elicitor conformiter rectae rationi et volitioni perfecte et intrinsece virtuosae. Similiter, sicut stante eodem actu comedendi numero, variato actu voluntatis – puta quod velim comedere propter malum finem, puta incontinentiam et contra rectam rationem –*

Thus, in order for the exterior act of eating to be *extrinsically vicious*, it must be in conformity with an *intrinsically vicious* act of will where the common object is, say, to eat, the primary object is incontinence, and the secondary object is contrary to right reason. Similarly, in order for the exterior act of eating to be *extrinsically virtuous*, it must be in conformity with the *intrinsically virtuous* act of will where, say, the common object is to eat, the primary object is God, and the secondary object is right reason. Thus, there are countless examples of intrinsically virtuous acts of will – as many, in fact, as there are extrinsically virtuous acts.

Conclusion

Summing up the first half of this dissertation, the three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for virtuous action are an act of prudence, a corresponding act of will, and God coinciding with the act. The third condition is required because God is a necessary partial cause, alongside every created agent, for bringing about every act's effect. The second condition is required because the will is the source of freedom. And the first condition is required because the will, as a free power, needs, at least according to the present divine ordination, a dictate from the intellect, an act of prudence, in order to act rightly. Thus, a virtuous act is an act of will in accordance with right reason with which God concurs. Even more specifically, a virtuous act can be necessarily and intrinsically virtuous or contingently and extrinsically virtuous. All necessarily and intrinsically virtuous acts are acts of will, but not all acts of will are necessarily and

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dicitur idem actus comedendi numero qui denominabatur virtuosus, vitiosus, quia conformiter elicitur volitioni malae et contra iudicium rationis, ideo est vitiosus denominatione extrinseca."

intrinsically virtuous. Only acts of will rightly circumstanced are necessarily and intrinsically virtuous. All other acts are virtuous only contingently and extrinsically.

What's been presented thus far suggests, or makes a *prima facie* case, that Ockham is a divine command theorist – that he thinks all of morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands. To reiterate just two of the more obvious reasons: first and foremost, Ockham thinks divine commands are a norm of morality. Recall that there are two kinds of sin: (i) sin of commission (namely, doing what one's obligated not to do) and (ii) sin of omission (namely, not doing what one's obligated to do). So sin, for Ockham, becomes possible because of obligations. Moreover, Ockham clearly claims that divine commands are a source of obligation. So, for one example which will be discussed more in the next chapter, if God commands us to hate him, one sins by a sin of commission by loving him and sins by a sin of omission by not hating him.[217]

Second, stemming from the absolute/ordinate distinction, there are multiple central pieces in Ockham's ethics that are merely contingent on God's present ordination. Two such pieces are (i) right reason's being necessary for virtuous action and (ii) an action's being necessary and intrinsically virtuous itself. Both, Ockham claims, are contingent on God's ordination; God can, from his absolute power, ordain differently.

This is a rather significant amount of influence God has over morality, on Ockham's account. Thus there's *prima facie* reason for thinking Ockham is a divine command theorist. But there are also some reasons – three arguments in particular –

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[217] *Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 352.8-10

recently given for thinking Ockham isn't a divine command theorist. It's to those three

arguments we now turn. Examining and undermining each will take up the second half

of this dissertation.

Chapter Three:

Loving God isn't Fundamental for Ockham's Ethics

As mentioned in the Introduction, though there was a long-standing consensus that Ockham was a divine command theorist – that is, one who holds that all of morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands – three arguments have recently surfaced that he wasn't. The goal of this chapter is to undermine the first argument – the Loving God is Fundamental Argument – while the next chapter seeks to undermine the other two.

Recall that the Loving God is Fundamental Argument says that the act of loving God (rather than divine commands) is fundamental for Ockham's ethics. Something is *fundamental* if there is nothing more basic that justifies it.[218] On such a schema, here's an example of a non-fundamental rule for Kantian ethics: (C) forbidding children from belittling their unpopular classmates. (C) isn't fundamental because there is something more basic that justifies it: (B) showing respect to others. It's not as if *because* belittling unpopular classmates is forbidden, *therefore* we should show respect to others. Rather the reverse is true: *because* we should show respect to others, *therefore* we shouldn't belittle our classmates. (B) is a more basic moral rule that justifies (C). But just because

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(B) is more basic than (C), it doesn't follow that (B) is fundamental. After all, there could be some more basic rule that justifies (B). Turns out, for Kant, that there is: (A) always treat a human as an end and never as a mere means. (A) is fundamental for Kant because there is no more basic moral rule that justifies it. This is because, in Shafer-Landau's words, "Moral questioning, like all other lines of investigation, must stop somewhere. Fundamental moral rules mark that stopping point."[219] So while the long-standing consensus held that divine commands are fundamental for Ockham's ethics, this new interpretation situates the act of loving God as fundamental.

One version of the Loving God is Fundamental Argument comes from Peter King. He states, "The act of loving God above all else for his own sake is good in itself and generates or tends to generate a virtuous habit in the agent's will….This act is good whenever it is elicited, and it is the intrinsic good on which the goodness of other acts depends."[220] Thus, "For Ockham, then, the core of ethics is the love of God (the intrinsically good act)."[221]

Another version of the argument comes from Lucan Freppert, who asks, "Is the divine precept, then the basis for the obligation to love God? Or on the contrary, is the

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[219] Shafer-Landau, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, 219.

[220] Peter King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 227-244, here 232.

[221] King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," 237. Paul Spade and Claude Panaccio agree that the act of loving God is the "intrinsically virtuous act" ("William of Ockham", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ockham/>). And Richard Cross similarly states, "...the scope of God's possible commands is very wide: God can command anything other than hatred of himself. The reason for this last restriction is simply that loving God is the one necessarily good act" (*The Medieval Christian Philosophers*, [London, Tauris, 2013], 203.

love of God itself the basis for obeying his precept that he must be loved?....it is the love of God, above all and for Himself, that is basic."[222] Freppert here explicitly states that, for Ockham, God's commands aren't fundamental because they're further justified by what is "basic" – i.e., the love of God. To be clear, it's consistent with King and Freppert that God's commands can justify moral rules, like "Don't murder," "Don't steal," and such. But God's commands aren't fundamental, on their account. Rather, the love of God is the ultimate justification for Ockham's ethics.

Several of Ockham's writings are involved in the discussion about whether loving God is fundamental, but two central passages include QV 7.1 and Quod 3.14. Since the former has already been discussed at length in the previous chapter, the majority of attention will be given to the latter. Additionally, King and Freppert see Quod 3.14 as the key passage supporting their view that loving God is fundamental for Ockham's ethics.[223] I'll end up arguing that, while a statement near the end of the question – what I'll (rather presumptuously) call the Misunderstood Statement – appears to support King and Freppert's view, the surrounding context rules out that interpretation as mistaken.[224] Not only does Quod 3.14 *not* support the view that loving God is fundamental, it *does* support the view, consistent with other of Ockham's writings, that the goodness of loving God depends upon divine commands. This

[222] Lucan Freppert, *The Basis of Morality According to William Ockham* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1988), 121-22.

[223] King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," 231-32; Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 121-25.

[224] Osborne argues similarly in "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist," *Religious Studies* 41 (2005): 1-22, here 13.

chapter can be divided into four stages: (1) Properly understanding the misunderstood

statement, (2) King and Freppert's errors, (3) Freppert's objection, and (4) my response.

Stage 1: The Misunderstood Statement & Properly Understanding It

As mentioned above, the Misunderstood Statement, when taken out of context,

appears to support King and Freppert's interpretation that loving God is fundamental

for Ockham's ethics. Ockham's Misunderstood Statement is as follows:

> I say that that necessarily virtuous act – in the sense mentioned above[225] –
> is an act of the will, for an act by which God is loved above all and on
> account of himself, is an act of that sort. For that act is virtuous in the
> sense that it cannot be vicious, nor can that act be caused by a created will
> without being virtuous, both because (i) anyone in a place and time is
> obligated to love God above all, and consequently that act cannot be
> vicious, and because (ii) that act is the first of all good acts.[226]

This Misunderstood Statement certainly appears to support the view that loving

God is fundamental for Ockham. After all, Ockham explicitly states that the act by

which God is loved above all things and for his own sake is virtuous in the sense that it

can't be vicious and can't be caused by a created will without being virtuous, that

anyone is obligated to love God above all, and this act is the first of all good acts. But if

one closely attends to the surrounding context, this statement doesn't actually support

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[225] This "sense mentioned above" points to a crucial bit of context that will be explained in due course.

[226]*Quodlibeta* (hereafter *Quod*) 3.14, in *Opera Theologica* (hereafter *OT*) IX (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1980) 255.60-256.67: "*dico quod ille actus necessario virtuosus modo praedicto est actus voluntatis, quia actus quo diligitur Deus super omnia et propter se, est huiusmodi; nam iste actus sic est virtuosus quod non potest esse vitiosus, nec potest iste actus causari a voluntate creata nisi sit virtuosus; tum quia quilibet pro loco et tempore obligatur ad diligendum Deum super omnia, et per consequens iste actus non potest esse vitiosus; tum quia iste actus est primus omnium acuum bonorum.*"

the view that loving God is fundamental for Ockham. So let's turn to a closer look at Quod 3.14 to get clear about this pertinent context.

Quod 3.14 asks the question "whether only an act of the will is necessarily virtuous."[227] Ockham claims the question is ambiguous and can be read in two ways: read negatively, it asks whether *no* act other than an act of the will is necessarily virtuous; read positively, it asks whether *some* act of the will is necessarily virtuous."[228] Concerning the negative reading, Ockham answers in typical voluntarist fashion that it is "unqualifiedly true" that no act other than an act of the will is necessarily virtuous since, among other reasons, "every other act can be elicited naturally and non-freely, and no such [act] is necessarily virtuous."[229]

Concerning the positive reading – whether some act of the will is necessarily virtuous – Ockham says it too can be read in two ways: in a "literal" (*virtute sermonis*) way and in "another" (*aliter*) way. Though Ockham leaves this other way unnamed, for clarity's sake I'll call it the "non-literal" way. So, to the question whether some act of the will is necessarily virtuous, he states, "I say first that, literally speaking, no act is necessarily virtuous."[230] He argues for this literal reading in two ways: "both since (i) no act is necessary, consequently no act is necessarily virtuous; and since (ii) every act

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[227] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 253.1: "*Utrum Solus Actus Voluntatis Sit Necessario Virtuosus.*"

[228] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 253.8-11: "*unam negativam, quae est quod nullus actus alius ab actu voluntatis est necessario virtuosus; et aliam affirmativam, scilicet quod aliquis actus voluntatis est necessario virtuosus.*"

[229] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 254.16-18: "*omnis alius actus potest elicit naturaliter et non-libere, et nullus talis est necessario virtuosus.*"

[230] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 254.36-7: "*dico primo quod de virtute sermonis nullus actus est necessario virtuosus.*"

can be brought about by God [acting] alone, consequently no act is necessarily virtuous

because such an act [i.e., by God acting alone] is not in the power of the will."[231] Thus,

literally speaking, no act is necessarily virtuous.

But non-literally speaking is a different story. In what I'll call (again, rather

presumptuously) the Relevant Context, Ockham states:

> Yet an act can be understood to be necessarily virtuous in another sense,
> namely in such a way that (i) it cannot be vicious if the divine command
> remains. Likewise (ii) [the act] cannot be caused by a created will without
> being virtuous.[232]

And as for the question being read in this non-literal way, Ockham gives an

affirmative answer: "And if a virtuous act is to be understood in this [non-literal] sense,

I say that some act can be necessarily virtuous in this sense.[233] Thus, Ockham thinks it's

possible for an act to be necessarily virtuous in the non-literal sense. He next offers a

proof (similar to the parallel QV 7.1 passage which was discussed in the last chapter

and will be reexamined below[234]) that works as follows: that there is some contingently

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[231] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 254.37-255.41: "*tum quia nullus actus necessario est, et per consequens non est necessario virtuosus; tum quia omnis actus potest fieri a solo Deo, et per consequens non est necessario virtuosus, quia talis actus non est in potestate voluntatis.*" Moreover, recall from Chapter 2 that Ockham thinks (i) God is a partial cause of every effect and (ii) God can be the total cause of whatever he is a partial cause; hence, God can be the total cause of every effect. See also *Reportatio* (hereafter *Rep*) 2.15, in *Opera Theologica* (hereafter *OT*) V (St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1981), 342.22-6; 350.4-7; 339.14-353.2; 343.11-15; 345.22-3; *Rep* 2.3-4, *OT* V, 62.21-2; 63.10-14.

[232] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.43-5: "*aliter potest intelligi actum esse necessario virtuosum, ita scilicet quod non possit esse vitiosus stante praecepto divino; similiter non potest causari a voluntate creata nisi sit virtuosus.*"

[233] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.46-7: "*Et sic intelligendo actum virtuosum, dico secondo quod sic potest aliquis actus esse virtuosus necessario.*"

[234] See *Quaestiones Variae* (hereafter *QV*) 7.1, in *Opera Theologica* (hereafter *OT*) VIII (St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1984), 327.99-328.112.

virtuous act – an act that can indifferently be called virtuous or vicious – entails that

there is some necessarily virtuous act. Here's his proof at length:

> I say second that some act can be necessarily virtuous in this [non-literal]
> sense. I prove this, for it's impossible that some contingently virtuous act
> – so that it can indifferently be called virtuous or vicious – be made
> determinately virtuous unless on account of another necessarily virtuous
> act. This is proven, for a contingently virtuous act, like an act of walking,
> is made determinately virtuous through conformity to another act. I ask,
> concerning this second act, whether (i) it is necessarily virtuous in the way
> mentioned above, and [in that case] I have what I set out to prove, that
> there is some necessarily virtuous human act; or (ii) it is contingently
> virtuous, and then that [second] act would be made determinately
> virtuous through conformity to another [third] virtuous act. And one
> must ask the same question as before concerning this third act, and either
> there will be an infinite regress, or the regress will terminate at some
> necessarily virtuous act.[235]

Now though Ockham doesn't explicitly rule out the possibility of an infinite

regress here (though recall that he does in QV 7.1), its impossibility must be an implied

premise. The reason for this is that he clearly takes himself to have accomplished what

he set out to prove – namely, that there's some necessarily virtuous act – because he

next gives an example within the Misunderstood Statement of such a necessarily

virtuous act: loving God. That is, the Relevant Context, which immediately precedes

the Misunderstood Statement, is Ockham's characterization of a necessarily virtuous act

in the non-literal sense. Thus, the Misunderstood Statement (what King and Freppert

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[235] *Quod.* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.46-58: "*dico secundo quod sic potest aliquis actus esse virtuosus necessario. Quod probo, quia impossibile est quod aliquis actus contingenter virtuosus, ita quod indifferenter potest dici virtuosus vel vitiosus, fiat determinate virtuosus nisi propter alium actum necessario virtuosum. Hoc probatur, quia actus contingenter virtuosus, puta actus ambulandi, fit determinate virtuosus per conformitatem ad alium actum. Quaero de illo secundo actu: aut est necessario virtuosus modo praedicto, et habetur propositum, quod est aliquis actus in homine necessario virtuosus; aut est contingenter virtuosus, et tunc ille fit determinate virtuosus per conformitatem ad alium actum virtuosum; et de isto est quaerendum sicut prius, et erit processus in infinitum vel stabitur ad aliquem actum necessario virtuosum.*"

think supports the view that loving God is fundamental for Ockham), when read in

light of the Relevant Context, says:

> I say that that necessarily virtuous act – in the sense mentioned above [i.e., in the non-literal sense]– is an act of the will, for an act by which God is loved above all and on account of himself, is an act of that sort. For that act is virtuous in the sense that it cannot be vicious, nor can that act be caused by a created will without being virtuous, both because (i) anyone in [his own] place and time is obligated to love God above all, and consequently that act cannot be vicious, and because (ii) that act is the first of all good acts.[236]

So informed by the Relevant Context, here's how the Misunderstood Statement is

to be properly understood: the necessarily virtuous act discussed within the

Misunderstood Statement is a necessarily virtuous act taken in the *non-literal sense*. This

is clear for three reasons. The first, which I've already mentioned, is the immediate

context. At the beginning of the Misunderstood Statement, when Ockham says "that

necessarily virtuous act – in the way mentioned above," the most natural reading of "in

the way mentioned above" is the immediately preceding context: namely, the Relevant

Context where Ockham characterizes a necessarily virtuous act in the non-literal sense.

Second, Ockham very closely mirrors his characterization of a necessarily

virtuous act taken in the non-literal sense in the Relevant Context with his later

justification in the Misunderstood Statement that loving God is necessarily virtuous.

Let's look at these two statements of Quod 3.14 side by side:

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[236] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255-56.60-67.

The Relevant Context	The Misunderstood Statement
(i) it [i.e., a necessarily virtuous act in the non-literal sense] cannot be vicious if the divine command remains. Likewise (ii), the act cannot be caused by a created will without being virtuous.	that act [of loving God] is virtuous in the sense that (I) it cannot be vicious, and (II) that act cannot be caused by a created will without being virtuous.

It's clear that (II) is a restatement of (ii), while (I) and (i) similarly affirm that the act cannot be vicious, though, admittedly, (I) lacks the qualification "if the divine command remains." Perhaps the qualification missing from (I) is implied, for, as just mentioned, the Relevant Context and the Misunderstood Statement share such close proximity and similar mirroring.[237] Regardless, such similarity between the two statements (especially concerning (II) and (ii)) is further evidence that the necessarily virtuous act of the Misunderstood Statement is to be taken in the non-literal sense.

But, moving on to the third (and strongest) reason, we could conclude that the necessarily virtuous act of the Misunderstood Statement is of the non-literal sort without either previous justification because, as Ockham already explained in the larger argument of Quod 3.14, there are only two senses of a necessarily virtuous act – literal and non-literal – and that no act is necessarily virtuous in the literal sense whereas some act is necessarily virtuous in the non-literal sense. Thus, since Ockham claims, within the Misunderstood Statement, that some act (namely, loving God) is necessarily virtuous, the only possible way of interpreting this necessarily virtuous act is in the non-literal sense. This conclusion will prove important below. And now that we've got

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[237] Freppert, as we'll see below, thinks the lack of the divine-command qualification indicates a significant "development" in Ockham's ethical theory (*the Basis of Morality*, 147-48).

the Misunderstood Statement properly understood, we can begin to see King and

Freppert's errors, and they are telling.

<p style="text-align:center">Stage 2: King and Freppert's Errors</p>

Recall that King says, "Ockham holds that all acts are morally neutral, neither

good nor bad in themselves – except for the act of loving God above all else for his own

sake."[238] Moreover, King grounds the goodness of all other acts in the act of loving

God; he says, "The act of loving God above all else for his own sake....is good whenever

it is elicited, and it is the intrinsic good on which the goodness of other acts depends."[239]

Thus King concludes, "For Ockham, then, the core of ethics is the love of God (the

intrinsically good act)."[240] Two difficulties with King's remarks should already be

apparent from what's been said. Let's look at each, with a look at some of Freppert's

own subtle errors in between.

2.1 King's First Error

First, Ockham doesn't say that the act of loving God above all else for his own

sake is *the only* necessarily virtuous act, but merely *a* necessarily virtuous act. In that

sense King says *more* than Ockham does here.

Perhaps it could be said, in King's defense, that King's overstatement is

innocuous. At the very least, that King's overstatement isn't inconsistent with Quod

3.14. But, while this is true, King's overstatement *is* inconsistent with another of

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[238] King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," 229.

[239] King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," 232.

[240] King, "Ockham's Ethical Theory," 237.

Ockham's writings, QV 7.1, which was discussed in the previous chapter. There

Ockham gives a proof, very similar to the proof in Quod 3.14, that some contingently

virtuous act entails some necessarily virtuous act. But one notable difference between

the two passages is that while Ockham's example of a necessarily virtuous act in Quod

3.14 is *loving God*, in QV 7.1 his example is *willing something because God commands it*.

Allow me to quote Ockham at length here:

> The third conclusion is that some act is necessarily and intrinsically virtuous. This is proven, for it's impossible that some contingently virtuous act – in the sense that it can indifferently be called virtuous or vicious – be made determinately virtuous on account of some new act [that is] not necessarily virtuous. For through no contingently virtuous act in the sense just mentioned is another act made or denominated determinately virtuous. For if so, either that second act, which is contingently virtuous, will be determinately virtuous through some other [third] act which is necessarily virtuous, or through a contingently virtuous act. If in the first way, then by the same reasoning one would terminate the regress with the second [act], and then I'll have what I set out to prove, that there is some necessarily virtuous human act. If in the second way, either there will be an infinite regress, or the regress will terminate at some necessarily virtuous act, and in this way I'll have what I set out to prove.
>
> But human acts, both exterior and interior (that is, to intellect and to will – when to will is an indifferent act) are contingently virtuous. For example: to walk to church on account of an obligated end is first a virtuous act, and while walking to church remains the same [act], it's vicious on account of an evil end. Consequently it's contingently virtuous. It's the same concerning intellection and speculation: first, on account of an obligated end, that [act] of intellection will be virtuous. And afterwards, while remaining the same act in the intellect, if the intention changes, so that such an act is continued on account of a prohibited end, that intellection will be vicious. Consequently that intellection is contingently virtuous.
>
> Thus I say that there should be some primarily [and] necessarily virtuous act, which is an act primarily praiseworthy and perfectly circumstanced, which is virtuous in such a way that it cannot be made vicious, such as *to will to do something because it's a divine command*. It's

virtuous in such a way that it cannot be made vicious, *while the divine command remains*.[241]

So while Ockham here gives a similar proof that some contingently virtuous act entails some necessarily virtuous act, the example Ockham gives of a necessarily virtuous act in QV 7.1 isn't loving God, but rather willing something because God commands it. It's important to note that QV 7.1 and Quod 3.14 are perfectly consistent with each other: Ockham doesn't say that willing something because it is God's command is *the only* necessarily virtuous act, but merely that it is *one* such act. Recall also from the last chapter that Ockham elsewhere explicitly mentions other examples of necessarily virtuous acts, like willing to pray,[242] willing to eat,[243] and willing to study.[244] Moreover, any extrinsically virtuous act must be in conformity with an intrinsically virtuous act of will; so there are countless examples of intrinsically virtuous acts – as

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[241] *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 327.99-328.130: "*Tertia conclusion est quod aliquis actus est necessario et intrinsece virtuosus. Hoc probatur, quia impossibile est quod aliquis actus contingenter virtuosus, – sic scilicet quod potest indifferenter dici virtuosus vel vitiosus –, fiat determinate virtuosus propter novitatem alicuius actus non necessario virtuosi, quia per nullum actum contingenter virtuosum modo praedicto fit alius actus sive denominatur determinate virtuosus. Quia si sic, aut ille secundus actus, qui est contingenter virtuosus, erit determinate virtuosus per aliquem alium actum qui est necessario virtuosus, aut per actum contingenter virtuosum. Si primo modo, tunc eadem ratione esset standum in secundo, et similiter tunc habetur propositum, quod est aliquis actus in homine necessario virtuosus. Si secundo modo, erit processus in infinitum, vel stabitur ad aliquem actum necessario virtuosum, et sic habetur propositum.*

Sed actus hominis tam exteriores quam interiores, puta intelligere et velle, – secundum quod velle est actus indifferens –, sunt contingenter virtuosi. Exemplum: ire ad ecclesiam propter finem debitum primo est actus virtuosus et, stante eodem ire ad ecclesiam, propter malum finem est vitiosus, et per consequens est contingenter virtuosus. Eodem modo est de intelligere et speculari: primo propter debitum finem, erit istud intelligere virtuosum, et post, stante eodem actu in intellectu, mutata intentione, scilicet quod talis actus continuetur propter indebitum finem, erit illa speculatio vitiosa, et per consequens est contingenter virtuosa illa speculatio.

Ideo dico quod est dare aliquem actum necessario primo virtuosum, qui est actus primo ladabilis et perfecte circumstantionatus, qui est ita virtuosus quod non potest fiere vitiosus, sicut velle facere aliquid quia est praeceptum divinum, est ita virtuosus quod non potest fieri vitiosus, stante praecepto divino."

[242] *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 338.200-212.

[243] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 386.11-21.

[244] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 384.184-385.209.

many, in fact, as there are extrinsically virtuous acts. Thus, King's first error isn't

merely an overstatement, but a mistaken overstatement. It's not the case that loving

God is the only necessarily virtuous act; it's merely one example of many.

To be clear, we're a long way from showing conclusively that it's not the case

that loving God is basic for Ockham's ethics. But even knowing that there are multiple

necessarily virtuous acts raises doubts for that view. For example, why conclude

(consistent with Quod 3.14) that loving God is basic instead of (consistent with QV 7.1)

that willing something because God commands it is basic? Let's turn now to Freppert's

account, for while he has just such an explanation, his explanation brings troubles of its

own.

2.2: Freppert's Errors Concerning Rep 2.15 and Rep 4.16

Freppert, different from King, acknowledges that loving God isn't the *only*

necessarily virtuous act. But, like King, Freppert grounds the goodness of all other acts

on the necessarily virtuous act of loving God. He does this by introducing a distinction

between what he calls "primary" and "secondary" necessarily virtuous acts.[245] Freppert

thinks the only primary necessarily virtuous act is loving God, whereas he thinks the

secondary are necessarily virtuous, but in such a way as to depend on the primary for

their goodness.[246] And, as mentioned above, Freppert thus concludes that "it is the love

of God, above all and for Himself, that is basic."[247]

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[245] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 148-49.

[246] Concerning the secondary necessarily virtuous acts, Freppert says that "They depend,
therefore, on the primary necessarily virtuous act, the love of God" (*the Basis of Morality*, 149).

[247] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 122.

One significant worry for such an interpretation is that it's inconsistent with

other of Ockham's writings. For example, in Rep 2.15 Ockham says:

> The created will is obligated by a command of God for God to be loved,
> and for that reason while that command remains it cannot properly hate
> God nor [properly] cause an act of hating, but necessarily it wickedly
> causes evil of behavior. And this [is] because it is obligated by a
> command of God to the opposite act. Nor while the first command
> remains can God himself command the opposite. But God is not obligated
> to cause any act, for that reason he can cause any absolute act and its
> opposite without any blameworthy evil.[248]

Recall from the last chapter that sin is possible because of obligations,[249] and one source

of obligations is divine commands.[250] Importantly, Ockham says here that creatures are

obligated to love God and that the source of that obligation is a divine command. Not

even God can command the opposite while that command remains, for it'd be a

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[248] *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 353.6-13: "*voluntas creata obligatur ex praecepto Dei ad diligendum Deum, et ideo stante illo praecepto non potest bene odire Deum nec causare actum odiendi, sed necessario male causat militia moris. Et hoc quia obligatur ex praecepto Dei ad actum oppositum. Nec stante primo praecepto potest sibi Deus oppositum praecipere. Sed Deus ad nullum actum causandum obligatur, ideo quemlibet actum absolutum potest sine omni malo culpae causare et eius oppositum.*"

[249] Ockham says that "no human sins unless because he is obligated to do what he does not do or because he does what he is obligated not to do. For that reason a human is made a debtor. God, however, is in no way obligated nor is he obligated as a debtor, and thus he cannot do what he is obligated not to do or not do what he is obligated to do" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 343.17-22: "*nunquam homo peccat nisi quia tenetur facere quod non facit vel quia facit quod non debet facere. Per istam [rationem] fit homo debitor; Deus autem nulli tenetur nec obligatur tanquam debitor, et ideo non potest facere quod non debet facere nec non facere quod debet facere.*" Cf., *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 389.307-16; *QV* 8, OT *VIII*, 431.504-5;

[250] Ockham says that "the will elicits an act which it ought not to elicit because [it is] contrary to the divine will and precept. And similarly the will does not elicit a right act which it ought to elicit according to divine precept. And accordingly the will sins by a sin of commission and [a sin] of omission" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 383.158-61: "*voluntas elicit actum quem non debuit elicere quia contra voluntatem et praeceptum divinum, et similiter non elicit actum rectum quem debuit elicere secundum praeceptum divinum, et ita peccat peccato commissionis et omissionis*"). Elsewhere he similarly states that "the will always sins by a sin of commission when it elicits some act for which the opposite is obligated through a divine command or divine ordination" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 428.434-36: "*quia semper peccat voluntas peccato commissionis quando elicit aliquem actum ad cuius oppositum obligatur per praeceptum divinum vel ordinationem divinam*").

contradiction to command us both to love him and hate him at the same time.[251] But

since God can perform any act or its opposite, he can command us to love him and hate

him at different times.[252]

This brings trouble for Freppert's view that loving God is fundamental, for

Ockham here clearly states that the obligation to love God is because of a divine

command. That is, that there's something more fundamental that justifies the act of

loving God, namely God's command to love God. Recall that something is

fundamental if there is nothing more basic that justifies it. Loving God isn't

fundamental, here in Rep 2.15, because there's something more basic that justifies it:

namely, God's command to love him. Put differently, it's not as if since we're obligated

to love God, then we're obligated to God's commands. Rather, since we're obligated to

God's commands, we're obligated to love him. Thus, according to Rep 2.15, loving

God, rather than being fundamental, is grounded in what Ockham sees as more

fundamental: God's command to love him.

One other example where Ockham states that the obligation to love God comes

from a divine command is found in QV 8. For some context, Ockham is arguing that

one can sin by a sin of commission without also sinning by a sin of omission. He states,

> Similarly, sin of commission can be without sin of omission. It's clear that
> it's a distinct sin. For someone is obligated not to elicit an act contrary to

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[251] Ockham says that loving God and hating God are "formally incompatible" (*Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 342.4) and "formally opposed" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 391.350). Recall also from Chapter Two that Ockham thinks God can, since he's omnipotent, do anything that doesn't include a contradiction. See *Quod* 6.6, *OT* IX, 604.13-16; *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 342.19-21; 353.11-13.

[252] In *Rep* 4.16 Ockham explicitly states that not only can God command us to hate him, but that our hating him is right if so commanded by God (*Rep* 4.16, in *Opera Theologica* (hereafter *OT*) VII [St. Bonaventure NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1984] 352.5-10).

the act of some command while the command is in effect, yet one is not obligated to elicit the affirmative and positive of that command. For example, someone can be obligated not to hate God when he's not obligated positively to love him. Therefore, such is able to hate God and consequently sin by a sin of commission, though he doesn't necessarily sin by a sin of omission.[253]

Thus, if God commands one not to hate him but doesn't additionally command one to love him, one performs a sin of commission for hating him, but one doesn't perform a sin of omission for not loving him. And the reason is because, in this hypothetical scenario, one's obligated through divine command not to hate God, but one isn't currently obligated to love him.

Freppert, to my knowledge, is not aware of Ockham's remark in QV 8, but he is aware of Ockham's remark in Rep 2.15. But despite this, Freppert still maintains that loving God is fundamental for Ockham. His explanation is that loving God and obeying him are equivalent. He states,

Is the divine precept, then, the basis for the obligation to love God? Or on the contrary, is the love of God itself the basis for obeying his precept that he must be loved? It would seem that the second alternative is the only one which can save Ockham from falling into a vicious circle in which the love of God is based on obedience to a divine command, and the obedience in turn is obligatory because man is obliged to love God and what God wills....Hence, it is the love of God, above all and for Himself, that is basic – but this is a love which includes the doing of whatever God wills. And since the doing of whatever God wills is obedience, this love includes obedience. So intimately are the notions of love and obedience

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[253] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 439.671-79: "*Similiter peccatum commissionis potest esse sine peccato omissionis. Quod sit distinctum peccatum [patet]. Nam aliquis obligatur ad non eliciendum actum contrarium actui alicuius praecepti pro aliquo tempore pro quo tamen non obligatur ad eliciendum affirmativum et positivum illius praecepti. Exemplum: aliquis obligatur ad non odiendum Deum quando non tenetur positive diligere eum. Talis igitur potest Deum odire et per consequens peccare peccato commissionis, et tamen ille non necessario peccat peccato omissionis.*"

bound together that we may legitimately regard them as being equivalent notions. To love God is to obey Him.[254]

Two problems should be noted about Freppert's remarks here. First, it should already be apparent from what's been said that Ockham not only *doesn't* claim that one's obligated to obey divine commands because one loves him, but he *does* claim the very opposite in Rep 2.15 and QV 8: one's obligated to love God because he commands it.

And second, Freppert's claim that loving God and obeying him are equivalent is not merely an overstatement, but a *mistaken* overstatement. Not only does Ockham never say that loving God and obeying him are equivalent, Ockham characterizes them as inequivalent when he claims, in Rep 4.16, that we can obey God's command to hate him:

> Moreover, every will can conform itself with a divine command. But God can command that the created will hate him, so the created will can do this.
> Moreover, everything that can be a right action on earth, also [can be a right action] in heaven. But to hate God can be a right action on earth – say if it is commanded by God – so [it can be a right action] in heaven.[255]

This clearly shows that loving God and obeying him can split apart. Here's how. Recall that loving God and hating God are incompatible; that is, when one hates God one doesn't love God, and when one loves God one doesn't hate him. But, from Rep 4.16, when God commands that we hate him, and we do so, we simultaneously obey God

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[254] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 121-22.

[255] *Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 352.5-10: "*Praeterea, omnis voluntas potest se conformare praecepto divino. Sed Deus potest praecipere quod voluntas creata odiat eum, igitur voluntas creata potest hoc facere.*
    Praeterea, omne quod potest esse actus rectus in via, et in patria. Sed odire Deum potest esse actus rectus in via, puta si praecipiatur a Deo, igitur in patria."

and hate God. But if we hate God, we don't love God. Thus, we simultaneously obey

God and don't love God. Thus, contrary to Freppert, not only does Ockham never say

that loving God and obeying him are equivalent; it's apparent from Rep 4.16 that they

aren't.

Freppert is aware of Rep 4.16; he simply thinks that there's either a contradiction

or modification in Ockham's thought. He says,

> …it appears that here is a genuine contradiction in Ockham's thought.
> Love and obedience are equivalent; and yet the created will can morally
> obey the command that God be hated. Obedience to the command of
> hatred would argue to a distinction and separability of love and
> obedience, for love and hatred of the same object are certainly mutually
> exclusive. I do not see any way of denying the contradiction; but I also see
> no reason for refusing to admit as probable that Ockham underwent a
> change or modification of this thought.[256]

As for the modification alternative, Freppert rightly claims that the *Quodlibeta* were

written after the *Reportationes*,[257] and thus withholds "final judgment" until closer

examination of Quod 3.14. But as we'll see below, Quod 3.14 says nothing to the effect

that loving God and obeying him are equivalent. Quod 3.14 and Rep 4.16 are perfectly

consistent, on that score.

Wrapping up this section, we've learned three lessons from King and Freppert's

errors thus far. First, King's overstatement is mistaken: loving God isn't the only

necessarily virtuous act, but merely one of many. Second, that Freppert's distinction

between "primary" and "secondary" necessarily virtuous acts is inconsistent with Rep

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[256] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 124.

[257] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 125; Cf., Spade, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, 5, 7.

2.15 and QV 8, where Ockham explicitly states that the obligation to love God is because of a divine command. And third, Freppert's view that loving God and obeying his commands are equivalent is also inconsistent with Rep 4.16, where Ockham explicitly states that we can obey God's command to hate him.

2.3: King's Second Error

Let's turn now to King's second error concerning Quod 3.14. Opposite of King's first error – where he says *too much* – King says *too little* when he neglects to mention that the act of loving God found in the Misunderstood Statement is a necessarily virtuous act of the *non-literal* sort. And as with his first error, his second error isn't innocuous. As mentioned above, it's clear that the necessarily virtuous act in the Misunderstood Statement is to be taken non-literally because, among other reasons, there are only two senses of a necessarily virtuous act – literal and non-literal – and no act is necessarily virtuous in the literal sense whereas some act is necessarily virtuous in the non-literal sense. Thus, since Ockham claims, within the Misunderstood Statement, that some act (namely, loving God) is necessarily virtuous, the only possible way of interpreting this necessarily virtuous act is in the non-literal sense. Also recall that Ockham says two things when he characterizes a non-literal necessarily virtuous act: "(i) it cannot be vicious if the divine command remains. Likewise (ii) [the act] cannot be caused by a created will without being virtuous."[258] We'll discuss (ii) in much greater detail below, but (i) clearly states that a necessarily virtuous act depends upon divine commands in some way. My main argument against the Loving God is Fundamental

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[258] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.44-5.

Argument works by putting these two pieces together. It's clear that the necessarily virtuous act in the Misunderstood Statement – i.e., loving God – is to be understood in the non-literal sense. And from (i), what it means for an act to be necessarily virtuous in the non-literal sense is that it depends on divine commands in some way for its being virtuous. Therefore, it's clear from Quod 3.14 that loving God depends, in some way, upon divine commands. My argument – call it the Non-Literal Argument – can be put more formally as follows:

1) All necessarily virtuous acts in the non-literal sense depend upon divine commands in some way for their being virtuous.

2) The necessarily virtuous act of loving God in the Misunderstood Statement is a necessarily virtuous act in the non-literal sense.

3) Therefore, the necessarily virtuous act of loving God in the Misunderstood Statement depends upon divine commands in some way for its being virtuous.

The Non-Literal Argument is valid, so if the premises are true, the conclusion must be too. (2) seems indisputable from the three reasons mentioned above in Section 1. I've argued that (1) is true from (i) of the Relevant Context. If that's right, (3) must be true too: the necessarily virtuous act of loving God in the Misunderstood Statement depends, in some way, on God's commands for its being virtuous. Note that this fits nicely with Rep 2.15 and QV 8, where Ockham says that we're obligated to love God because of a divine command. It's clear that King's oversight of the context of the Misunderstood Statement in Quod 3.14 isn't innocuous. Thus, instead of the Misunderstood Statement supporting the view that loving God is fundamental for

Ockham, it actually, when taken in its context, supports the view that loving God depends upon something more fundamental still: divine commands.

Stage 3: Freppert's Objection

But the debate is not quite settled, because Freppert's subtle account could attempt to reject (3) by rejecting (1). Ultimately, he argues (contrary to (1)) that loving God, even as a non-literal necessarily virtuous act, does not depend in any way on divine commands. And he does this by separating Ockham's two "formulations" of a necessarily virtuous act in the Relevant Context.[259] Recall, once more, what Ockham says in the Relevant Context: "Yet an act can be understood to be necessarily virtuous in another [what I've been calling "non-literal"] sense, namely in such a way that (i) it cannot be vicious if the divine command remains. Likewise (ii) [the act] cannot be caused by a created will without being virtuous."[260] Freppert thinks (mistakenly, as I'll argue below) that (i) and (ii) are exclusive – that an act can be necessarily virtuous in sense (i) or (ii), but not both.[261] And importantly, Freppert thinks there's only one act

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[259] Freppert says, "the proposition 'an act is necessarily virtuous' can be understood to mean that the act which is necessarily virtuous cannot be evil while the divine precept remains in force – or that it means that the act cannot be caused by the created will in such a way that the act will not be virtuous. Actually, this is not one understanding of the proposition, but it involves two distinct, though related, meanings of the proposition 'an act is necessarily virtuous'" (*The Basis of Morality*, 147).

[260] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.43-5: "*aliter potest intelligi actum esse necessario virtuosum, ita scilicet quod non possit esse vitiosus stante praecepto divino; similiter non potest causari a voluntate creata nisi sit virtuosus.*"

[261] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 147-49. Adam and Wood also think that (i) and (ii) are exclusive: "In *Quodlibeta* III, q. 14, Ockham has tried, in effect, to repair his theory by assigning certain acts of will intrinsic-value properties that are conditional: a volition to love God above everything and for His own sake has the intrinsic property of being virtuous-if-caused-by-the-created-will, and others have the intrinsic value property of being virtuous-if-caused-by-the-created-will-when-certain-divine-ordinances-are-operative" ("Is To Will It As Bad As To Do It?: The Fourteenth Century Debate" *Franciscan Studies* 41 (1981): 5-60, here 28.)

necessarily virtuous in sense (ii) – i.e., loving God. All other necessarily virtuous acts are necessarily virtuous in sense (i).

This is significant, for if loving God isn't necessarily virtuous in sense (i), then loving God doesn't depend in any way on God's commands for its being virtuous. Or, in Freppert's words, "the act of loving God is necessarily virtuous apart from any consideration of the divine precept," and "it remains unaffected by any precept of God."[262] That's why loving God, on Freppert's account, is the "primary" necessarily virtuous act, whereas all other necessarily virtuous acts are merely "secondary." He explains,

> The primary virtuous act is the love of God….But it seems he holds that other acts of the will are also necessarily virtuous – *but all of these other acts would depend on the condition that the divine precept which commands them remains in force*. These other acts are what we have designated as the secondary necessarily virtuous acts. They depend, therefore, on the primary necessarily virtuous act, the love of God.[263]

Thus, for Freppert, all acts are necessarily virtuous in sense (i) except for loving God – the only act "unaffected" by God's commands. This is how Freppert situates the act of loving God as fundamental for Ockham, since all secondary necessarily virtuous acts depend upon it. This is also how Freppert's objection attempts to undermine (1): all necessarily virtuous acts (in the non-literal sense) depend upon God's commands *except one*: loving God.

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[262] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 148.

[263] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 148-49. My italics.

The reasons Freppert gives for characterizing the act of loving God as "primary" are twofold.[264] First, while sense (i) is mentioned about the necessarily virtuous act in QV 7.1 (Ockham's earlier writing), it's not mentioned about the act of loving God in the Misunderstood Statement and its proceeding context – i.e., an objection and Ockham's response we'll look at shortly – in Quod 3.14 (Ockham's later writing). And second, while sense (ii) isn't found in QV 7.1, it's mentioned about the act of loving God in the Misunderstood Statement and its proceeding context in Quod 3.14. Thus, Freppert thinks Ockham makes a "development" in Quod 3.14: Ockham doesn't reject his older position that the necessarily virtuous acts are to be understood in sense (i); he simply grounds those acts in the primary and fundamental act of loving God, which, being necessarily virtuous in sense (ii) and not sense (i), is unaffected even by God's commands.

Stage 4: Rebutting Freppert's Objection

Ultimately, I'll argue that Ockham didn't intend (i) and (ii) to be exclusive. Rather, I believe Ockham added (ii) simply to be able to respond to a particular objection, the very objection Ockham mentions immediately following the Misunderstood Statement. This objection also makes obvious why (i) is absent from Ockham's response. And, further, it indicates that Freppert's primary/secondary distinction collapses. But before turning there, let me point out that there are good reasons for thinking (i) and (ii) aren't exclusive. Here are four reasons, from both inside and outside Quod 3.14.

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[264] Freppert, *The Basis of Morality*, 147-48.

4.1: Four Reasons

First, Ockham makes no reference to exclusivity when first introducing (ii).

Recall what Ockham says in the Relevant Context: "Yet an act can be understood to be

necessarily virtuous in another (*aliter*) [what I've been calling "non-literal"] sense,

namely in such a way that (i) it cannot be vicious if the divine command remains.

Likewise (*similiter*) (ii) the act cannot be caused by a created will without being

virtuous."[265] Ockham's adverb of choice for connecting (i) and (ii) – *similiter* (from

similis + the adverbial suffix *iter*) – denotes *similarity*; Freppert's exclusivity

interpretation would better fit *aliter*, *difference* or *otherness* – the very word Ockham uses

earlier in that same sentence to differentiate the *other* (what I've been calling *non-literal*)

sense of a necessarily virtuous act. But Freppert adds the disjunctive *or* in his

translation, which, while fitting his account nicely, isn't found in Ockham.[266]

Second, if Ockham's ethics truly changed from (i) in QV 7.1 to (ii) in the

Misunderstood Statement, its odd that Ockham bothered to mention (i) in the Relevant

Context of Quod 3.14 at all. It's even stranger that Ockham would mention both (i) and

(ii) in the Relevant Context, and then only employ (ii) in the rest of Quod 3.14.

Third, Freppert's exclusivity interpretation stakes much on the absence of

something which could safely be implied from the surrounding context. To see this,

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[265] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 255.43-5: "*aliter potest intelligi actum esse necessario virtuosum, ita scilicet quod non possit esse vitiosus stante praecepto divino; similiter non potest causari a voluntate creata nisi sit virtuosus.*"

[266] Freppert says that "the proposition 'an act is necessarily virtuous' can be understood to mean that the act which is necessarily virtuous cannot be evil while the divine precept remains in force—*or* that it means that the act cannot be caused by the created will in such a way that the act will not be virtuous" (*The Basis of Morality*, 147, my italics).

let's look at the Relevant Context and the Misunderstood Statement side by side once more:

The Relevant Context

(i) it [i.e., a necessarily virtuous act in the non-literal sense] cannot be vicious if the divine command remains. Likewise (ii), the act cannot be caused by a created will without being virtuous.

The Misunderstood Statement

that act [of loving God is virtuous in the sense that (I) it cannot be vicious, and (II) that act cannot be caused by a created will without being virtuous.

Recall that one reason for Frepper's view that the act of loving God is primary (and hence, that (i) and (ii) are exclusive) is that the divine-command qualification isn't mentioned concerning the act of loving God. That is, that (I) lacks the divine-command qualification present in (i). But, as mentioned above, the qualification could safely be implied, both because the Relevant Context and the Misunderstood Statement mirror each other so similarly, and because the Relevant Context, which includes the qualification, is mentioned immediately prior to the Misunderstood Statement. At the very least, Freppert's argument from silence stakes much on the absence of something which could safely be implied from its immediate context. Moreover, if Ockham intended for (i) and (ii) to be exclusive, merely omitting the qualification in (I) is very subtle indeed.

And fourth, which we've already seen, is consistency. It is because Freppert holds (i) and (ii) as exclusive that he's able, then, to situate the act of loving God as necessarily virtuous "apart from" God's commands. But that's what brings about Freppert's inconsistency with Rep 2.15 and QV 8, where Ockham says the obligation to love God is because of a divine command. One way Freppert tries to mitigate this

inconsistency is by claiming that loving God and obeying his commands are equivalent.[267] But that's what brings about Freppert's inconsistency with Rep 4.16, where Ockham shows that they aren't equivalent, since one can obey God's command to hate him.

Now while it's possible, as Freppert claims, that Ockham's "development" in Quod 3.14 is simply inconsistent with these old writings. My point is merely that, when interpreting Quod 3.14, we have good reason (both from context and consistency) *not* to interpret (i) and (ii) as exclusive. At the very least, there should be significant reasons for viewing them as exclusive. We've already seen that one of Freppert's reasons – the lack of the qualifier – is surprisingly thin. But let's now turn to the context after the Misunderstood Statement – an objection and Ockham's response – to see why (ii) is present in Ockham's response and why (i) isn't.

4.2: The Objection and Ockham's Response

After the Misunderstood Statement, Ockham mentions an objection that concludes "an act of loving God above all is not virtuous." On the heels of Ockham's

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[267] Concerning Ockham's claim in Rep 2.15 that the created will is obligated to love God because of a divine command (*voluntas create obligatur ex praecepto Dei ad diligendum Deum*), Freppert says that *Rep* 2.15 "could be interpreted in the sense that the phrase 'out of obedience to the divine command' is understood not as stating the basis for the love of God but as emphasizing one aspect of that love. Thus the love of God and obedience to a divine precept are necessarily virtuous acts; and all other acts are only contingently virtuous, that is, virtuous in so far as they are performed out of love for God, or equivalently, out of obedience to a divine precept" (*The Basis of Morality*, 123). Freppert's done two things here. First, he's supplied the claim that loving God and obeying him are equivalent – something Ockham never says and is inconsistent with what Ockham does say in *Rep* 4.16. And second, he's stretched Ockham's words to say the very opposite of what Ockham actually says. Ockham says: the obligation to love God is because of a divine command. Somehow Freppert has turned that into: the obligation to love God is because of an aspect of that love. Freppert's interpretation is quite different indeed from what Ockham actually says.

claim that loving God is necessarily virtuous, this appears to be an interesting objection

indeed. Here's the objection at length:

> Someone might object that God is able to command that he himself should
> not be loved for some [stretch of] time, since he is able to command that
> the intellect should be intent on study to such a degree – and the will
> [should be] similarly [intent] – that he would not think about God for that
> [stretch of] time. Next I imagine that the will then would elicit an act of
> loving God; and then either (i) that act [of loving God] is virtuous, and
> this cannot be said since [the act of loving God] is elicited contrary to the
> divine command; or (ii) [that act of loving God] is not virtuous, and I have
> what I set out to prove: that an act of loving God above all is not
> virtuous.[268]

Interestingly, Ockham's response doesn't conclude that the act of loving God is

virtuous, but (perhaps surprisingly) that, under these hypothetical circumstances, the

will can't elicit an act of loving God. He says,

> I respond: if God were able to command this [i.e., that he is not to be loved
> for some stretch of time], as it seems that he can without contradiction,
> then I say that the will cannot elicit such an act [of loving God] for that
> [stretch of] time; for from the fact that the will would elicit such an act, the
> will would love God above all, and consequently the will would fulfill the
> divine command, since what it is to love God above all is to love whatever
> God wills to be loved; and from the fact that the will would love in this
> way, the will would not perform the divine command in [this] case; and
> consequently when the will loves in this way, the will would love God
> and would not love [God]; the will would perform the command of God
> and would not perform [it].[269]

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[268] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 256.74-81: "*Si dicis quod Deus potest praecipere quod pro aliquo tempore non diligatur ipse, quia potest praecipere quod intellectus sit sic intentus circa studium et voluntas similiter, ut nihil possit pro illo tempore de Deo cogitare. Tunc volo quod voluntas tunc eliciat actum diligendi Deum; et tunc aut ille actus est virtuosus, et hoc non potest dici, quia elicitur contra praeceptum divinum; aut non est virtuosus, et habetur propositum, quod actus diligendi Deum super omnia non est virtuosus.*"

[269] *Quod* 3.14, *OT* IX, 256.83-257.91: "*Respondeo: si Deus posset hoc praecipere, sicut videtur quod potest sine contradictione, dico tunc quod voluntas non potest pro tunc talem actum elicere; quia ex hoc ipso quod talem actum eliceret, Deum diligeret super omnia, et per consequens impleret praeceptum divinum, quia hoc est diligere Deum super omnia: diligere quidquid Deus vult diligi; et ex hoc ipso quod sic diligeret, non faceret praeceptum divinum per casum; et per consequens sic diligendo, Deum diligeret et non diligeret, faceret praeceptum Dei et non faceret.*"

Thus, Ockham's response concludes: if God commands us not to love him, then the will[270] can't elicit an act of loving him. And here's why. If one elicited an act of loving God, one wouldn't love God (because one would disobey God's command *not* to love him). Ockham here states that loving God entails obeying him (or, put contrapositively, that if one doesn't obey God, then one doesn't love God). He says this when he states "this is to love God above all: to love whatever God wills to be loved." So if God wills my neighbor to be loved by me, and yet I don't love my neighbor, it follows that I don't love God either. Or to use Ockham's own example: if God commands us not to love him, and yet we elicit an act of loving him, then we don't love him (for if one doesn't obey God, one doesn't love God).

As a quick aside, we've seen enough now to see that Freppert's overstatement, concerning the equivalence of loving God and obeying him, is in fact mistaken. Ockham merely states in Quod 3.14 that loving God entails obeying him. To attribute to Ockham the further claim that obeying God entails loving him is an overstatement. And, as we saw above, Rep 4.16 shows us that it's a *mistaken* overstatement. Thus, for Ockham, loving God entails obeying him, but obeying God doesn't entail loving him.

But let's return to the conclusion of Ockham's response: that if God commands us not to love him, then the will can't elicit an act of loving him. It's important to note that Ockham grants the objector's claim that God can command us *not* to love him. Appreciating this explains why (i) is absent from Ockham's response. Concerning the

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[270] The *will* Ockham is talking about here is a *created will*. This is clear from context. For example, (ii) of the Relevant Context explicitly concerns a *created* will. Moreover, God's will is exempt because, as explained above, he has no obligations.

act of loving God, (i) says that *if* God's command to love him remains, then the act of loving him cannot be vicious. But the objection (and Ockham's response) is assuming the opposite: that God's command to love him does *not* remain (more specifically, that God in fact commands us not to love him). The objector and Ockham both have their respective consequents (that the act of loving God is not virtuous, for the objector, and that the act of loving God can't be caused by a created will, for Ockham), but of course (i) wouldn't appear anywhere in Ockham's response because he's assuming its very opposite.

It's also important to see how (ii) enables Ockham to respond to the objection. Concerning the act of loving God, (ii) says that the act of loving God can't be caused by a created will unless the act of loving God is virtuous (or, put contrapositively, if the act of loving God *can* be caused by a created will, then the act of loving God is virtuous). Thus, Ockham is able to respond to the objection that *if* God commands us not to love him, the act of loving God simply can't be caused by a created will. But the act of loving God would still, in that case, be necessarily virtuous because whenever the act *can* be caused the act *is* virtuous.

Thus, (ii) enables Ockham to respond where (i) can't. (i) says that *if* God's command to love him remains, the act can't be vicious. But *even if* (as Ockham grants is possible) God commands us *not* to love him, the act of loving God is still necessarily virtuous because (from (ii)) whenever the act can be caused, the act is virtuous. That's why Ockham first introduces (ii) in Quod 3.14: because he is responding to an objection that he also first introduces in Quod 3.14. (i) and (ii) complement and clarify what it

means for an act to be necessarily virtuous. Concerning the act of loving God, (i) answers that the act can't be vicious *if* God's command to love him remains; (ii) answers that the act can't be caused if God's command *doesn't* remain.

Moreover, recall the four reasons given in Section 4.1 against viewing (i) and (ii) as exclusive. Here's a fifth reason to add to that number: now that we've examined the objection and Ockham's response in Quod 3.14, it can be pointed out that the same could have been said concerning the necessarily virtuous act in Ockham's earlier QV 7.1. That is, there's nothing in Ockham's "development" in Quod 3.14 concerning loving God that can't also be applied in QV 7.1 concerning willing something because God commands it. This is significant, for it shows (contrary to Freppert) that the act of loving God didn't occupy a unique or primary role in Ockham's ethics and, hence, that Freppert's primary/secondary distinction collapses. To see this, let's turn back to QV 7.1.

Recall, as just mentioned, that the necessarily virtuous act Ockham mentions in QV 7.1 is willing to do something because it is a divine command. Also recall that Ockham says that that act is necessarily virtuous in sense (i): that to will to do something because it is a divine command "is virtuous in such a way that it cannot be made vicious, if the divine command remains."[271] So, mirroring Quod 3.14, let's assume the divine command *doesn't* remain – that is, let's grant that God commands us *not* to will to do something because it is a divine command. Turns out, just like in Quod 3.14, Ockham could respond that the will couldn't elicit the act of willing to do

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[271] *QV* 7.1, *OT* VIII, 328.127-28.

something because it is a divine command. And here's why, just like in Quod 3.14: if

one elicited an act of willing to do something because it is a divine command, then the

will wouldn't elicit an act of willing to do something because it is a divine command

(since one would disobey God's command *not* to will to do something because it is a

divine command).[272] Thus, if God commands us not to will to do something because it

is a divine command, then the will can't elicit an act of willing to do something because

it is a divine command.

Note that, just like in Quod 3.14, (i) wouldn't appear anywhere in Ockham's

response in QV 7.1 because Ockham's assuming its very opposite. But (ii) could

provide Ockham a response where (i) can't. *Even if* (as could be granted, mirroring

Quod 3.14) God commands us *not* to will something because it's a divine command, the

act of willing to do something because it's a divine command is still necessarily

virtuous because whenever the act *can* be caused the act is virtuous.

I point this out for two reasons. First, it shows that Freppert is mistaken that the

act of loving God has some unique or primary role in Ockham's necessarily virtuous

acts. Recall that Freppert introduces his distinction between primary and secondary

necessarily virtuous acts because he believes that Ockham's remarks concerning (ii) in

Quod 3.14 are unique to the act of loving God: that it alone is necessarily virtuous

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[272] Similar to *Quod* 3.14, where the necessarily virtuous act (of loving God) entails obedience, the necessarily virtuous act in *QV* 7.1 (of willing to do something because its a divine command) *just is* obedience. If one obeys, then one wills to do something because it's a divine command. And if one wills to do something because it's a divine command, then one obeys. It appears, then, that obedience (rather than love) is the real root of getting the necessarily virtuous acts of *Quod* 3.14 and *QV* 7.1 their self-defeating feature: that if God commands the opposite of the necessarily virtuous act, then the will can't elicit such an act (since the will would disobey).

"apart from" God's commands. But this shows that Ockham's introduction of (ii) in Quod 3.14 isn't, in fact, unique to the act of loving God; it can equally be applied to the necessarily virtuous act in QV 7.1. I take this as evidence that Freppert's primary/secondary distinction is not merely an overstatement, but a mistaken overstatement. The overstatement initially introduced to set apart the act of loving God as unique from the other necessarily virtuous acts fails to do so; the "primary" act of loving God collapses into a necessarily virtuous act just like the "secondary" one in QV 7.1.

Second, I take this as further evidence that Ockham didn't intend (i) and (ii) to be exclusive. Rather, he simply introduced (ii) to be able to respond to the objection that assumes the opposite of (i), an objection Ockham mentions in Quod 3.14 and very well could have mentioned in QV 7.1.

Conclusion

I've argued we have good reason to believe that Ockham didn't intend (i) and (ii) to be exclusive. Thus, Freppert's attempt to undermine (1) fails. Thus, (1) is *ultima facie* true: all necessarily virtuous acts in the non-literal sense (including loving God) depend upon divine commands in some way for their being virtuous. Thus, (3) is shown to be true: the necessarily virtuous act of loving God in the Misunderstood Statement depends upon divine commands in some way for its being virtuous.

Therefore, the passage Freppert and King think is key for their account that loving God is fundamental for Ockham, in fact, supports the view that loving God is grounded in something further still, God's commands. Such a conclusion is consistent

with Rep 2.15 and QV 8, that a created will is obligated to love God because of a divine command. Thus, loving God isn't fundamental for Ockham because it's grounded in something more fundamental still: God's commands.

Chapter Four:

Against Adams: Right Reason is Derivative, Divine Commands are Fundamental

The last chapter sought to undermine the first of three arguments that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist – the Loving God is Fundamental Argument. This chapter seeks to undermine the other two – the Right Reason Argument and the Non-Positive Moral Law Argument. Recall that the former argues that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist because his ethical theory includes a role for right reason. And the latter argues that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist because he holds that a portion of the moral law (i.e., the non-positive moral law) is ultimately grounded in something other than God's commands.

And while there are multiple examples of these arguments in print,[273] the most thoroughly developed come from perhaps the foremost Ockham scholar of the last forty years – Marilyn Adams.[274] So her arguments, and the account of Ockham's ethics from which her arguments stem, are the main opposition of this chapter. Adams's account of Ockham's ethics, in brief, is that there are two norms and two categories of morality.

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[273] See the Introduction.

[274] For Adams's account of Ockham's ethics, see: "The Structure of Ockham's Moral Theory" *Franciscan Studies* 46 (1986): 1-35; "William Ockham: Voluntarist or Naturalist? In *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Wippel (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987): 219-48; and "Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality" in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 245-72.

The two norms are right reason and divine commands;[275] the two categories are positive

morality and non-positive morality.[276] In the category of non-positive morality, Adams

thinks that right reason is the fundamental norm (that is, there is no more basic norm

that justifies it), while divine commands are a derivative norm (that is, there is a more

basic norm that justifies it – from which it *derives* its normative authority, in this case

right reason).[277] In the category of positive morality, the norms are reversed: divine

commands are the fundamental norm, while right reason is a derivative norm.[278] And

both arguments straightforwardly follow from such an account. For Adams's Right

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[275] For one example, Adams says that "(i) Ockham does recognize the commands of a free and omnipotent God as a norm of morality, and (ii) he does follow Aristotle in assigning the dictates of right reason a normative role as well" ("Ockham's Moral Theory," 4). Elsewhere Adams similarly states that "Ockham insists on the controversial assumption that it is enough for the coherence of moral theory if the two criteria for morally virtuous action, right reason and divine precepts, in fact yield extensionally equivalent results" ("Will, Nature, and Morality," 266; Adams's italics omitted).

[276] Adams characterizes them as "the two value categories of nonpositive and positive morality" ("Voluntarist or Naturalist," 327, footnote 102). She elaborates elsewhere that "Ockham explicitly divides the subject into two parts: (i) 'Non-positive moral science' 'directs human acts apart from any precept of a superior' or authority….(ii) By contrast, 'positive moral science is that which contains divine and human laws which oblige one to pursue or avoid things which are neither good nor evil except because they are prohibited or commanded by a superior to whom it belongs to make (*statuere*) laws'….The precepts of non-positive morality have the authority of the agent's own reason underlying them; those of the latter bind by virtue of some external authority" ("Ockham's Moral Theory," 15-6).

[277] For one example, Adams says "Thus, there is a double criterion of a morally virtuous act – the dictates of right reason, on the one hand, and divine precepts on the other. But within the sphere of non-positive morality, the latter derives its authority from the former" ("Ockham's Moral Theory," 24). Elsewhere Adams similarly states, "Where nonpositive morality is concerned, the agent's own right reason is the primary norm. But suitably informed right reason will derive divine commands as a secondary norm" ("Will, Nature, and Morality," 257). The terms "fundamental norm" and "derivative norm" are original to Adams, though she doesn't define them. The definitions offered here are simply an attempt to clarify Adams's original intent.

[278] For one example, Adams says, "With the sphere of positive morality, we arrive at a category in which Ockham's theory is fundamentally voluntaristic rather than naturalistic" (Voluntarist or Naturalist? 243). Elsewhere she states that "divine command and right reason are twin criteria in the category of merit and demerit as well as that of non-positive morality. But this time God's commands are fundamental and right reason's role derivative, whereas before it was the other way around" ("Voluntarist or Naturalist?" 245).

Reason Argument, since Ockham's ethical theory includes a role for right reason – that it's a fundamental norm in non-positive morality – Ockham isn't a divine command theorist. Or as she puts it:

> For Ockham, it is a necessary truth that divine commands are a derivative norm in non-positive morality, but that does not make his theory an authoritarian "Divine Command Ethics." For in theories of the latter type, the obligation of the commanded person to obey comes from without and binds the individual so to act even against his own reason and deepest inclinations. In Ockham's account of non-positive morality, this is not so….Because Ockham's ethics begins with right reason and is led thereby to divine commands…his theory might be better labelled "Modified Right Reason Theory."[279]

And as for Adams's Non-Positive Moral Law Argument, since non-positive moral law has a foundation in something other than God's commands – namely, right reason – Ockham isn't a divine command theorist. Adams says "caution is in order" concerning the possibility that Ockham is a divine command theorist because

> Ockham retains the distinction between nonpositive morality or ethics – which is based on principles known per se or through experience quite apart from the commands of any authority – and positive morality – which pertains to human or divine laws having to do with matters that are neither good nor bad except insofar as they are commanded or prohibited by the authority.[280]

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[279] Adams, "Ockham's Moral Theory," 33-4. Adams similarly states that "Ockham's recognition of divine commands as a [derivative] norm in nonpositive morality gives the will a prominence unprecedented in medieval Aristotelianism….Nevertheless, commentators are wrong to characterize Ockham's ethics as a 'divine command theory,' as if God's precepts were the only norm" ("Voluntarist or Naturalist?" 242).

[280] Adams, "Will, Nature, and Morality," 246. Elsewhere Adams similarly states, "And this common ground identifies the norm of nonpositive morality with the deliverances of right reason, as prior to and independent of the agent's choices and/or the free and contingent legislation of any external authorities" ("Voluntarism or Naturalism?" 239).

Thus, even if divine commands are fundamental for positive morality, they aren't

fundamental for non-positive morality. And since divine command theory is the view

that *all* of morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands, it follows, according to

Adams, that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist.

One difficulty Adams recognizes with her account is that Ockham's ethics can

"breakdown" – that is, given certain divine commands, the dictates of right reason can

contradict. Adams claims that Ockham's account of right reason can imply both (i) that

God ought to be loved and (ii) that God ought to be obeyed; but Ockham thinks it's

possible for God to command us to hate Him; thus, right reason would dictate both that

God ought to be loved and that he ought to be hated, which are contradictory for

Ockham.[281] Despite such a breakdown's being logically possible, Adams optimistically

concludes "The two norms could break apart but they do not and will not!"[282]

The reason for Adams's optimism is not entirely clear, for if the two norms can

break apart (as she admits), then how can she be so confident, not merely that they

don't, but that they *won't*? I offer an alternative account of Ockham's ethics, one that

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[281] Adams raises the difficulty that Ockham's ethics can "break down" throughout her writings –
e.g., "Ockham's Moral Theory," 29, 24-5; "Voluntarist or Naturalist," 241-2, 245 – but her latest writing
may also be the most explicit: "…right reason infers from divine natural excellence that God ought to be
loved above all and for God's own sake; suitably informed right reason, that divine commands are a
secondary ethical norm. But according to Ockham, divine liberty of indifference means God could forbid
us to love or even command us to hate him. Likewise, God could command the opposite of what right
reason dictates, whether in general or in particular. Given such divine precepts, right reason would
enjoin contradictory dictates. And this would mean the breakdown of Ockham's ideal of the moral life as
one in which at the highest degrees of virtue agents freely commit themselves to do whatever right
reason dictates for right reason's sake or whatever God commands for God's sake, or both" ("Will,
Nature, and Morality," 265-6). Concerning that loving God and hating him are contradictory, see *Rep*
2.15, *OT* V, 342.4; *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 391.351-2.

[282] Adams, "Will, Nature, and Morality," 266.

both avoids her "breakdown" and undermines her Right Reason and Non-Positive

Moral Law Arguments.

My view, as mentioned previously, is that Ockham is a divine command theorist

– i.e., one who holds that all of morality is ultimately grounded in God's commands.

And by "God's commands," following Osborne, I mean not only God's explicit

commands (the Ten Commandments, say) but also God's free decisions to make any

specific acts right or wrong.[283] Instead of, like Adams, seeing positive and non-positive

morality as two *categories* of morality, I see them as two ways to *know* morality. Put

differently, Adams sees Ockham's positive/non-positive distinction as a metaphysical

distinction; I think Ockham intended it primarily as an epistemological one.[284] And

while I agree with Adams that the two norms of morality for Ockham are right reason

and divine commands, I see the latter as the fundamental norm and the former as the

derivative norm for *all of morality*, not just for positive morality.

My account avoids Adams's "breakdown," for there can be no conflict between

right reason and divine commands because the former derives its normative authority

from the latter. My account undermines her Non-Positive Moral Law Argument for,

taking the positive/non-positive distinction epistemologically, there aren't two

categories of morality – non-positive grounded in right reason, and positive grounded

in divine commands – but only one which is ultimately grounded in divine commands.

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[283] Thomas Osborne, "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist" *Religious Studies* 41 (2005): 1-22, here 3.

[284] Osborne similarly holds that "the distinction between positive and non-positive more science is only about the way in which different obligations are known" ("Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist," 2-3).

And my account undermines her Right Reason Argument, for there is nothing incompatible about such a version of divine command theory – the view that all of morality is ultimately grounded in divine commands – incorporating right reason as a norm derived from the fundamental norm of divine commands. Rather, as Osborne rightly states, "Ockham's moral theory is designed to take into account two different positions, namely (1) that pagans can have moral knowledge even though they are ignorant of God's commands; and (2) the moral value of any action has its ultimate source in God's commands or prohibitions."[285] This chapter has two stages. First, Ockham's positive/non-positive distinction is primarily an epistemological distinction. And second, Ockham characterizes right reason as a norm derived from the fundamental norm of divine commands, but not vice versa.

Stage 1: Ockham's Positive/Non-Positive Distinction is Primarily an Epistemological Distinction:

The only place where Ockham makes the distinction between positive and non-positive moral science is Quod 2.14. To situate this important distinction in its proper context, this quodlibet asks "Whether There Can Be Demonstrative Knowledge (*Scientia*) about Morals."[286] Ockham defines a demonstration elsewhere as a syllogism producing knowledge from evidently known necessary premises.[287] So Quod 2.14 is

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[285] Osborne, "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist," 11.

[286] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 176.1: "*Utrum De Moralibus Possit Esse Scientia Demonstrativa*"

[287] *Summa Logicae*, *OP* I, 505.1-506.46. See also *Summa Logicae*, *OP* I, 359.14-6: "A demonstrative syllogism is that by which the first cognition of a conclusion can be acquired from necessary propositions evidently known" (*Syllogismus demonstrativus est ille in quo ex propositionibus necessariis evidenter notis potest*

asking an *epistemological* question: whether morals are the kind of thing that can be demonstratively *known*, namely from syllogisms with evident premises. This already suggests that the distinction is an epistemological one: positive and non-positive moral *scientia* (*science* or *knowledge*). But a look at the entire quodlibet shows this even more clearly. Ockham ultimately argues that *some* morals can be known demonstratively, but he mentions how one might argue they *can't* – call it the Morals Aren't Demonstrative Argument – as follows:

1) There can be no demonstrative knowledge about things which are subject to the will.

2) Morals are subject to the will.

3) Therefore, there can be no demonstrative knowledge about morals.[288]

This argument is valid, so in order to reject (3), Ockham must reject (1) or (2). Without even looking at the rest of this quodlibet it's clear that Ockham accepts (2), for, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Ockham thinks the will alone can act morally virtuous, for the will alone is free.

But it's also clear that Ockham accepts (2) from his remarks in Quod 2.14. The quodlibet is made up of three articles: (i) two senses of the term "moral," (ii) the distinction between positive and non-positive moral science, and (iii) Ockham's reply to

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adquiri prima notitia conclusionis). Cf., *Ord Prol*, q.2, *OT* I, 81.1-82.2. Moreover, see Chapter One, section 3 for a discussion of what Ockham means by evident knowledge.

[288] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 176.3-5: "For the negative: For there can be no demonstrative knowledge about things which are subject to the will; but morals are [subject to the will]; therefore [there can be no demonstrative knowledge about morals] (*Quod non: Quia de illis quae subiacent voluntati, non potest esse scientia demonstrativa; sed moralia sunt huiusmodi; igitur etc.*).

the question.[289] In the first article we learn that Ockham accepts (2). The term "moral"

can be taken in a broad sense – i.e., human acts subject to the will without further

specification – and a stricter sense – i.e., human acts subject to the will in accordance

with reason's dictate and the other circumstances.[290] Thus, it's clear from the first article

that Ockham accepts (2), for morals are, in either sense, subject to the will.

Since Ockham accepts (2) but rejects (3), he thereby must reject (1). His avenue

for rejecting (1) becomes clearer in the second article where he introduces the

positive/non-positive distinction. There he says,

> Concerning the second [article] it is known that moral doctrine has two
> parts, one of which is positive, the other non-positive. Positive moral
> science is that which contains human and divine laws, which obligate one
> to follow or avoid things which are neither good nor evil except because
> they are prohibited or commanded by a superior who has the authority to
> establish laws.
> Non-positive moral science is that which gives direction to human actions
> without any precept of a superior; for example, principles known per se or
> known through experience give direction in this sense, such as that every
> good thing should be done and every bad thing should be avoided, and
> the like, about which Aristotle speaks in moral philosophy.[291]

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[289] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 176.7-9: "In this question, first I will explain one of the terms of the question; second I will posit one distinction; third, [I will reply] to the question" (*In ista questione primo exponam unum terminum quaestionis; secondo ponam unam distinctionem; tertio, ad questionem*).

[290] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 176.11-177.16: "Concerning the first [article] I say that 'moral' is taken broadly for human acts which are subject to the will absolutely….Otherwise it's taken more strictly for morals or actions which are subject to the power of the will in accordance with the natural dictate of reason and in accordance with the other circumstances (*Circa primum dico quod 'morale' accipitur large pro actibus humanis qui subiacent voluntati absolute….Aliter accipitur magis stricte pro moribus sive actibus subiectis potestati voluntatis secundum naturale dictamen rationis et secundum alias circumstantias*).

[291] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 177.18-28: "*Circa secundum sciendum quod moralis doctrina habet plures partes, quarum una est positiva, alia non positiva. Scientia moralis positiva est illa quae continet leges humanas et divinas, quae obligant ad prosequendum vel fugiendum illa quae nec sunt bona nec mala nisi quia sunt prohibita vel imperata a superiore, cuius est leges statuere.*
Scientia moralis non positiva est illa quae sine omni praecepto superioris dirigit actus humanos; sicut principia per se nota vel nota per experientiam sic dirigunt, sicut quod omne honestum est faciendum, et omne inhonestum est fugiendum, et huiusmodi, de quibus loquitur Aristoteles in morali philosophia."

In order to reject (1) – i.e., that there's *no* demonstrative knowledge about things subject

to the will – Ockham needs a counterexample: that there's *some* demonstrative

knowledge about things subject to the will. Introducing the distinction in the second

article enables him to reply to the question in the third: that while both positive and

non-positive moral science are subject to the will (since, from the first article, "morals" in

either sense are subject to the will), only non-positive moral science is demonstrative

knowledge. He explains:

> Concerning the third [article] I say that positive moral science, such as the
> science of jurists, is not demonstrative knowledge, though it is regulated
> by demonstrative knowledge for the most part; for arguments of jurists
> are based on positive human laws, which do not take evidently known
> propositions as their starting points.
> But non-positive moral instruction is demonstrative knowledge. I prove
> [this], for knowledge that deduces conclusions syllogistically from
> principles known per se or through experience is demonstrative; such is
> moral instruction; therefore etc. The major premise is manifest. The
> minor premise is proven, for there are many principles known per se in
> moral philosophy; such as that the will ought to conform itself with right
> reason, every blameworthy evil should be avoided, and the like. Similarly
> many principles are known through experience, as is manifestly clear to
> someone who attends to experience.[292]

Thus, Ockham is clear that positive moral science is not demonstrative knowledge, but

non-positive moral science is demonstrative knowledge. The reason positive moral

science, such as the science of jurists, isn't demonstrative is that it's non-evidently

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[292] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 177.30-178.43: "*Circa tertium dico quod moralis scientia positiva, cuiusmodi est scientia iuristarum, non est scientia demonstrativa, quamvis sit a scientia demonstrativa ut in pluribus regulata; quia rationes iuristarum fundantur super leges humanas positivas, quae non accipiunt propositiones evidenter notas.*
> *Sed disciplina moralis non positiva est scientia demonstrativa. Probo, quia notitia deducens conclusiones syllogistice ex principiis per se notis vel per experientiam scitis est demonstrativa; huiusmodi est disciplina moralis; igitur etc. Maior est manifesta. Minor probatur, quia multa sunt principia per se nota in morali philosophia; puta quod voluntas debet se conformare rectae rationi, omne malum vituperabile est fugiendum, et huiusmodi. Similiter per experientiam sciuntur multa principia, sicut manifeste patet sequenti experientiam.*"

known through authority or faith. Recall from Chapter One that Ockham distinguishes evident knowledge from faith.[293] Faith is one's intellectual assent to a proposition because one trusts the testimony of authoritative witnesses, like assenting to the proposition that Rome is a great city despite not having seen it.[294] Evident knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge of the highest epistemic degree, known either per se or through experience.[295]

Thus, since syllogisms of positive moral science include non-evident premises, they're not demonstrative. Here's such an example: Every instance of speeding should be avoided; Driving 60mph when the speed limit is 45mph is an instance of speeding; Therefore, driving 60mph when the speed limit is 45mph should be avoided. This syllogism includes non-evident premises known only from faith – one must be *told* or *read about* speed limit laws in order to know them – and thereby isn't demonstrative.

But non-positive moral science is a different story. It is demonstrative since it's evidently known, either per se (like "every blameworthy evil should be avoided") or through experience (like "any irascible person should be soothed with calm words").[296] And since syllogisms of non-positive moral science include evident premises, they are thereby demonstrative. This gives Ockham the counterexample he needs against (1): there can be *some* demonstrative knowledge about things which are subject to the will –

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[293] See Chapter One, section 3. See also Freddoso and Kelley, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 5, footnote 1; 192, footnote 24; and 402-4, footnotes 4,7, and 10.

[294] *Prol*, *OP* IV, 5.30-4.

[295] *Ord*, *Prol*, q.2 *OT* I, 81.20-21; *Prol*, *OP* IV, 6.38-40.

[296] Though not mentioned in *Quod* 2.14, Ockham gives this example of evident knowledge from experience in *QV* 6.10, *OT* VIII, 282.227-9 and *QV* 7.2, *OT* VIII, 330.12-3.

namely, non-positive moral science. Thus, Ockham rejects (3) – that there can be no demonstrative knowledge about morals – by rejecting (1). And he rejects (1) by introducing the positive/non-positive distinction: though positive moral science isn't demonstrative knowledge, non-positive moral science is.

Thus, Ockham's positive/non-positive distinction is primarily an epistemological one: there are two ways to *know* morality: positive moral science is known non-evidently from faith, whereas non-positive moral science is known evidently either per se or through experience. But while the distinction is *primarily* an epistemological one, Ockham does state the metaphysical source of moral obligation – that is, the norm – of positive moral science (though importantly he doesn't also state the norm of non-positive moral science, as will be discussed shortly).

Concerning positive moral science, Ockham explicitly states that the source of obligation is the "superior" – whether human or divine – who establishes the laws. Recall that Ockham says, "Positive moral science is that which contains human and divine laws, which obligate one to follow or avoid things which are neither good nor evil except because they are prohibited or commanded by a superior who has the authority to establish laws."[297] Thus, not only do we come to *know* positive moral science from authority, but additionally positive moral science comes to *exist* from authority. Returning to the speeding example, going 60mph in a speed limit of 45mph

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[297] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 177.19-23: "*Scientia moralis positiva est illa quae continet leges humanas et divinas, quae obligant ad prosequendum vel fugiendum illa quae nec sunt bona nec mala nisi quia sunt prohibita vel imperata a superiore, cuius est leges statuere.*"

is "neither good nor evil" except because it's prohibited by the human authority who establishes such laws.

Moreover, what Ockham says here in Quod 2.14 concerning positive moral science coming to *exist* from authority is consistent with what he says elsewhere concerning some of morality coming to *exist* from divine commands. Recall from Chapter Two that Ockham thinks divine commands are a norm or source of moral obligation. For one example just discussed in the last chapter, Ockham reveals that one is obligated to love God and that the source of that obligation is a divine command. He states, "The created will is obligated by a command of God for God to be loved, and for that reason while that command remains it cannot properly hate God."[298] For one more example (of many), Ockham states,

> I say although hatred, stealing, committing adultery and similar [acts]
> have an evil circumstance attached because of the common law, insofar as
> they are done by someone who is obligated by divine command to the
> opposite, yet as for every absolute thing in those actions, they can be done
> by God without any evil circumstance attached. Moreover they can also
> be done meritoriously by a wayfarer if they fell under a divine command,
> as now, in fact, their opposites fall under a divine command. But as long
> as the divine command remains for their opposites, someone couldn't
> exercise such acts meritoriously or properly, for they would not be
> exercised meritoriously unless they fell under a divine command.[299]

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[298] *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 353.6-8: "*voluntas creata obligatur ex praecepto Dei ad diligendum Deum, et ideo stante illo praecepto non potest bene odire Deum.*" Elsewhere Ockham conversely claims that hating God can be right if God commands it: "everything that can be a right action on earth, also [can be a right action] in heaven. But to hate God can be a right action on earth – such as if it's commanded by God – therefore [it can be a right action] in heaven" (*Rep* 4.16, *OT* VII, 352.8-10: "*omne quod potest esse actus rectus in via, et in patria. Sed odire Deum potest esse actus rectus in via, puta si praecipiatur a Deo, igitur in patria*").

[299] *Rep* 2.15, *OT* V, 352.3-12: "*dico quod licet odium, furari, adulterari et similia habeant malam circumstantiam annexam de communi lege, quatenus fiunt ab aliquo qui ex praecepto divino obligatur ad contrarium, tamen quantum ad omne absolutum in illis actibus possunt fieri a Deo sine omni circumstantia mala annexa. Et etiam meritorie possunt fieri a viatore si caderent sub praecepto divino, sicut nunc de facto eorum opposita cadunt sub praecepto. Sed stante praecepto divino ad eorum opposita non posset aliquis tales actus meritorie nec bene exercere, quia non possent [exerceri] meritorie nisi caderent sub praecepto divino.*" And there

Thus, it's clear that divine commands are a norm or source of moral obligation for

Ockham. Even Adams accepts this.[300] So not only is positive moral science *known* from

authority, it also comes to *exist* from authority.

are numerous passages where Ockham reiterates that divine commands are a source of moral obligation. For example, he says "the will always sins by a sin of commission when it elicits some act for which the opposite is obligated through a divine command or divine ordination" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 428.434-36: *quia semper peccat voluntas peccato commissionis quando elicit aliquem actum ad cuius oppositum obligatur per praeceptum divinum vel ordinationem divinam*). He also says, "the will elicits an act which it ought not to elicit because [it is] contrary to the divine will and command, and similarly it does not elicit a right act which it ought to elicit according to the divine command, and accordingly it sins by a sin of commission and [by a sin] of omission" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 383.158-61: *voluntas elicit actum quem non debuit elicere quia contra voluntatem et praeceptum divinum, et similiter non elicit actum rectum quem debuit elicere secundum praeceptum divinum, et ita peccat peccato commissionis et omissionis*). "God is a debtor to no one, and thus he is neither obligated to cause that [sinful] act or the opposite act, nor not to cause that act, and thus he does not sin whenever he causes that act. A created will, however, is obligated through a divine command not to cause that act, and consequently sins by causing that act, since it does what it ought not to do. Hence if the created will wasn't obligated for not causing that act or the opposite, whenever it would cause that [act], it would never sin just as God doesn't" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 389.322-30: "*Deus nullius est debitor, et idea nec tenetur illum actum causare nec oppositum actum, nec illum actum non causare, et ideo non peccat quantumcumque illum actum causet. Voluntas autem creata tenetur per praeceptum divinum illum actum non causare, et per consequens in causando illum actum peccat, quia facit quod non debet facere. Unde si voluntas creata non obligaretur ad non causandum illum actum vel oppositum, quantumcumque causaret illum, numquam peccaret sicut nec Deus*"). Elsewhere he says, "that will is bound and obligated to elicit some other act according to divine command which it did not elicit, and accordingly it sins by a sin of omission. And accordingly, rectitude is nothing absolute or relative other than the act itself which ought to be elicited in accordance with right reason and the will of God" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 386.237-41: "*quod voluntas tenetur et obligatur aliquem alium actum elicere secundum praeceptum divinum quem non elicit, et sic peccat peccato omissionis; et ita rectitudo nihil absolutum vel respectivum est aliud quam ipse actus qui debuit elici secundum rectam rationem et voluntatem Dei*"). "And similarly the will elicits some act which it is obligated not to elicit since it elicits contrary to right reason and the command of God, and in this way it sins by a sin of commission" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 387.259-61: "*Et similiter voluntas elicit aliquem actum quem tenetur non elicere quia elicit contra rectam rationem et praeceptum Dei, et sic peccat peccato commissionis*"). He says "everyone who sins mortally either does something that God wills him not to do since he commands it not to be done, or he does not do what God wills to be done since God commands it to be done" (*QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 390.336-39: "*omnis peccans mortaliter vel facit aliquid quod Deus non vult eum facere quia praecipit illud non fieri, vel non facit quod Deus vult fieri quia Deus praecipit illud fieri*") Venial sins needn't avert one from God, though mortal sins do. For helpful discussions of this standard Scholastic distinction see Adams, *William Ockham*, vol. 2 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 1258, and Colleen McCluskey, *Thomas Aquinas on Moral Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 7.

[300] Recall Adams says "Ockham does recognize the commands of a free and omnipotent God as a norm of morality" ("Ockham's Moral Theory," 4). Elsewhere she states, "Ockham's recognition of divine commands as a norm in nonpositive morality gives the will a prominence unprecedented in medieval Aristotelianism….Nevertheless, commentators are wrong to characterize Ockham's ethics as a 'divine command theory,' as if God's precepts were the only norm" ("Voluntarist or Naturalist?" 242).

But importantly, non-positive moral science is a different story. While Ockham

states its epistemological source – namely, it's evidently known per se or through

experience – he doesn't (contrary to Adams) also state its metaphysical source. He

merely states, "Non-positive moral science is that which gives direction for human acts

without any precept of a superior; for example, principles known per se or known

through experience give direction in this sense, such as that every good thing should be

done."[301] The major premise "every good thing should be done" gives direction for

human action (say, when coupled with the minor premise "this is a good thing" in

order to conclude "this should be done") without being told it because one knows it

evidently. But while Ockham says that non-positive moral science *gives direction* or *is*

known independent of authority, he doesn't make the further claim that it comes to *exist*

independent of authority.

Thus, Adams mischaracterizes Ockham here when she claims that non-positive

morality is "prior to and independent of…the free and contingent legislation of any

external authorities."[302] Scott MacDonald similarly misunderstands Ockham when he

states, "Scotus and Ockham maintain that nonpositive moral laws command or forbid

actions the rightness of which is independent of the divine will….Not even God can

alter the moral value of acts dictated by this sort of moral science."[303] But Ockham

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[301] *Quod* 2.14, *OT* IX, 177.24-7: "*Scientia moralis non positiva est illa quae sine omni praecepto superioris dirigit actus humanos; sicut principia per se nota vel nota per experientiam sic dirigunt, sicut quod omne honestum est faciendum.*"

[302] Adams, "Voluntarism or Naturalism?," 239.

[303] Scott MacDonald, "Later Medieval Ethics," in *A History of Western Ethics*, ed. Charlotte B. Becker (New York: Routledge, 2003), 52-9, here 58-9.

doesn't say, contrary to Adams and MacDonald, that non-positive moral science comes to *exist* independent of authority, merely that it comes to be *known* independent of authority. And Adams further mischaracterizes Ockham when she claims that right reason is the fundamental norm in non-positive moral science. As has just been shown, Ockham doesn't mention a norm for non-positive moral science anywhere in Quod 2.14, let alone that the fundamental norm is right reason.[304]

Thus, Adams's account that positive and non-positive moral science are two metaphysical categories of morality – with divine commands being fundamental in the former and right reason being fundamental in the latter – is unfounded. Rather than two metaphysical *categories* of morality, they are two ways to *know* the single category of morality: positive moral science is known non-evidently from faith, whereas non-positive moral science is known evidently either per se or through experience. And Adams mischaracterization of Ockham here in Quod 2.14 is compounded with further mischaracterizations she makes elsewhere, as will be shown in the next stage.

Stage 2: Ockham Characterizes Right Reason as a Norm Derived from the Fundamental Norm of

Divine Commands, but not Vice Versa.

It's already been shown that divine commands are a norm of morality for Ockham. Up next is to show that right reason is also a norm, and then to show that the latter is the derivative norm while the former is the fundamental norm.

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[304] Adams also overstates Ockham concerning her view that one subcategory of positive morality is merit and demerit. She states, "Ockham insists that merit and demerit constitute a category of positive morality," and cites Quod 2.14 for support ("Ockham's Moral Theory," 19, footnote 114). But Quod 2.14 says nothing at all about merit or demerit, let alone that they constitute a category of positive morality.

2.1: Right Reason is a Norm of Morality

It's already been shown that Ockham thinks right reason is *necessary* for virtuous

action,[305] but it's not yet been shown that right reason is a *norm* of virtuous action. It's

one thing to be *required* for virtuous action, it's another thing entirely to be the *source* of

moral obligation – what *makes* the act virtuous. At times Adams seems to confuse the

two.[306] But for one obvious example that they're distinct, Ockham's act of will is

necessary for virtuous action[307] but not normative for virtuous action; it is *required* in

order for an act to be virtuous, but it isn't what *makes* the act virtuous.

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[305] See Chapters One and Two. Ockham states that "no act is virtuous unless it is in conformity with right reason, for right reason is posited in the definition of virtue in *Ethics* II" (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 362.494-6: "*nullus actus est virtuosus nisi sit conformis rectae rationi, quia recta ratio ponitur in definitione virtutis,* II Ethicorum"). Elsewhere he similarly states, "first it should be known that in order for a right act to be elicited by the will, some right reason is necessarily required in the intellect" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 409.16-18: "*primo sciendum est quod ad hoc quod actus rectus eliciatur a voluntate necessario requiritur aliqua recta ratio in intellectu*"). Cf., *QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 363.515-18; *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 417.198-200.

[306] For one example (though more will be shown below in Section 2.3), Adams says "the agent's own practical reason enjoys a *normative* function as rightful regulator of the agent's will. Agents are bound to make their own practical calculations (neither mindless nor slavish actions are candidates for virtue) and to do so correctly insofar as they are able." She then cites QV 8, 409 for support ("Will, Nature, and Morality," 254, footnote 69). But there Ockham merely states, "To the question, first it should be known that in order for a right act to be elicited by the will, some right reason is necessarily required in the intellect" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 409.16-8: "*Ad dubium primo sciendum est quod ad hoc quod actus rectus eliciatur a voluntate necessario requiritur aliqua recta ratio in intellectu*"). So (contrary to Adams) Ockham is here merely stating that right reason is *necessary* for virtuous action, not additionally that it's *normative* for virtuous action.

[307] Recall from Chapter Two that Ockham says, "activity of an act of prudence and activity of the will are necessarily required for a virtuous act, so that those two causes, together with God, are partial causes concerning a virtuous act (*QV* 7.3, *OT* VIII, 363.515-18: "*ad actum virtuosum necessario requiritur activitas actus prudentiae et activitas voluntatis, ita quod illae duae causae sunt causae partials cum Deo respectu actus virtuosi*"). Cf., *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 417.198-200. Elsewhere Ockham says, "if God was to perform an act in conformity with right reason in my will, when the will does nothing, that act wouldn't be meritorious or virtuous. And thus, it's required for the goodness of an act that it's in the power of the will that possesses that act (*Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 389.19-22: "*si Deus faceret in voluntate mea actum conformem rationi rectae, voluntate nihil agente, non esset ille actus meritorius nec virtuosus. Et ideo requiritur ad bonitatem actus quod sit in potestate voluntatis habentis illum actum*").

But it's also clear that right reason is a norm of virtuous action. One passage

where Ockham reveals this is QV 8, the question: "Whether the will could perform a

virtuous act about some object while the intellect is in error concerning that object."[308]

Though the question may seem obscure to our modern ears, it's surprisingly

commonsensical: if *right* reason is necessary for virtuous action, can someone act

virtuously when one has *wrong* reason?

His nuanced response depends on a distinction between two kinds of wrong

reason: what he calls (i) vincible error (i.e., error in one's power, which one is thereby

culpable for) and (ii) invincible error (i.e., error not in one's power, which one is thereby

not culpable for).[309] He ultimately answers that the will could act virtuously with an

invincible error in the intellect, but not with a vincible one. He addresses the invincible

scenario first, giving the example of someone – I'll call Helpful Hannah – who has an

invincible error about a person – I'll call Needy Nick – who appears to be, though is not

in fact, in extreme need.[310] Helpful Hannah performs the following practical syllogism

about Needy Nick:[311]

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[308] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 409.1-2: "*Utrum Voluntas Possit Habere Actum Virtuosum Respectu Alicuius Obiecti Respectu Cuius Est Error In Intellectu.*"

[309] Ockham says, "a certain error is vincible and that is culpable, and a certain [error is] invincible and that is not culpable" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 420.256-7: "*error quidam est vincibilis et ille est culpabilis, et quidam invincibilis et ille non est culpabilis*"). He also states that "an invincible error is not culpable because it is not in the power of the one who errs" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 422.299-300: "*error invincibilis non est culpabilis quia non est in potestate errantis*").

[310] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 423.307-424.335.

[311] Ockham says, "for example: someone is posited having the following universal right reason "When anyone in extreme need isn't benefitted, he passes away," which is evident from knowledge of the terms. Thus, when one meets some poor person who appears to be in extreme need, if the will commands the intellect so that it inquires whether he needs as he appears to need – by performing an investigation through every possible way posited –, if from something hidden which isn't in its power to know, the intellect assents that he needs as he appears to need, permitting he doesn't truly need,

4) Everyone in extreme need should be helped.

5) Needy Nick is in extreme need.

6) Therefore, Needy Nick should be helped.

In this scenario Ockham stipulates that (4) is true but (5) is false: Needy Nick isn't in extreme need. But Helpful Hannah, despite "performing an investigation in every way available to her,"[312] has the invincible error that he is in extreme need; she mistakenly thinks (5) is true. So she mistakenly thinks (6) is true, that Needy Nick should be helped. Ockham then considers two possibilities: first, that Helpful Hannah acts in conformity with this invincible error and helps Needy Nick; second, that she acts contrary to this invincible error and neglects to help him. The question at hand is which, if either, of these possibilities would be a virtuous act.

Ockham says the first possibility – when she acts in conformity with the invincible error – would be virtuous, for "that error is not in the power of the one who

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evidently the intellect will dictate that he who appears to need should be helped as if he were in extreme need. Therefore, according to that conclusion, the intellect errs since it judges he is in extreme need who isn't truly in extreme need, and it judges that he should be helped who shouldn't truly be helped….But even though what errs is particular reason concerning the minor premise and conclusion, still the universal reason is right, namely that 'everyone in extreme need should be helped,' therefore etc." (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 423.309-322: "*exemplum: ponatur aliquis habens istam rationem universalem rectam 'omni indigenti extrema necessitate est benefaciendum ne pereat' quae est evidens ex notitia terminorum. Occurrente igitur aliquo paupere qui apparet indigere extrema necessitate, si voluntas imperet intellectui ut inquirat si talis sic indigeat sicut apparet indigere, – facta investigatione per omnem viam possibilem poni –, si ex aliquo latente quod non est in potestate sua scire intellectus assentiat quod talis sic indiget sicut apparet indigere, licet non sic indigeat secundum veritatem, evidenter dictabit intellectus quod tali qui sic apparet indigere est subveniendum tamquam exsistenti in extrema necessitate. Hic igitur, secundum istam conclusionem, errat intellectus quia iudicat illum indigere extrema necessitate qui non sic indiget, et iudicat quod sibi est subveniendum cui secundum veritatem non est sic subveniendum….Sed licet haec sit ratio particularis errans circa minorem et conclusionem, tamen ratio universalis est recta, ista scilicet quod 'omni indigenti extrema necessitate est subveniendum,' igitur etc*").

[312] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 423.314: "*facta investigatione per omnem viam possibilem poni.*"

errs."[313] But the second possibility – when she acts contrary to this invincible error –

would be sinful

> because such an act would be elicited contrary to conscience and non-culpable reason, and this knowingly. For if the case mentioned above is posited, the intellect doesn't know it errs but it believes it has right reason, and consequently it mortally sins by disregarding it. Similarly it would be a sin of omission if it didn't efficaciously will to help, because *it is obligated to will that which non-vicious reason dictates should be willed*.[314]

Though Ockham doesn't here spell out what he means by the dictates of "non-vicious reason" (though he further clarifies below), it is clear that such dictates are normative. If Helpful Hannah's reason wrongly dictates from invincible error that Needy Nick should be helped, she's obligated to help him. The source of her obligation is the dictates of her "non-vicious reason," or in this case the dictates of her invincibly erroneous reason.

Ockham nuances this norm further still in the second scenario, the one with vincible error in the intellect.[315] For this scenario, imagine the same practical syllogism with the exception that Helpful Hannah's error concerning (5) is vincible: she's culpable

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[313] Ockham says, "Consequently, a right act of the will and an error of the intellect simultaneously remain concerning the same object. And the whole reason is because that error is not in the power of the one who errs….And thus, the will acts virtuously and meritoriously eliciting an act in conformity with such [invincible] erroneous reason" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 423.324-424.330: "*Et per consequens actus rectus voluntatis et error intellectus stant simul respectu eiusdem obiecti. Et tota ratio est quia ille error non est in potestate errantis….Et ideo voluntas eliciens actum conformiter tali rationi erroneae, virtuose et meritorie agit*").

[314] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 424.332-8: "*quia talis actus eliceretur contra conscientiam et rationem non culpabilem et hoc scienter, quia posito casu praedicto nescit se errare sed credit se habere rationem rectam, et per consequens contemnendo eam peccat moraliter.*
    Similiter non volendo sibi efficaciter subvenire esset peccatum omissionis, quia tenetur velle illud quod ratio non vitiosa dictat esse volendum."

[315] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 428.416-430.482.

for mistakenly thinking (5) is true because she doesn't do her due diligence.[316] Again,

Ockham considers two possibilities: first, that Helpful Hannah acts in conformity with

this vincible error and helps Needy Nick; second, that she acts contrary to this vincible

error and neglects to help him.[317]

Concerning the first possibility – when she acts in conformity with the vincible

error – Ockham claims the action would be sinful

> because the will always sins by a sin of commission when it elicits some
> act the opposite of which is obligated through divine command or divine
> ordination – or it is obligated to the opposite in another way – and
> otherwise it never sins. At present, however, *the will is obligated to elicit
> [acts] in conformity with right reason*.[318]

It's old news that divine commands are a norm of morality, but it's news indeed that

there's "another way," which he further clarifies in the next sentence to be the norm of

right reason: "the will is obligated to elicit [acts] in conformity with right reason." If

right reason dictates action *A*, the will is obligated to elicit *A*. Recall from Chapter Two

that Ockham thinks the will can, *in virtue of its freedom*, act contrary to reason's dictates,

but it can't do so *virtuously*.[319] One reason for that, also shown in that chapter, is that

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[316] Or as Ockham says higher up in QV 8, "by omitting that investigation voluntarily on account of laziness or some other similar cause which she could have avoided if she had willed to" (*QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 421.274-6: "*omittendo illam investigationem voluntarie propter pigritiam vel aliquam aliam causam consimilem quam posset vitare si vellet*").

[317] Ockham actually considers a third possibility here – namely, simply abstaining from action concerning the error – but this possibility needn't be considered for purposes of this paper.

[318] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 428.434-429.441: "*quia semper peccat voluntas peccato commissionis quando elicit aliquem actum ad cuius oppositum obligatur per praeceptum divinum vel ordinationem divinam, – vel alio modo obligatur ad oppositum –, et numquam aliter peccat. Nunc autem voluntas obligatur ad eliciendum conformiter rationi rectae.*"

[319] Chapter Two, section 2.2.

right reason is necessary for virtuous action. A second reason now understood is that

right reason is a norm of virtuous action.

He next clarifies that this norm or obligation to reason's dictates is consistent

with the first scenario, the one about invincible error. He states:

> even though a will isn't obligated to elicit an act conforming with right
> reason which is posited with invincible erroneous reason, because such an
> error isn't in the power of the human who errs, and thus it excuses the
> will so that it's not obligated to elicit in conformity with the opposite of
> right reason – on the contrary it does not sin but acts virtuously by
> eliciting in conformity with such erroneous reason, and it sins and errors
> by eliciting an act contrary to that error – even though I affirm this, still
> the will is obligated to elicit an act conforming with right reason which is
> posited with vincible and culpable erroneous reason, and this because
> such is in the power of the one who errs because it had been able not to err
> if it had willed.[320]

Thus, Ockham thinks the will is obligated to conform to reason's dictates, whether right

or invincibly erroneous. He reiterates this in the next possibility – when the will acts

contrary to vincible error – saying the will sins "because it is obligated – as has been

said – to conform itself with the dictates of reason concerning action, whether it is right

or [invincibly] erroneous."[321] So right reason – and by that here I mean the dictates of

reason, whether right or invincibly erroneous, though excluding the dictates of vincibly

erroneous reason – is a norm or source of moral obligation for Ockham. Adams admits

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[320] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 429.443-52: "*Unde licet non teneatur voluntas elicere actum conformiter rationi rectae quae opponitur rationi erroneae invinicibili, quia talis error non est in potestate hominis errantis et ideo excusat voluntatem [ita] quod non tenetur elicere conformiter rationi rectae oppositae, – immo eliciendo conformiter rationi tali erroneae non peccat sed agit virtuose, et eliciendo actum contra illum errorem peccat et errat – licet inquam ita sit, tamen voluntas tenetur elicere actum conformiter rationi rectae quae opponitur rationi erroneae vincibili et culpabili, et hoc quia talis est in potestate errantis quia potuit non errasse si voluisset.*"

[321] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 430.466-7: "*quia tenetur – ut dictum est – se conformare dictamini rationis in operando, sive sit rectum sive erroneum.*"

as much.[322] Even if Helpful Hannah's reason dictates with invincible error that Needy

Nick should be help when, in fact, he shouldn't, she's obligated to help; and the source

of that obligation is that dictate of reason.

2.2: Right Reason as Derivative, Divine Commands as Fundamental

Though it's clear that right reason is *a* norm for Ockham, it's not yet clear *which*

kind of norm it is, whether fundamental or derivative. Adams thinks it's both. Recall

that she thinks right reason is fundamental in non-positive moral science and derivative

in positive moral science. She states, "Thus, there is a double criterion of a morally

virtuous act - the dictates of right reason, on the one hand, and divine precepts on the

other. But within the sphere of non-positive morality, the latter derives its authority

from the former."[323] And elsewhere she states, "divine command and right reason are

twin criteria in the category of merit and demerit as well as that of non-positive

morality. But this time God's commands are fundamental and right reason's role

derivative, whereas before it was the other way around."[324]

But such an account already has trouble because, as shown in Stage I, Ockham's

positive/non-positive distinction isn't about two metaphysical *categories* of morality –

right reason being fundamental in one and divine commands being fundamental in the

other – but two ways to *know* the single category of morality. And since there's only

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[322] Adams cites QV 8 saying "we are now obliged to elicit acts that conform to right reason" ("Ockham's Moral Theory," 26, footnote 168). For other passages where Adams affirms the norm of right reason, see "Ockham's Moral Theory," 4; "Will, Nature, and Morality," 257; "Voluntarist or Naturalist," 245.

[323] Adams, "Ockham's Moral Theory," 24.

[324] Adams, " "Voluntarist or Naturalist?" 245.

one category of morality, right reason can be fundamental or derivative for Ockham, but not both. This section raises further trouble for Adams, for while Ockham (consistent with Adams) characterizes right reason as deriving its normative authority from divine commands, Ockham never (contrary to Adams) claims the opposite – that divine commands derive their normative authority from right reason.

Two passages where Ockham characterizes right reason as deriving its normative authority from the fundamental norm of divine commands – passages Adams herself acknowledges[325] – are Ord d.41, q.1 and QV 8. In the former, Ockham clearly (though without explanation) states, "precisely because the divine will wills this, right reason dictates that it should be willed."[326] So it's not that the divine will wills it *because* right reason dictates it; rather the reverse is true: right reason dictates it *because* the divine will wills it. So Ockham here characterizes right reason as deriving its normative authority from the fundamental norm of divine commands, not vice versa.

And Ockham provides further explanation in QV 8. After Ockham reveals that right reason is a norm, he then reveals that it derives its normative authority from divine commands when he responds to a certain objection. The objection targets Ockham's claim (mentioned above) that an act of will in conformity with invincible error is virtuous because that error isn't in one's power.[327] The objection is that such an

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[325] Adams "Ockham's Moral Theory," 24, footnote 152; 26, footnotes 166-7.

[326] *Ord*, d.41, q.un., *OT* IV, 610.3-5: "*Se eo ipso quod voluntas divina hoc vult, ratio recta dictat quod est volendum.*"

[327] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 423.307-424.330.

act isn't virtuous but sinful because it's out of harmony with the divine will – the

standard of virtuous action. Here's the objection in full:

> The first [objection] is that a will that acts in conformity with invincible
> erroneous reason is not unqualifiedly right, which is the opposite of what
> was said earlier. For a will that acts in conformity with the divine will as
> its rule is right, and a will that wills out of harmony with the divine
> intellect and divine will is not right. But a will that acts in the way
> mentioned above [i.e., in conformity with invincible erroneous reason] is
> out of harmony with the judgment of the divine intellect and divine will,
> since God judges that someone who is not truly in extreme need should
> not be helped in the way that someone who is truly in such need should
> be helped, and the divine will wills that such a person should not be
> helped in that way. Therefore, a created will that wills to help him in that
> way is willing the opposite of what God judges should be willed and [the
> opposite of what] God wills, and consequently it will sin by being out of
> harmony with the divine will.[328]

In other words, willing in conformity with the divine will is necessary and sufficient for

right action. It's sufficient, for *if* one wills in conformity with the divine will, such

action is right. And it's necessary, for *only if* one wills in conformity with the divine will

is such action right (or put contrapositively: if one *doesn't* will in conformity with the

divine will, such action *isn't* right). So the divine will, according to the objection, is

one's standard or rule for right or virtuous action. Thus, when one wills in conformity

with invincible erroneous reason, one doesn't will in conformity with the divine will,

and thereby sins.

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[328] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 431.510-432.22: "*Primum est quod voluntas agens conformiter rationi erroneae invincibili non simpliciter sit recta, cuius oppositum prius dictum est. Quia illa voluntas est recta quae in operando conformatur voluntati divinae tamquam suae regulae, et illa non est recta quae discordat ab intellectu divino et voluntate divina in volendo. Sed voluntas agens praedicto modo discordat a iudicio intellectus divini et voluntate divina, quia Deus iudicat quod illi qui secundum veritatem non indiget extrema necessitate non est subveniendum tamquam sic indigenti, et voluntas divina vult quod tali non sic subveniatur. Igitur voluntas creata volens sibi sic subvenire, vult oppositum illius quod Deus iudicat sic esse volendum et quod Deus vult, et per consequens discordando a voluntate divina peccabit.*"

Ockham's response affirms that the divine will is, in one sense, one's rule for virtuous action, but clarifies that the sense isn't *what* God wills but what God *wills one to will*. He explains:

> To the first of these [objections] I say that the will is not always right when it is in conformity with the divine will with respect to the object willed. For sometimes God wills something but wills that a creature will the opposite. For example, from eternity God willed the death of Christ, and yet he willed that the Jews not will his death in the way that he died at their hands. Augustine likewise gives an example: God wills that my father die, and yet he wills that I will-against that my father die. And yet when I will something that God wills me to will-against, even though [what I will] is willed by God, I sin, and especially if I were to know that God wills that I will-against it, since in that case I am knowingly out of harmony with the rule to which I am obligated to conform in my acts, and consequently I sin.[329]

So "the rule to which I am obligated to conform in my acts" isn't *what* God wills, but what God *wills one to will*. Willing what God wills isn't sufficient for virtuous action, as when the Jewish authorities willed what God willed (namely Christ's death) but didn't act virtuously (because they didn't will what God willed them to will). And willing what God wills isn't necessary for virtuous action, as when a creature doesn't will what God wills (say, willing-against the death of one's father) but acts virtuously (because one wills what God wills one to will). Thus, while God's will is, in one sense, one's rule for virtuous action, it's not *what* God wills but what God *wills one to will*. Or in Ockham's words, "So in this way it is clear that the will is not always obligated to

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[329] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 434.573-435.583: "*Ad primum istorum dico quod voluntas non semper est recta quando conformatur voluntati divinae in obiecto volito. Nam aliquando vult Deus aliquid et tamen vult creaturam velle oppositum. Examplum: Deus ab aeterno voluit mortem Christi et tamen voluit Iudaeos nolle mortem eius eo modo quo mortuus est ab eis. Similiter point Augustinus exemplum, quia Deus vult patrem meum mori et tamen vult me nolle mortem patris mei. Nunc autem quando volo aliquid quod Deus vult me nolle, licet illud sit volitum a Deo, tunc pecco, maxime si scirem Deum me nolle illud, quia tunc scienter discordo a regula cui me teneor in actibus meis conformare, et per consequens pecco.*"

conform itself to the divine will with respect to the object willed….But it is obligated to

conform itself to the divine will with respect to a circumstance of the object willed,

namely because it is obligated to will what God wills it to will."[330]

Ockham next reveals that this obligation – a nuanced restatement of the norm of

divine commands[331] – is fundamental, while the dictates of reason are derivative.

Ockham's distinction between what God wills and what God wills one to will enables

him to respond to the objection:

> To the question at issue I say that although the divine intellect dictates
> that such a person should not be helped in the way described above, and
> the divine will wills-against his being helped in that way, a created will
> that follows invincible erroneous reason is right *because the divine will wills*
> *that it follow non-culpable reason*.[332]

Ockham's response, in other words, is that while Helpful Hannah doesn't will

what God wills (namely, not to help Needy Nick), she wills what God wills her to will

(namely, to follow non-culpable reason) and thereby acts virtuously. What's important

to note is that Ockham here clearly states that divine commands are fundamental, while

the dictates of reason are derivative. It's not that one is obligated to divine commands

because reason so dictates, but that one is obligated to reason's dictates because God so

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[330] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 436.601-5: "*Sic igitur patet quod voluntas non tenetur se semper conformare voluntati divinae in volito….Sed tenetur se conformare voluntati divinae in circumstantia obiecti voliti, puta quia tenetur velle quod Deus vult eum velle.*

[331] Recall that by "divine command," following Thomas Osborne, I mean not only God's explicit commands (like the Ten Commandments) but also God's free decisions to make any specific acts right or wrong ("Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist," 3).

[332] *QV* 8, *OT* VIII, 436.608-13: "*Ad propositum dico quod quamvis intellectus divinus dictet quod tali non sit subveniendum modo praedicto et voluntas divina nolit quod sibi sic subveniatur, tamen voluntas creata sequens rationem erroneam errore invincibili est recta, quia voluntas divina vult eum sequi rationem non culpabilem.*"

commands. Or in other words, right reason derives its normative authority from the fundamental norm of divine commands.[333]

And Ockham's remarks that right reason is derivative while divine commands are fundamental shouldn't be surprising, for two reasons. First, as has already been shown in Chapters Two and Three, Ockham thinks both (i) right reason's being necessary for virtuous action and (ii) an action's being necessarily and intrinsically virtuous (e.g., loving God) are contingent on God's ordination. God could, from his absolute power, ordain differently if he so willed. So right reason's deriving its normative authority from divine commands is just one more example to add to the stack that Ockham's ethics situates the will of God as foundational.

And second, as mentioned in Chapter One, there are numerous instances where Ockham's remarks concerning the dictates of right reason are informed by divine commands. For one obvious example concerning the virtue of temperance, Ockham says Eleazar, who died rather than violate the Levitical law against eating pork, "thus sustained death according to the dictates of right reason."[334] Such dictates were *informed* by divine commands – the only way Eleazar knew not to eat pork. Two other

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[333] Someone could object that Ockham merely states that the dictates of invincibly erroneous reason find their obligation derived from divine command, not additionally the dictates of right reason. Three things could be said in response. First, it's unsurprising that Ockham's remark is about invincibly erroneous reason since the objection Ockham is responding against also is about invincibly erroneous reason. Second, recall that the other passage where Ockham characterizes right reason as deriving its normative authority from the norm of divine commands (i.e., *Ord*, d.41, q.un., *OT* IV, 610.3-5) concerns right reason in general, not invincibly erroneous reason in particular. And third, as already mentioned, Adams agrees that Ockham characterizes right reason as the derivative norm, divine commands as the fundamental norm, here in QV 8 (Adams, "Ockham's Moral Theory," 26, footnotes 166-7), which seems, all by itself, sufficient for this paper's purposes.

[334] *QV* 6.10. *OT* VIII, 280.190-1: "*ideo secundum dictamen rationis rectae sustinuit mortem.*" Cf., 2 *Maccabees* 6:18-31; *Leviticus* 11:7-8.

examples are praying to God and walking to church (some of Ockham's most common examples, in fact) which are virtuous when willed in accordance with reason's dictates – say, that the end is on account of God's glory, which can only be known from divine commands.[335] So it's not as if, as Adams mistakenly thinks, these two norms could break apart.[336] Rather, the norm of right reason derives from, and is informed by, the norm of divine commands.

And while Adams herself affirms that Ockham characterizes right reason as deriving its normative authority from divine commands in Ord, d.41, q.1 and QV 8,[337] she avoids concluding that Ockham is a divine command theorist by positing that right reason is derivative and divine commands are fundamental *only* for positive morality, whereas right reason is fundamental and divine commands are derivative in non-positive morality.[338] But there's no mention of positive or non-positive morality at all in Ord, d.41, q.1 or QV 8, let alone any indication that Ockham's remarks about right reason's being derivative and divine commands's being fundamental only concern positive morality. Thus, Adams mischaracterizes Ockham once more.

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[335] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 360.8-361.7; 381.16-382.14; 383.4-10; *QV 7.2, OT* VIII, 338.200-3; *Quod* 3.16, *OT* IX, 266.117-20.

[336] Recall that Adams says, "The two norms could break apart" ("Will, Nature, and Morality," 266). For more on Adams view that Ockham's ethics can "breakdown," see "Ockham's Moral Theory," 29, 24-5; "Voluntarist or Naturalist," 241-2, 245; and "Will, Nature, and Morality," 265-6.

[337] Adams "Ockham's Moral Theory," 24, footnote 152; 26, footnotes 166-7.

[338] Adams, "Ockham's Moral Theory," 24; "Voluntarist or Naturalist?" 245.

2.3: Ockham Never Characterizes Right Reason as Fundamental nor Divine Commands as

Derivative:

But perhaps Adams's most blatant mischaracterization is her view that right

reason is fundamental and divine commands are derivative in non-positive morality.

She claims that "Ockham repeatedly gives expression to this perspective," and cites

three passages for support: QV 7.2, Rep 3.11, and QV 7.4.[339] But contrary to Adams, the

first two merely affirm that right reason is *necessary* for virtuous action, while the third

may affirm that it's a *norm* for virtuous action but, importantly, not a *fundamental* norm.

As for QV 7.2, a passage already discussed in Chapter Two, Ockham states:

> some acts are intrinsically morally good, some intrinsically morally
> wicked and vicious, [and] some morally neutral or indifferent. An
> example of the first: to will to pray on account of God's honor and because
> it's commanded by God in accordance with right reason etc. An example
> of the second: to will to pray on account of vain glory and because [it's]
> contrary to God's command and contrary to right reason. An example of
> the third: to will simply to pray, without any circumstance dictated by
> reason, on account of no end, whether good or wicked. And such an
> [indifferent] act, whether interior or exterior, is only called good or vicious
> by extrinsic denomination and in no way intrinsically.[340]

Adams seems to think that Ockham's remarks that an intrinsically morally good act is

done "in accordance with right reason" and that an intrinsically morally wicked act is

done "contrary to right reason" support her view that right reason is fundamental while

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[339] Adams, "Ockham's Moral Theory," 24-5.

[340] *QV 7.2, OT* VIII, 338.200-210: "*aliquis actus est intrinsece bonus moraliter, aliquis intrinsece malus et vitiosus, aliquis neuter sive indifferens. Exemplum primi: velle orare propter honorem Dei et quia praeceptum est a Deo secundum rectam rationem etc. Exemplum secondi: velle orare propter vanam gloriam et quia contra praeceptum Dei et contra rectam rationem. Exemplum tertii: velle simpliciter orare sine aliqua circumstantia dictata a ratione, quia nec propter bonum finem nec propter malum, quia propter nullum finem; et talis actus, sive interior sive exterior, solum dicitur bonus denominatione extrinseca et nullo modo intrinsece, nec vitiosus.*"

divine commands are derivative for non-positive morality. But that goes well beyond

the text. For one, Ockham again gives no indication that his remarks concern non-

positive morality. For another, he doesn't even affirm here that right reason is a *norm* of

virtuous action, but merely that it's *necessary* for virtuous action. Recall from above the

instance where Adams seems to confuse the two.[341] This seems to be one further

instance. To see this, recall from Chapter Two that Ockham claims right reason is a

secondary partial object of an act of will. He says,

> for if an act of will whereby someone wills to pray to God is perfectly
> virtuous, these circumstances are necessarily required: that it wills to pray
> on account of God's honor, according to the dictate of right reason, in the
> established time, such as the Lord's day, in the obligated place, such as
> church, then that virtuous act has God's honor for the principal object, the
> act of praying for the common object, right reason, the Lord's day and the
> church for secondary and partial objects.[342]

Here Ockham distinguishes three objects. The common object is the exterior act (for it

shares its object *in common* with multiple acts of will), in this case praying.[343] The

principal or primary object is the end (on account of which the act is done, typically

signified in Ockham's Latin by the object of the preposition "*propter*"), in this case on

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[341] See footnote 306.

[342] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 381.16-382.5: "*si enim ad hoc quod actus voluntatis quo aliquis vult orare Deum sit perfecte virtuosus requirantur necessario istae circumstantiae: quod velit orare propter honorem Dei, secundum rectum dictamen rationis, in tempore statuto, puta die dominico, in loco debito, puta in ecclesia, tunc iste actus sic virtuosus habet honorem Dei pro obiecto principali, actum orandi pro obiecto communi, rectam rationem, diem dominicum et ecclesiam pro obiectis secundariis et partialibus.* Cf., *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 383.4-15.

[343] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 383.3-4.

account of God's honor.[344] And the secondary objects are the other circumstances – in this case he only mentions right reason, time, and place.

So when Ockham says in QV 7.2 that one example of an intrinsically morally good act is "to will to pray on account of God's honor and because it's commanded by God in accordance with right reason etc.," the common object is "to pray," the primary object is "on account of (*propter*) God's honor," and the secondary objects are God's command, right reason, etc. And his example of an intrinsically morally wicked act as "to will to pray on account of vain glory and because [it's] contrary to God's command and contrary to right reason" has the same common object (i.e., to pray), but a different primary object (i.e., vain glory) and different secondary objects (i.e., contrary to God's command and contrary to right reason). But all Ockham is revealing here is that right reason – being a secondary partial object – is *necessary* for this intrinsically morally good act because, as shown in Chapter Two, a change in object entails a change in act.[345] Ockham isn't here revealing, as he does in QV 8, that the will is obligated to the dictates of right reason; he's merely stating that right reason is necessary, not (further) that it's normative, for virtuous action.

But even if, for the sake of Adams's argument, we grant that Ockham reveals a normative role for right reason here in QV 7.2, Ockham still isn't saying that right reason is fundamental and divine commands are derivative – i.e., that the obligation to

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[344] Ockham elsewhere calls the end the "primary" object; see *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI 381.5. According to Thomas Williams, Scotus similarly signifies the end with "*propter*" ("Reason, Morality, and Voluntarism," 80).

[345] See Chapter Two, section 2.4.

divine commands is *because of* the obligation to right reason. So Adams view would still be left unsupported by QV 7.2.

The same is true concerning Adams's second reference – Rep 3.11. There Ockham states, "for instance, that I will to love the same human because it displeases God or because he is a sinner or on account of another evil end and contrary to right reason."[346] Adams is right to say Ockham "envisions three vicious-making conditions of an act of loving a human being" – one of which is doing the act "contrary to right reason."[347] But even if doing an act "contrary to right reason" makes the act vicious, it needn't show that right reason is a norm, merely that it's necessary for virtuous action. And, once again, Ockham doesn't additionally state that right reason is fundamental while divine commands are derivative, nor that such only concerns non-positive morality.

And lastly, concerning Adams's third reference – QV 7.4 –, Ockham does seem to state that right reason is a norm alongside divine commands, but importantly he doesn't (further) state that right reason is fundamental while divine commands are derivative. He states, "rightness is nothing, either absolute or relative, other than the act [of will] itself which ought to be elicited in accordance with right reason and the will of God."[348] So right reason seems to be a norm here, alongside the norm of divine

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[346] *Rep* 3.11, *OT* VI, 387.1-3: "*puta quod velim eundem hominem diligere quia displicet Deo vel quia peccator est vel propter alium finem malum et contra rectam rationem.*"

[347] Adams, "Ockham's Moral Theory," 25.

[348] *QV* 7.4, *OT* VIII, 386.239-41: "*rectitudo nihil absolutum vel respectivum est aliud quam ipse actus qui debuit elici secundum rectam rationem et voluntatem Dei.*"

commands. But importantly Ockham doesn't characterize the former as fundamental nor the latter as derivative. In other words, Adams's view that right reason is fundamental and divine commands are derivative concerning non-positive morality is entirely unfounded. There is no passage where Ockham makes such a remark.

Conclusion:

Thus, from Stage 1, it's shown that Adams's metaphysical reading of Quod 2.14 – that positive and non-positive moral science are two metaphysical categories of morality, with divine commands being fundamental in the former and right reason being fundamental in the latter – is unfounded. Rather than two metaphysical *categories* of morality, they are two ways to *know* morality: positive moral science is known non-evidently from faith, whereas non-positive moral science is known evidently either per se or through experience.

And from Stage 2, it's shown that Adams's account that right reason is the fundamental norm while divine commands are the derivative norm in non-positive moral science is also unfounded. Ockham characterizes right reason and divine commands as two norms, and there are passages where Ockham characterizes the former as derivative and the latter as fundamental, but he never characterizes the former as fundamental or the latter as derivative.

Thus, Adams's two arguments that Ockham isn't a divine command theorist – what I call her Non-Positive Moral Law Argument and her Right Reason Argument – are mistaken. Concerning the former, it's not that there's some portion of the moral law (i.e., non-positive moral science) that comes to *exist* independent of divine authority;

rather, there's some portion of the moral law that comes to be *known* independent of divine authority. Concerning the latter, there's nothing incompatible about such a version of divine command theory – the view that all of morality is ultimately grounded in divine commands – incorporating right reason as a norm derived from the fundamental norm of divine commands.

The first half of this dissertation, Chapters One and Two, gave a *prima facie* case that Ockham is a divine command theorist. The second half, Chapters Three and Four, concluded so *ultima facie*. Chapter Two showed that divine commands are a *norm* of morality, for Ockham. Chapter Four clarified that divine commands are the *fundamental norm*. Chapter Two also showed that there are several concepts central to Ockham's ethics that are merely contingent on God's present ordination, like (i) right reason's being necessary for virtuous action and (ii) an action's being necessarily and intrinsically virtuous itself. Chapter Three undermined Freppert's Loving God Argument by showing that loving God isn't fundamental; rather, divine commands are fundamental. And Chapter Four undermined Adams's two arguments by showing that Ockham never claims that there's some portion of the moral law which exists independent of divine authority, and that Ockham never characterizes right reason as fundamental while divine commands are derivative, but he does characterize right reason as derivative while divine commands are fundamental. To be sure, there is still much to be understood about Ockham's account of ethics, but it's quite clear that he is a divine command theorist.

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