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# DUNS SCOTUS ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD<sup>1</sup>

Marilyn McCord Adams

Over the past thirty years, analytical philosophers of religion have confronted the problem of evil in the guise of the atheistic argument from evil against the existence of God. Many have met it from the posture of defense, constructing logically possible morally sufficient reasons for divine permission of evils from the materials of religion-neutral value-theory. At best, such defenses vindicate divine goodness along the dimension "producer of global goods," while neglecting the religiously more relevant dimension of His *goodness to* individual suffering creatures. My methodological recommendation is that we Christian philosophers shift away from defense and concentrate on formulating what we really believe about the goodness of God and how He is solving the problem of evil. If successful, our accounts would not only exhibit how divine permission of evils is logically consistent with His goodness to creatures, but also advertise Him as a character worthy of worship. Failures would pinpoint more precisely where and how evil is a problem for us. I illustrate this method by examining Duns Scotus' many-faceted conception of divine goodness and measure its power to explain the compossibility of God and evil.

Over the last thirty years or so, we analytic philosophers of religion have tended to grapple with the religious problem of suffering under the guise of the so-called "logical" argument from evil for atheism: *viz.*, that since it is logically impossible that an essentially omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God coexist with evil, God must not exist because evil plainly does. Many of us have agreed that solutions (if any) must take the form of generating logically possible morally sufficient reasons that even a perfect being might have for not preventing or eliminating evils in the amounts and the kinds found in the actual world. Moreover, many of us have conducted our search for such divine excuses from the posture of *defense*, seeking to undermine the charge of inconsistency by appeal to value-premisses that the atheistic arguer *qua* atheist might accept (or at least could not conclusively discredit) rather than to doctrinal claims peculiar to believers. If our defense is from the Best of All Possible Worlds, we invoke G. E. Moore's notion of organic unity to suggest (via Leibniz) how a craftsman may be morally permitted to include negatively valued parts as necessary constituents of (means to) a whole greater in value than any whole entirely lacking in negatively valued parts. We then mount an appeal to ignorance, that for all we know, the Best of All Possible Worlds contains evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in this world; and conclude that the atheist is not entitled to his



charge of incompatibility.<sup>2</sup> If we prefer the Free Will Defense, we commend a world with a favorable balance of moral good over moral evil as a logically possible and morally permissible divine goal, maintain that moral responsibility presupposes freedom, contend that not even an omnipotent God could ensure a world including free creatures but *no* evils, and conclude as before that the atheistic arguer has not made out his case.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the merits of such defenses, they have the defect of leading us away from the religious question that gives rise to the atheistic argument in the first place: *viz.*, whether and *how*, in view of sufferings many and great, God (if He exists) could be *good enough* to suffering creatures to warrant their love and trust. Portraying God as a possible producer of such global goods as the Best of All Possible Worlds, or a world containing free creatures or a favorable balance of moral virtue over moral vice or a perfect order of retributive justice, may vindicate divine character along one dimension of goodness, but it fails to confront the issue of His agent-centered goodness. Yet, as Ivan Karamazov's speeches eloquently show, God's worthiness of worship (of whole-hearted love and unreserved trust) cannot be adequately defended apart from His goodness in this latter respect.

For my part, I would like to suggest a methodological change of pace. What if some of us Christian philosophers shifted off the project of defense and tried to articulate what we actually believe about God's goodness and how He is solving the problem of evil? Christian metaphysics would examine the goodness of God as He is in Himself, while soteriology would chart how God is being good *to* created persons. Our attempted formulations would then be measured for adequacy against both the canons of consistency and the convictions of the wider Christian community. Failures would pinpoint more precisely where and how evil is a problem for believers; and Faith seeking Understanding would send us in pursuit, with both heart and philosophical mind, of a more profound grasp of the mysterious goodness of God. To the extent that we succeed, our solutions might not only exhibit the compossibility of God and evil, but also commend God as a character worthy of worship. If the atheistic arguer could not share our value theory, he might at least gain a better understanding of our position or even come to appreciate how reasonable people could find it attractive.<sup>4</sup>

Although my purpose is methodological, my approach is historical. To illustrate my proposal, I shall begin by reviewing Duns Scotus' many-faceted conception of divine goodness. I choose Scotus because he is perhaps less known than others, and because his picture of God's creative and redemptive purpose is novel and stimulating.<sup>5</sup> As we shall see, his resultant theology is not immune to the problem of evil. But our investigation will re-identify its location in the light of Christian soteriology.

### 1. *God's Metaphysical Goodness and Divine Justice:*

Scotus distinguishes among metaphysical or natural, moral, and supernatural or meritorious goodness. The interaction of his philosophical and theological value intuitions yields a modified naturalism to which he appeals in showing how an appreciation of God's metaphysical goodness delineates the obligations of justice for rational free agents, created and divine.

Scotus believes that he can demonstrate *a priori* the existence of an infinite being, which is the first efficient cause and ultimate end of everything else, the most eminent being, and one which acts by intellect and will.<sup>6</sup> As dependent, any other being is finite. Following ancient Greek value-theory, Scotus assumes that in a transcendental sense, 'being' and 'good' convert (art truly predicable of all and only the same things), the latter signifying being under the aspect of desirability or amiability; while natural goodness pertains to the perfection of a thing (e.g., a blind man has transcendental goodness, but is defective in natural goodness because humans are normally sighted).<sup>7</sup> Both the transcendental and natural goodness of a thing are proportionate to its degree of being.<sup>8</sup> The infinite being is the infinite good and infinitely desirable or lovable; finite beings are only finite goods, only finitely desirable or lovable.

Ancient naturalists in value-theory held that the metaphysical or natural goodness of a thing imposed a moral obligation on agents to love it. According to them, the moral goodness of an agent consists in following what its right reason dictates, and right reason would surely judge that a thing is to be loved in proportion to its amiability. The logical outcome of such naturalism would seemingly be that an agent's obligation to love a thing is directly proportionate to that thing's degree of being, so that one ought to love better beings more than lesser ones—e.g., angels more than humans, dogs more than rocks.

Scotus does not fully agree. Apparently, he reckons that since the infinite good is incommensurate with any finite good (or collection of finite goods), there could be no good reason for not loving the infinite good above all and for its own sake. Hence, right reason would dictate universally to any agent, that "the best ought to be loved the most."<sup>9</sup> Since not all finite goods are mutually compatible, there can always be a reason against loving any finite good. Hence, there is no unconditional obligation for any agent to love any finite good.

It follows that "God is no debtor in any unqualified sense save with respect to His own goodness, namely, that He love it"<sup>10</sup> and "there is no justice in God except that which inclines Him to render to His own goodness what is its due."<sup>11</sup> Indeed,

"there is nothing in the divine will that inclines it specifically to any secondary object in such a way that it would be impossible for it justly

to incline to its opposite. For without contradiction, the will could will the opposite, and thus it could justly will such; otherwise it could will something absolutely and not do so justly, which seems incongruous."<sup>12</sup>

Since God owes it to Himself to be of consistent purpose in creation,

"... where creatures are concerned, He is a debtor rather to His own generosity, in the sense that He gives creatures what their nature demands, which exigency in them is set down as something just, a kind of secondary object of justice, as it were . . ."<sup>13</sup>

Scotus interprets this secondary obligation liberally, however, not as one to do what befits this or that *particular* creature, but to establish an appropriate order on the *totality* of things.<sup>14</sup> And Scotus seems to imply that God can establish a fitting order on any collection of possible created things He chooses or allows to be actualized.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, it follows from Scotus' modified naturalism that rational free creatures (if any) have an obligation to love God above all.<sup>16</sup> Thus, he writes,

"that I should love God above all" "can be inferred demonstratively in the following fashion. 'God is that greater than which nothing can be thought; therefore he is supremely lovable; therefore I ought to love Him above all'."<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, not even God can dispense anyone from this obligation.<sup>18</sup> From the obligation to love God above all, there follows another: "free will is obliged to elicit every act in conformity with a superior rule—*viz.*, according to divine precept."<sup>19</sup>

Thus far, Scotus thinks, *a priori* philosophizing will take us. God's infinite metaphysical or natural goodness imposes an obligation on Him and on creatures to love Him above all (to place Him first in the preference ranking and to love Him with greater intensity). But the finite natural goodness of creatures implies that God owes nothing to creatures and will not be unjust *to* any creature no matter what He does. Nor will He be unjust to Himself in creation provided He satisfies the minimal condition of establishing a fitting order on the whole collection of created things.

## 2. *The Generosity of Divine Purpose:*

For Scotus, *a priori* reasoning demonstrates, from God's metaphysical goodness, that perfect justice puts God under no *obligations* to creatures; but it is Christian soteriology that reveals God as a maximally organized *lover* of them.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Scotus' novel reading of tradition serves to magnify God's love and

generosity towards His elect.

(2.1) *Divine Love in Search of Co-Lovers*: Scotus believes he can demonstrate (see section 1) that God loves Himself above all with friendship love (*amor amicitiae*)—that is, with a love that values the good for its own sake and not merely as a means to some other end.<sup>21</sup> Such love for a good is non-possessive, and expresses itself in part in the will that the good in question be loved the same way by others. Yet, insofar as loving that good is advantageous for the lover, the will that there should be co-lovers is an expression of love for the prospective co-lovers as well. The persons of the Trinity love the divine essence and each other with such friendship-love. That this love of the infinite good should be shared by still others is, for Scotus, God's principal motive in creation.

Among possible creatures, only free agents could be elevated to share such friendship-love for God. To be sure, every possible being has a natural inclination or tendency for its own proper perfection.<sup>22</sup> But such an inclination would move a being towards God, only insofar as God was a means to or contributed towards *its* own proper perfection, and would not be towards God *for His own sake*. It is the ultimate differentia of rational free creatures that they have a double motivational drive: natural appetite, or *affectio commodi*, which is an inclination for its own advantage as perceived by its own intellect (perfected by hope), and *affectio iustitiae*, or the inclination for intrinsic goods for their own sake (perfected by charity).<sup>23</sup> The will of free creatures is, according to Scotus, a self-determining power for opposites that determines whether the free agent acts in accordance with the inclination for what is advantageous or the inclination for justice. It is only because such creatures share with God an inclination for justice, to love things for their own sake as they deserve to be loved, that they are minimally suited to be co-lovers of God.

Since God is not under any obligation, whether to Himself or to possible creatures, to give them real existence, His making free creatures whose obligation it is to love God above all, is a first act of generosity. But divine liberality goes further in its desire to raise such persons above their natural possibilities by granting them the beatific vision and such steadfastness of friendship love for God as would be sufficient for created happiness.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Scotus joins the medieval consensus that God who has no obligation to create anything and no obligation to creatures to do one thing rather than another in relation to them, *in being true to Himself* generously wills that finite and temporal persons be raised to the incommensurate good of face to face loving intimacy with the infinite and eternal God. Of such surprising generosity, Scotus writes,

“. . . Not only does God's infinite goodness or His nature as this unique nature in its uniqueness draw us to love such, but because 'Goodness' loves me, sharing itself with me, therefore I elicit an act of love towards

it . . .”<sup>25</sup>

(2.2) *The Structure of God's Intentions in Creation:* Scotus' theological originality shows in his detailed articulation of God's purpose. Even though there is no temporal succession in God's deliberation and willing, but He wills whatever He wills immutably in the now of eternity, nevertheless, Scotus thinks it is possible to distinguish a logical order within His purpose, a natural priority and posteriority, and so to locate the willing of different objects at different “instants of nature.”

Since God is the most well-organized of lovers, God wills first the end and then the proximate and remote means to that end.<sup>26</sup> According to Scotus, (a) *God's end* in creation is for created persons to share with the Trinity in the intimate friendship-love of God above all. Within this end, however, the primary finite object of divine love is the rational soul of Christ. According to Scotus' daring conception, God so loved the rational soul of Christ that He wanted to create it and be intimately loved by it whether or not any other creatures existed.<sup>27</sup> Happily for us, however, God has willed that Christ should be the head of many co-lovers,<sup>28</sup> whose number includes angels and other human souls.<sup>29</sup>

(b) Second, God wills *the proximate means* to that end. Since the end raises created persons above what is naturally possible or required for them, something must be done to fit them for such intimacy with the eternal Trinity. Where Christ is concerned, his human soul is fitted for the intimacy of the beatific vision by hypostatic union with the Divine Word. Sometimes Scotus explains this by saying that it was *fitting* for what subsisted in the Word to be raised to a higher glory than is appropriate to a pure creature.<sup>30</sup> Other times, Scotus evidences the pull of ancient naturalism, which insists that better beings *should be* loved more, when he says that hypostatic union makes it fitting for God to love the soul of Christ more than an angel.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the union of intimate love is given a *metaphysical ground* in the hypostatic union.<sup>32</sup> Further, the soul of Christ is confirmed in beatitude from the first instant of its creation; as steadfast in its friendship-love of God above all, that soul is impeccable.<sup>33</sup>

Angels and other human souls are fitted for sharing the divine love life by infused grace. God freely and contingently legislates a system of merit which creates *conventional and statutory* connections between the finite and temporal acts and states of created persons on the one hand, and divine acceptance, infused grace, and eternal glory on the other. Thus, the finite and temporal acts and states of created persons are given eternal significance.

(c) Third, God wills *the remote means* to His end. Scotus notes, “God is said to do what is right in a creature from the way He makes one created thing correspond to another . . . because the created nature demands this as something suited to it.”<sup>34</sup> Human rational souls are incomplete beings and are naturally

metaphysical constituents of rational animals. Thus, it was fitting for God to produce the physical world, so that the rational souls of men could be fittingly joined to bodies. On this construal, Scotus approves Aristotle's claim that man is the end for the sake of which the physical world exists.<sup>35</sup>

(2.3) *Evil as "Occasional"*: Notice that Scotus' charter of God's principal ends in creation and the proximate and remote means thereto ignores evils completely. This is deliberate. So far as the origin of evil is concerned, Scotus adopts what is known nowadays as a "free will defense." According to him, "all goods are attributed to God and all evils to us."<sup>36</sup> Rational free creatures and hence the possibility of sin are necessary for God's primary objective—the community of co-lovers, created as well as divine. But, pace Leibniz, actual sin is not a logically (metaphysically) necessary constituent of the Best of All Possible World. Nor, pace Aquinas, is actual sin required for the manifestation of divine goodness—so that God may show Himself just in punishing and merciful in sparing sinners.<sup>37</sup> Actual sin is not a logically (metaphysically) necessary means to, or a logically (metaphysically) or even naturally necessary consequence of God's principally intended end. Neither is the evil resulting from sin's punishment.<sup>38</sup> To make clear just how marginal evils are to the divine purpose, Scotus examines the natural priorities of God's will in more detail.

(2.3.1) *Predestination and Sin*: Against the current of theological opinion, Scotus declares that neither the Incarnation or the predestination of Christ—any more than the predestination of anyone else—was dependent upon sin or occasioned by prior guilt.<sup>39</sup> "Before any merit and before any demerit, He intends Christ to be united to Himself in the unity of the supposit"; otherwise, it would follow that God's highest work—*viz.*, Christ—was occasioned by sin, which would show bad priorities and belie the claim that God is the most well-organized of lovers.<sup>40</sup> Rather,

"First, God desires Himself; second He desires Himself in others; third, He wills that He be desired by one who can love Him in the highest degree that he can be loved by someone external; fourth, He intends the union of the nature which ought to love Him in the highest degree even if no one fell."<sup>41</sup>

As before, Scotus insists that according to God's actual priorities, the predestination of the soul of Christ follows only God's self-love and general desire for created co-lovers; the Incarnation is a suitable means to that end.

Likewise, for other free creatures, God predestines or not at an instant of nature prior to any foreseen sin. Scotus outlines the sequence as follows (where *n1*, *n2*, . . . stand for instants of nature; Michael and Lucifer are angels, and Peter and Judas, the disciples of those names):

*n1*: Michael and Lucifer, Peter and Judas are represented to God



- as alike in natural features;  
 God wills glory for Michael and Peter,  
 and elicits no positive act regarding Lucifer and Judas.  
*n2*: God wills grace—faith, merits, and a good use of free will—  
 for Michael and Peter,  
 and elicits no positive act regarding Lucifer and Judas.  
*n4*: God wills to permit Michael and Lucifer, Peter and Judas to  
 sin (and therefore wills not to obstruct their exercise of  
 free choice so as to eliminate the possibility of sin)  
*n5*: Lucifer and Judas are presented to God as ones who will commit  
 the sin of final impenitence  
 and God justly punishes or reprobates Lucifer and Judas.<sup>42</sup>

According to Scotus' theology, predestination is naturally prior to and not determined by foreseen free choice, because it raises the created person to a destiny not possible for him by nature alone; but reprobation is naturally simultaneous with foreseen sin, because "God is not a punisher before man is a debtor."<sup>43</sup> Again, "the complete foreordination and predestination of the elect is prior to anything being actually done about the reprobate, lest anyone should rejoice at the fall of another."<sup>44</sup> Elect human souls were not—pace Anselm—created and elevated to take the places forfeited by fallen angels.

(2.3.2) *God's Response to Sin*: In his effort to dissociate God from the entrance of evil into the universe, Scotus represents God's planning as ignoring sin until the last possible moment. His reasoning hints at a tacit reliance on the following controversial principles:

- (P1) an agent is responsible for his principally intended ends and the (proximate and remote) ;means thereto in a way in which he is not responsible for the side-effects occasioned thereby

and

- (P2) an agent is more responsible for his positive acts and their consequences than for his omissions and their consequences.

On Scotus' account (see section 1), however, God's only *responsibilities* are to Himself. And whatever may be said about (P1) in general, God's truth to Himself would mean not only choosing appropriate (proximate and remote) means to His ends, but also effecting a fitting integration of the unintended side-effects into His over-all purposes. Likewise, whether or not (P2) holds for created agents, surely the omniscient, omnipotent, and maximally organized lover would not be true to Himself were He to let His goals be obstructed by simple and avoidable omissions.

Scotus can consistently claim that God's justice survives His permission of

sin, only if God can work sin and its (logically/metaphysically or naturally) necessary consequences into a providential order that allows Him to achieve the generous aims Scotus ascribes to Him. This He does, Scotus thinks, by redeeming the elect<sup>45</sup> and punishing sin.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, God's choice among possible redemptive strategies amplifies His love for the elect by joining the generosity of (the human soul of) Christ to that of God Himself and allowing the best beloved to serve the less favored.

(2.3.3) *Redemption of the Elect from Sin*: Scotus' doctrine of the atonement is one of the most innovative pieces of his theology and affords a striking contrast to that of his eminent predecessor, St. Anselm. Both agree (i) that since God is a being a greater than which cannot be thought He is infinitely worthy of honor and love; (ii) that God's principal purpose in creation is to have created co-lovers who will be made happy thereby; (iii) that God's purpose is *prima facie* obstructed by sin; (iv) that the standards of divine justice are somehow prior to divine choice; and (v) that these standards of justice require God to be of consistent purpose and not let created persons decisively obstruct His plans.

In *Cur Deus Homo*, however, Anselm begins by conceding a premiss to which Scotus is fundamentally opposed—(vi) that it would be unfitting for the highest possible nature to join itself to a finite and temporal creature in hypostatic union apart from some necessary reason—and goes on to argue that the Incarnation was the only possible way for God to accomplish His original purpose in creation, given the fact of human sin. Anselm's argument seems to assume; (vii) that these standards require satisfaction for an offense against the supreme nature; and (viii) that this satisfaction must be proportionate to the worthiness of the offended party. Since (ix) worthiness is proportionate to degree of being (see section 1 above), it follows by (i) and (viii) that any offense against God is infinitely culpable. Likewise, by (ix), it follows that no created act could be infinitely meritorious. Therefore, only God could do something meritorious enough to make satisfaction for sin against God. Further, Anselm contends, even if an angel could do something infinitely meritorious, it would be unfitting for the human debt to be paid by a created person not of Adam's race. For fallen humans would then be obliged in the first instance to their created benefactor rather than to God. Relying on a principle of collective responsibility, Anselm concludes, that the debt will be fittingly paid only by a member of Adam's indebted race. Hence a God-man, who was both able to pay and a member of the race that ought to pay, was necessary.

Scotus begins his critique of Anselm by taking issue with (vii) and (viii), the assumption that in the redemptive order matters of fittingness are determined by standards of justice independent of the divine will. Rather, just as nothing about angelic or human natures could make created persons fit for the beatific vision *by their very natures*, but rather they are predestined to it by a free and contingent

divine volition; so no created act or state is, *by its very nature*, acceptable or meritorious, but is so only by freely instituted divine statutes. Thus, Scotus writes, “every created offering holds good only to the extent that God accepts it and not more”<sup>47</sup> and something counts as “merit because accepted, but not *vice versa*.”<sup>48</sup> A fortiori, which (if any) created act counts as satisfaction for sin is a matter of God’s free and contingent volition.

It follows, contrary to (viii), that God is not obliged to demand an offering that is ontologically commensurate with His nature. This is a good thing, too, because, if He were, not even an Incarnation would meet the Anselmian requirements of justice. For if it is a member of Adam’s race who must pay, Scotus reasons, then the acts of redemptive significance would be those of the human soul of Christ, not those of the divine will. Yet, all of the acts of Christ’s human soul are finite and ontologically incommensurate with the divine essence. Hypostatic union does not change the acts of a human soul from finite to infinite.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, God would be free to accept as satisfaction a formally finite act by which the sinful creature himself loves God more intensely than he formerly loved the created object in preference to God.<sup>50</sup> God willing,

“ . . . if Adam, through the gifts of grace and charity, had one or many acts of loving God for His own sake by a greater force of free will than was the force of sinning, such love would have sufficed for remitting his sin and could have made satisfaction . . . ”<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, God could accept such an act of love from a good angel or from another mere man conceived without sin and graced by God.<sup>52</sup> Nor, contrary to Anselm, would this mean that redeemed humans were obliged to their created benefactor rather than to God, but “to God alone because all he [i.e., the created benefactor] had would have been from God.”<sup>53</sup> And it would be only by virtue of contingent divine legislation that his finite act counted as meritorious enough for redemption. In sum, we are “always, finally, and maximally obliged to God as to the one from whom all goods proceed.”<sup>54</sup>

On Scotus’ account, God’s actual redemptive strategy explodes the Anselmian assumption—that where possible God respects the ontological proprieties, that the lower and less worthy should serve the higher and more admirable (i.e., that he abides by (vii), (viii), and (ix))—at a still deeper level. For where God—who is entitled to set the rules for redemption any way He wishes—could have chosen any created person as redeemer, He in fact elected, with the generous cooperation of the soul of Christ, the created being He loves most, so that the higher serves the lower. Again, although there was no metaphysical necessity for God to cast any of the divine persons as characters in the redemptive plot, God preferred to enter the action Himself and chose that human soul to which the Divine Word was already intimately united in hypostatic union. And, Scotus would contend,

it is precisely in making such choices that God shows consistency of purpose (and hence manifests His justice): the creator who takes the initiative to join finite and temporal persons to the infinite and eternal in beatific vision and love of God, also is joined in hypostatic union to the human soul whose finite and temporal acts He accepts for the world's redemption.

According to God's actual scenario, the human soul of Christ chooses to participate in divine judgment by confronting the religious leaders of His community with their sin.

“. . . Thus, it should be believed that that man suffered for the sake of justice. For he saw the evils of the Jews which they did and how by disordered and distorted affection they were attracted to their law. They did not even permit men to be healed on the Sabbath, and yet they drew out a sheep or cow from the pit on the Sabbath, and many others. Therefore, Christ, wishing to call them back from that error through deeds and words, preferred to die rather than to be silent, since truth needed to be spoken to the Jews. Therefore, He died for justice . . .”<sup>55</sup>

In this, Christ was obedient to God's call and purpose for Him. But with loving generosity for His fellows, He wished to turn the passion, which sin rejecting judgment effected, for a redemptive purpose.

“. . . Nevertheless, in fact His [i.e., Christ's] grace ordained His passion and offered it to the Father for us. Therefore, we are very much obliged to Him. For by the fact that man could have been redeemed otherwise and yet by His free will He redeemed us this way, we are very much obliged to Him and more so than if He had done so necessarily and we could not have been redeemed another way. Therefore, for the sake of attracting us to His love, as I believe, He chiefly did this, and because He wished man to be bound more fully to God. For example, if someone had begotten the first man and afterwards instructed him in discipline and sanctity, he would have been more obliged to him than if he had only begotten him and someone else had instructed him. This is fittingness, not necessity.”<sup>56</sup>

God, contemplating His response to sin in the now of eternity, sees Christ's obedience, His passion, and His generous offer, and freely and contingently decides to accept it, thereby electing Him redeemer of the world. In order for Christ to play this dual role, as head of the community of co-lovers and as redeemer of Adam's race, He must have a flesh that is able to suffer. Therefore, although apart from sin and in accord with His first role, Christ would have been endowed with a glorified body from the beginning,<sup>57</sup> the latter glory was delayed so that He might fill the role of mediator by suffering the passion.<sup>58</sup>

Scotus summarizes his account of God's redemptive plans in the following passage:

"This, then, was the order of divine intentions: (i) first God understood Himself under the aspect of the highest good; (ii) in the second sign, He understood all others, creatures; (iii) in the third, He predestined to glory and grace, and concerning the others He had a negative act by not predestining them; (iv) in the fourth, He foresees those who will fall away in Adam; (v) in the fifth, He foreordained or intended the remedy—how they would be redeemed through the passion of His Son. Thus, Christ in the flesh, like all the other elect, was intended and predestined to grace and glory, prior to His intending the passion of Christ as medicine against the fall, the way a doctor wills a man's health prior to ordering healing medicine.

"Moreover, just as the elect were predestined prior to His intending the passion of Christ as a remedy against their fall, so the whole Trinity ordained the predestinate and elect to grace and final glory, so far as efficient [causality] is concerned, prior to intending the passion of Christ as medicine to be taken for the elect who fall in Adam, already predestined to final glory. And just as the Word intends His passion to be offered to the Father for the predestined and elect, and so efficaciously offered it in effect, so the whole Trinity efficaciously accepted the passion for them, and it was efficaciously offered for no others or accepted from eternity. Therefore, He merited for them the first grace ordaining them to consummate glory. This much so far as the efficacy of merit is concerned."<sup>59</sup>

### 3. *The Surd of Reprobation:*

If Scotus' emphasis on God's freedom from obligation *to* creatures (see section 1 above) and on the irrelevance of evil to His purpose (see section 2 above) serves to magnify God's generosity towards the elect, it makes reprobation at best mysterious. According to Scotus, God establishes order on the sin by punishing it.<sup>60</sup> With the elect, punishment is tempered by mitigating mercy<sup>61</sup> in redemption (see section 2.3.2 above). With the reprobate it is eternal: they are forever given over to their guilt<sup>62</sup> and the torment of their inordinate appetites, deprived of both natural and supernatural happiness, and made to suffer perpetual fiery torment, which distracts their intellects so much that they can think of nothing else.<sup>63</sup> For the reprobate, the setting of their finite and temporal acts in relation to the infinite and eternal God has given their earthly lives eternal significance. But it does so by serving them a fate as much worse than natural

animal mortality,<sup>64</sup> as heavenly bliss is better than natural enjoyments. How can this piece of doctrine be made to fit with Scotus' general sketch of God's character and purposes in creation?

(3.1) *Justice to Creatures?* As Anselm had noted, the justice of one person's action towards another can be considered three ways: from the angle of the act-type, from the side of the actor, and from the side of the person acted upon. Anselm then argued that sins not infinitely culpable so far as the act-type was concerned, turn out so to be when considered as an offense against an infinitely worthy ruler. It follows that when God condemns unrepentant sinners to eternal punishment, His action is fitting because it assigns them their just deserts.<sup>65</sup>

Scotus will agree that the fit between sin and reprobation is one of just deserts, but the claim will not have explanatory value within his theory, given his contention that finite created acts, in and of themselves, have no eternal significance whatever. That they merit eternal bliss or deserve unending torment, is a product of God's free and contingent statutes, not of naturalistically grounded claims of justice. God could have legislated otherwise or not at all (see section 2.3.3 above). Our present question is whether and how the legislation which *defines* eternal deserts fits with Scotus' account of God's character and purposes in creation.

Scotus himself exploits the other side of this coin, maintaining that since God has no obligations *to* creatures, He is *not unjust to them* in (a) creating some persons whom (b) He omits to ordain to glory and (c) omits to furnish with the graces necessary for perseverance; nor is He unjust (d) in naming the above torments (instead say or lighter ones, or annihilation after judgment) as the penalty for sinning to the end. As Scotus says, "when equals are apprehended, it [=the highest goodness] wills to share the good unequally and there is no injustice in this . . . because nothing is owed."<sup>66</sup> And he supplements this *a priori* consideration with an analogy: a king is not obliged to accept anyone into the family of his household and may simply accept these and not those, apart from any injustice.<sup>67</sup>

(3.2) *God's Justice to Himself:* Scotus has claimed that God's only obligation is to His own goodness, that He love it, and that He follow through on what Love purposes. Within Scotus' framework (which contingently equates God's justice to Himself with His generosity towards creatures), our question remains, whether God can be true to Himself, if He weaves the sin of the reprobate into His cosmic plot by knotting it with eternal punishment? The answer, in my judgment, is that He cannot.

If, as Scotus' maintains, God's only reason for creating persons is that love of the infinite good be shared more widely, then Scotus is surely right to insist that sin and the evils resulting from its punishment are not *necessary* for this aim. Even granting that punishment may be rehabilitative for the predestinate,

it seems obvious that the eternal torment of the reprobate described by Scotus represents the defeat of God's purpose in those persons. Moreover, it seems to contradict the love to which God is supposed, above all, to remain true. If Scotus celebrates the supra-natural divine generosity evidenced in the elevation of the elect, he refuses to peer down the dark chasm of equally supra-natural divine cruelty projected in the doom of the damned.

Moreover, these failures look culpable, because seemingly God could have done otherwise. If the reprobate are neither constituents of or means to His chosen ends, could He not have planned ahead and not created them in the first place? or having decided to create them, surely it was within His power to include them among the predestinate? Are not His omissions horrendous failures of follow-through?

(3.3) *The Excuse of Divine Ignorance?* This last objection presupposes that God had knowledge of which free persons were going to persist in sin and which ones were not at an instant of nature prior to His decisions about which ones to create and/or predestine. On Scotus' account (see section 2.3.1 above), this is not so: God decides to create at  $n0$ , to predestine or not at  $n1$ , to distribute grace or not at  $n2$ , to permit sin at  $n3$ , and then only at  $n4$  sees which created persons sin to the end and which do not. Scotus would thus meet my complaint against God's kindness—that He should have used His knowledge to forestall reprobation—by holding that God does not know “soon” enough, in the natural order of priorities.<sup>68</sup>

Scotus is not clearly entitled to this rejoinder, however, because he sometimes (although not always<sup>69</sup>) holds that God's acts and omissions at  $n0$ - $n3$  are sufficient for the persistence in sin foreseen at  $n4$ . Not that what God does is a total efficient positive cause of the created volition—since it is impossible, given the nature of will as a *self*-determining power for opposites (see section 2.1 above), for one agent to be the total efficient cause of the volitions of another.<sup>70</sup> Rather it is His own foreseen non-cooperation with the circumstances that would make the created volition count as morally good and meritorious that is sufficient for the created volition being sinful<sup>71</sup> or at least “negatively, not good.”<sup>72</sup> If God could have certain foreknowledge of who will sin to the end on the basis of His own acts, omissions, and permissions at  $n0$ - $n3$ , then it would seem that He is in a position to know the general proposition

(P3) Whomever I pass over and assign no grace will sin to the end, if I permit it

from the beginning at  $n0$ . The objection would then rearise: why did not God make use of His knowledge of (P3) in deciding whom to create and how to distribute grace, or to form a policy of predestining and giving grace to everyone He creates? Or if God permitted any to sin to the end, why did He not use His

legislative powers to lighten the sanctions and to prolong into purgatory (for as long as necessary) the opportunities for a favorable response? Why did He not use His creative imagination to design post-mortem conditions optimal for repentance, while allowing the recalcitrant as much happiness as is metaphysically compatible with that goal? In not doing so, He seems unfaithful to the general creative purposes Scotus assigns to Him.

Faced with the dogma of reprobation, Scotus' bottom-line answer is that we don't know why God creates some whom He omits to predestine, or why He assigns to the reprobate a punishment so severe; "no reason can be given for this except the divine will."<sup>73</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion:

I will conclude by measuring Scotus' picture of divine goodness in terms of its power to show the compossibility of God and evil. (4.1) *The Resourcefulness of Scotus' Theory*: According to Scotus, God's infinite metaphysical or natural goodness implies that God has no obligations to creatures to will one thing rather than another. This consequence erases the question of whether human suffering and death of the sort found in this world is logically consistent with perfect *divine justice to creatures*. The only question of justice left is whether it is logically possible for such evils to exist in a world in which God is *true to Himself*, i.e., "of consistent purpose." According to Scotus, the only necessary aspect of divine purpose is that He love Himself above all and for His own sake. So the compossibility of God and evil can be exhibited within Scotus' framework, if there is some logically possible situation in which God is of consistent purpose in both (i) loving Himself above all and for His own sake, while (ii) making created persons and allowing them to sin and suffer temporal evils such as we experience. A modification of Scotus' soteriological plot-line suggests a story in which these conditions would be satisfied: *viz.*, one that differs from his actual proposal, in that God predestines and graces all of the persons He creates; one in which, should any sin to the point of death, He continues to create post-mortem opportunities until they repent. Such a world is logically possible even from Scotus' perspective. Further, it would be one in which God was immeasurably loving to all created persons, in ordaining them to the supernatural glory of the beatific vision and love of Himself, as by choosing to use for human redemption the human soul He loved most and to which He was joined in hypostatic union. Thus, Scotus' value-theory is resourceful enough to show how (i) and (ii) could be consistently incorporated in a triumph of divine generosity.

(4.2) *Objections* to this theory will be many and varied. For now, I shall pause to clear away two, which do not strike me as decisive. (a) First, some will contend that the above scenario is not really logically possible, because the



notions of divine generosity and Incarnation are both contradictory. For generosity is measured in terms of the resources of the giver; since God's resources are unlimited, He (like the multi-millionaire) is too rich to be generous.<sup>74</sup> Again, it seems metaphysically necessary that each individual have one and only one essential nature; but the Incarnation requires that one person have two.

(b) Further, some will say, that even if divine generosity were logically possible, the above world-story does not cast God as generous, but rather as cruel and foolish. For, according to Scotus, the sufferings of Christ were not *necessary* for our salvation; He could have "let us off" with a simple apology. Is it not both silly and sadistic of Him to choose the passion and death of His best beloved creature as a way of redeeming the world? How can He thereby be true to His own love for the soul of Christ?<sup>75</sup> Moreover, human sufferings *in via* would limit God's generosity towards the elect. As neither logically nor metaphysically necessary for God's intended end, they would serve no purpose and thus have no meaning. How can He thereby be true to His own putative generosity to creatures?

(Ra) To the first, Scotus defends the logical and metaphysical possibility of the Incarnation with a subtle revision of the metaphysics of substance, which I have elsewhere<sup>76</sup> commended as worthy of contemporary consideration. As for generosity, Scotus might reply, its measures are manifold: e.g., the absolute size of the gift, its relation to the donor's resources, to the recipient's need or title thereto, etc. His deepest answer, however, is that it can be generous to give yourself, no matter how rich in other resources you may be. According to Scotus, this is exactly what God does in the Incarnation, which is primarily a means to the end of His love-life with Christ, and secondarily an expression of God's commitment to the finite and temporal order.

(Rb) Not only that. In the possible world under discussion (like the actual world, according to Scotus), God does not choose to save us through the pain and suffering of *someone else*. Rather, via the Incarnation, God continues to give Himself, making His own pain and sufferings by which our redemption is won. Moreover, it is not even metaphysically or logically possible that human suffering and death limit God's generosity towards the elect, given His sharing of the intimate love-life of the Trinity, a good incommensurate with temporal evils. On the contrary, by voluntarily sharing this burden without trying to shirk it, God's people would likewise participate in His commitment to the finite and created order.

(4.3) *The Inadequacy of Scotus' Actual Account*: Scotus' soteriology provides us with his account of how God is *actually* solving the problem of evil. As I have argued (in section 3 above), reprobation is the rock on which the ship of Scotus' theodicy would founder. For in showing Himself (not unjust) but cruel to the reprobate, adding "eternal torment" to the sufferings of this present life,"

God also fails to be true to Himself, to the super-abundant generosity of purpose that Scotus attributes to Him.

Scotus' options for dealing with the surd of reprobation were severely limited by the theological climate of his time. The doctrine of reprobation seemed to have a Biblical base and was for that reason uncontested. Scotus could have reverted to Anselmian inflexibility and limited God's justifiable options for dealing with sin, but this move would have undercut the dramatic (and in my view, attractive) picture of God's generosity to the elect that is so distinctive of Scotus' doctrine of the atonement (see section 2.3.2 above). Alternatively, Scotus could have modified his doctrine of predestination, so that predestination and reprobation were naturally simultaneous, alike dependent upon and hence naturally posterior to foreseen free choices, thereby eliminating the mind-boggling thought that a person's eternal destiny might depend on a gratuitous divine omission. Such doctrines of predestination were espoused by Henry of Ghent and William Ockham and bring their own difficulties, which I must pass over here.<sup>77</sup> Not even this step would entirely absolve God of inconstancy of purpose, however, so long as Scotus continued to insist upon God's freedom to set up the eternal rewards and penalties any way He wants.

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## NOTES

1. I am grateful for comments and criticisms from Robert Adams, Eleanore Stump, Norman Kretzmann, and members of the Cornell Philosophy Discussion Club.

2. This approach has received its paradigmatic formulation in the unusually clear article of Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil," *Philosophical Review* LXXII (1963), 180-97.

3. This approach has received a particularly subtle formulation by Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford University Press, 1974, ch. 9, 164-193.

4. I have pursued these intuitions another way in my paper "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, Cornell University Press, 1986, 248-267.

5. Allan Wolter has contributed more than anyone else in the English-speaking world to filling the yawning gaps in our knowledge of Duns Scotus. His recent work, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, Catholic University Press, 1986 (afterwards = AW), contains Latin text and excellent translations of many of Scotus' writings on these subjects. I have learned more from these texts and the accompanying lengthy introduction than I can say.

6. Scotus offers this argument in many places, including *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, qq. 1-2; Vat II 145-73, and *De Primo Principio*.

7. *Ord.* II, d. 40, q.u; AW 225, 227.
8. *Ord.* II, d. 7, nn. 28-39; AW 219; *Ord.* II, d. 40, q.u; AW 225.
9. *Ord.* III, suppl. d. 27; AW 425.
10. *Op. Ox.* IV, d. 46, q. 1, n. 12; Wadding-Vives 20 428 (afterwards = WV); AW 253.
11. *Ord.* IV, d. 46, q. 1, n. 3; WV 20 425; AW 247.
12. *Op. Ox.* IV, d. 46, q. 1, n. 8; WV 20 425; AW 247.
13. *Op. Ox.* IV, d. 46, q. 1, n. 12; WV 20 428; AW 253, 255.
14. *Op. Ox.* IV, d. 46, q. 1, n. 12; WV 20 428; AW 253.
15. *Ord.* I, d. 44, q.u, nn. 3-5; Vat VI 363-5; AW 255, 257.
16. *Op. Ox.* II, d. 37, q. 1, n. 6; Wadding VI 981 (afterwards = Wad).
17. *Lect. Prol.*, pars 4, qq. 1-2, n. 172; Vat XVI 57; AW 139. Cf. *Ord.* III, suppl. d. 27; AW 435.
18. *Ord.* III, suppl. d. 37; AW 277.
19. *Op. Ox.* II, d. 37, q. 1, n. 6; Wad VI 981; cf. *Op. Ox.* II, d. 37, q. 2, n. 21; Wad VI 1003.
20. Introduction, AW 19-20.
21. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, q. 4; in Scotus, *Theologiae Marianae Elementa*, ed. by Carolus Balic, OFM, Kacic, 1933, 12 (afterwards = CB). Cf. Introduction, AW 19-20.
22. *Ord.* III, d. 17; AW 181.
23. *Ord.* III, suppl. d. 26; AW 181.
24. *Ord.* III, suppl. d. 27; AW 427-431
25. *Ord.* III, suppl. d. 27; AW 429.
26. *Ord.* I, d. 41, q.u, n. 41; Vat VI 332; *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, q. 4; CB 12.
27. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, q. 4; CB 14; cf. 14-15.
28. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 13, q. 4, n. 8; Wad VII 267.
29. Note that Scotus joins medieval theologians and the book of Hebrews in supposing that God loved Christ more than the angels, which are metaphysically better than humans. This is contrary to ancient naturalism, which would require one to love better things more. Scotus singles out the *soul* of Christ, a human substantial form and hence an incomplete being, as the primary object of divine love, presumably because the body plays no role in the loving.
30. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, q. 4; CB 12.
31. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, q. 3; CB 8.
32. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, q. 4; CB 14.
33. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 12, q.u, n. 3; Wad VII 255.
34. *Op. Ox.* IV, d. 46, q. 1, n. 9; WV XX 425-6; AW 249.
35. Introduction, AW 20.
36. *Ord.* I, d. 41, q.u, n. 46; Vat VI 334.
37. *Ord.* I, d. 41, q.u, n. 21; Vat VI 324-5.
38. *Ord.* I, d. 41, q.u, n. 46; Vat VI 334.
39. *Rep. Bar.* III, d. 7, q. 3; CB 182. *Lect. Completa* III, d. 7, q. 3; CB 188.
40. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, q. 4; CB 14.
41. *Op. Ox.* III, d. 7, a. 4; CB 14-15.

42. *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 45; Vat VI 334.
43. Quoted from Augustine by Scotus, *Lect. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 26; Vat XVII 520; *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 42; Vat VI 333.
44. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 7, q. 4; CB 14.
45. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 9; Wad VII 429.
46. *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 45; Vat VI 334.
47. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 9; Wad VII 429.
48. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 19, q.u, n. 9; Wad VII 429.
49. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 8; Wad VII 429; cf. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 19, q.u, n. 4; Wad VII 413; d. 19, q.u, n. 7; Wad VII 418.
50. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 9; Wad VII 429.
51. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 8; Wad VII 429.
52. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 9; Wad VII 429.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 10; Wad VII 430.
56. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 20, q.u, n. 10; Wad VII 430.
57. *Rep. Val. III*, d. 6, q. 5; CB 177-8; *Rep. Bar. III*, d. 7, q. 3; CB 185; *Lectura Completa III*, d. 7, q. 3; CB 188.
58. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 7, q. 4; CB 15.
59. *Op. Ox. III*, d. 19, q.u, n. 6; Wad VII 415.
60. *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 45; Vat VI 334.
61. *Op. Ox. IV*, d. 46, q. 2, n. 4; WV XX 443.
62. *Op. Ox. IV*, d. 46, q. 4, n. 6; WV XX 459.
63. *Op. Ox. IV*, d. 46, q. 4, n. 5; WV XX 457.
64. Cf. Mark 14:21, which implies that the end of Judas, the paradigm reprobate, is a fate worse than death.
65. *Prosligion*, c. 11; *Cur Deus Homo*, I, cc. 20-21.
66. *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 53; Vat VI 337.
67. *Rep. Bar. III*, d. 7, q. 3; CB 183-4; *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 47; Vat VI 334-5.
68. Scotus does not explicitly discuss counter-factual knowledge regarding free choices, which has been a topic of recent debate. See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, chapter ix, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1974, 164-193; and Robert Merrihew Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* XIV (1977) 109-117.
69. Other times Scotus holds that God's acts, permissions, and omissions could not be sufficient for *sin*, because in such cases it would not be within a creature's power to act rightly, and so his not acting rightly would not count as *sin*. (*Op. Ox. II*, d. 37, q. 2, nn. 16-17; Wad VI 998)
70. *Quaest. in Meta. IX*, q. 15; AW 157; *Ord. IV*, d. 29; AW 175-177.
71. *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 50; Vat VI 336; cf. *Ord. I*, d. 41, q.u, n. 38; Vat VI 331; *ibid.*, n. 48; Vat VI 335.
72. *Rep. Bar. III*, d. 7, q. 3; CB 183-4.

73. *Ord.* I, d. 41, q.u, n. 38; Vat VI 331.

74. This objection was raised to me by Eleanore Stump and Paul Streveler.

75. Eleanore Stump also raised this objection.

76. See my article, "The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in some Fourteenth-Century Franciscans," in *Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1985, 21-57.

77. See my book, *William Ockham*, chapter 31, Notre Dame University Press, 1987, 1299-1347.