

Riccardo Fedriga  
Monika Michałowska

SAFEGUARDING  
**FREE  
WILL**

William Ockham, Walter Chatton,  
and Richard Kilvington  
on the Will



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Kraków 2022

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	9
Riccardo Fedriga, Monika Michałowska	
<b>PART I. WILLIAM OCKHAM: AN ACTION-GUIDING SENSE OF FREEDOM</b>	<b>15</b>
Chapter 1. WILL, MIND, AND FREE ACTION: OCKHAM’S WAY OUT OF FATALISM	17
Riccardo Fedriga	
1.1 Introduction	17
1.2 The Freedom of Indifference	18
1.3 The Freedom of Action and the Freedom of Indifference	23
1.4 Fatalism, Divine Foreknowledge, and Human Free Will	25
1.5 Predestination and Freedom: Various Ways of References as a Solution	29
1.6 The Criticism of and Counterarguments to Scotus’s Voluntarism	33
1.7 Conclusion	37
Chapter 2. THE LOGIC OF BELIEF AS A PRAGMATICS OF FREEDOM	41
Riccardo Fedriga	
2.1 Introduction	41
2.2 The Compatibilist Dilemma and the Foreknowledge Conundrum	42
2.3 Revisiting Historical Positions	44
2.4 Epistemic Guarantees for Compatibilism	50
2.5 Contingency and True Reference: A Puzzle about Belief	53
2.6 Divine Foreknowledge and Verbal Tenses	56
2.7 From a Theological Point of View	60
2.8 Conclusion	64

Chapter 3. SIGNS, RULES, AND PROPHECIES: AN ACTION-GUIDING SENSE TO FREEDOM	67
Riccardo Fedriga	
3.1 Introduction	67
3.2 Prophecies	70
3.3 <i>Adhuc post quadraginta dies et Ninive subverteretur</i>	73
3.4 Prophecies and Performative Statements	75
3.5 Knowing and Believing	80
3.6 Conclusion	86
 <b>PART II. THE COMPLEX AND MULTIFARIOUS NATURE OF THE WILL AND ITS ACTS</b>	 87
Chapter 4. WALTER CHATTON ON THE WILL AND ITS ACTS	89
Monika Michałowska	
4.1 Introduction	89
4.2 The Will's Choice-Making	92
4.3 Nilling and Hating God	99
4.4 Willing and Nilling in Absolute and Conditional Senses	106
4.5 Conclusion	113
Chapter 5. SECOND-ORDER VOLITIONS	115
Monika Michałowska	
5.1 Introduction	115
5.2 The Development of the Notion of High-Order Volitions	116
5.3 The Sources of 14 <sup>th</sup> -Century Concepts of Second-Order Volitions: John Duns Scotus and William Ockham on Higher-Order Acts of the Will	121
5.4. Walter Chatton on Willing the Opposite and Higher-Order Willing	127
5.5 Richard Kilvington: The Self-Determining Nature of the Will	131
5.6 Conclusion	135



<b>PART III. THE WILL AND TIME</b>	<b>137</b>
Chapter 6. THE WILL, TIME, AND SIMULTANEOUS CONTRADICTIONS: THE ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM	139
Riccardo Fedriga, Monika Michałowska	
6.1 Introduction: After the Condemnation of 1277	139
6.2 John Duns Scotus as a 14 <sup>th</sup> -Century Source: A Contingent Approach	142
6.3 Three Ways of Free Will	148
6.4 From the Human to the Divine Will	151
6.5 Conclusion	153
Chapter 7. ACT IN A DECENT WAY: FREE WILL, CHARITY, AND INSTILLED GRACE	155
Riccardo Fedriga	
7.1 Introduction	155
7.2 In the Shadow of John Duns Scotus: Walter Chatton and Adam Wodeham in Dialogue with William Ockham	156
7.3 Walter Chatton: Habits and the Necessity of Grace	157
7.4 Adam Wodeham and Propositional Realism	161
7.5 Conclusion	166
Chapter 8. RICHARD KILVINGTON ON THE WILL'S ACTING AND TIME	169
Monika Michałowska	
8.1 Introduction	169
8.2 The Structure and Sources of the Question	171
8.3 The Will's Acting and Time	173
8.4 Conclusion	180
8.5 Introduction to the Edition	181
8.6 Edition of Question 5.1: <i>Utrum voluntas eliciens actum voluntatis pro aliquo instanti debeat ipsum actum per aliquod tempus necessario tenere</i>	189

Conclusion	201
Riccardo Fedriga, Monika Michałowska	
Bibliography	207
Primary Sources	207
Secondary Sources	213
Summary	233
Index of names	235
Subject index	241

# INTRODUCTION

Riccardo Fedriga, Monika Michałowska

*Safeguarding Free Will: William Ockham, Walter Chatton, and Richard Kilvington on the Will* features an array of varied issues that made up the much-debated will problem in late medieval philosophy and theology. The book discusses concepts of the will produced in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, whereby its special focus is on the ideas that sprang up and evolved at Oxford in the 1330s. Although the literature on medieval concepts of the will and will-related issues is indeed extensive, this particular timeframe remains under-researched. There are several reasons for this neglect. Firstly, some important textual sources are still available solely in manuscripts. Secondly, some authors whose merits as ingenious philosophers and/or logicians have already been acknowledged did not pen texts explicitly or entirely devoted to the will and have thus been regarded as irrelevant to debates on the will. Consequently, their writings have not been studied from the will-perspective. Thirdly, the contemporary discourse on late medieval theories of the will developed by scholars working on ethics, the metaphysics of the will, and moral psychology has of late been dominated by a tendency to marginalize “minor authors” and those whose reputation lay elsewhere. We believe that this trend has particularly disadvantaged the Oxford Calculators, who have been recognized as experts in logic and mathematical physics, yet their writings on and concepts of the will have been grievously overlooked so far. Admittedly, there are signs that this trend is abating, and that a new group of scholars has arisen who probe beyond the surface and glean will-issues from writings that less expressly engage with the problem. Nevertheless, this shift is only just starting to emerge. Therefore, this book seeks to shed some light on the concepts of the will hatched at Oxford in the 1330s by exploring the themes and approaches adopted by Walter Chatton (an opponent of William Ockham) and Richard Kilvington (one of the Oxford Calculators).

From: Riccardo Fedriga, Monika Michałowska, *Safeguarding Free Will: William Ockham, Walter Chatton, and Richard Kilvington on the Will*, Kraków 2022

The research on and publication of this volume has been supported financially by the National Science Centre, Poland under grant agreement UMO-2017/27/B/HS1/00066.

It would be naive to think that the ideas conceived at Oxford in the 1330s appeared in a theoretical and conceptual void. The authors whose concepts we examine in this book are greatly indebted to those who had come before them and whose writings inspired them either to follow and advance certain ideas or to develop a critical standpoint and offer alternative solutions. The variety of will-related themes investigated at Oxford in the 1330s is impressive. Presenting and analyzing all the threads and knots involved (if feasible, in the first place) lies beyond the scope of our book. The aim we have in mind is much more modest; it is merely to study an ensemble of selected issues that were considered vital at that time.

This threefold volume starts with the theories of William Ockham to show how he paved the way for the Oxonian thinkers of the 1330s, some of whom were his conversation partners and opponents in disputes. Ockham's concepts in fact provide a starting point for our further argument. In Part I, we offer a detail study of his notions of the human and the divine wills, the freedom of the will as entwined with the problem of future contingents and divine foreknowledge, the will and time, and the will in relation to causal chains. This not only outlines a doctrinal framework for the theories of Chatton and Kilvington (Part 2 and Part 3), but also shows the varied ways in which Ockham's ideas were adopted, advanced, criticized, and referred to by the Oxonian philosophers and theologians.

In Part I (Chapters 1–3), entitled “William Ockham: An Action-Guiding Sense of Freedom,” Riccardo Fedriga analyzes Ockham's theories of the human and the divine wills in conjunction with a range of issues, such as divine foreknowledge, future contingents, prophecies, the logic of belief, causal determinism, and the distinction between *soft* and *hard* facts. Fedriga presents Ockham's theory of the will in terms of the freedom of indifference, where the will is conceptualized as independent from reason. Rather than indicating that the will is the sole cause of its action (which is the case in the voluntaristic want-belief model), indifference refers in this context to the causal structure of the will and implies that the will is morally indifferent. Because of its moral indifference, the will is not bound by or to the injunctions of reason. This means that, according to Ockham, humans are free to choose an end to pursue, even if this end is morally wrong, since its moral value never determines the act of the will. Consequently, the freedom of indifference is not a pre-reflexive state of the will, but rather represents an unlimited, extra-temporal, volitional power, as the will itself is indifferent to the objects that the intellect presents to it. The indifference of the will is ontologically undetermined, because the will is not just indifferent to what the intellect dictates, but also capable of acting against what the intellect commands. However, the existence of this intrinsic freedom of the will is only

established by practical experience and cannot be either demonstrated *a priori* or grounded in transcendental categories. In Ockham's view, for the intention of a free action to be achieved, it must occur and be pursued in a proper way. This means that it must always exhibit a causal regularity, such that it can be followed and socially ascertained. This regularity is based on the reciprocal referentiality between a particular intentional act and its actual regularity. It is precisely in this reciprocity that, in our view, the epistemological-ethical function of the practical intellect (and not the moral value of the action) lies. More than that: it is thanks to this reciprocal process that the will is completely free and indifferent regarding the action itself. While admissible because of God's absolute power, God's free action *extra ordinem* is not presented by Ockham either as an arbitrary intervention in the actual world or as an exception to the order created by God, or, much less even, as preparation for a free divine intervention. Rather, it represents a possible foundation of a new and different order: a potential, counterfactual alternative to the existing laws of fact. While such an action remains possible, it is not implemented. Otherwise, the divine intellect could be subjected to the dominion of its own will, or a believer would only depend on God's *imperium voluntatis*, or God would be unable to foreknow future contingents with certainty. God can work a miracle, threaten the fulfillment of a prophecy, or even bestow grace, revealing that God's intention is simple and free—unrestricted by the will—and indicate to a believer the path to an eventual, yet free, good action. In this way, God safeguards divine free will. But how can a *viator* evade the risks of theological fatalism amidst this "conundrum of foreknowledge"? Chiefly (though not exclusively) in the *Tractatus de praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei respectu futurorum contingentium* (1321–1324), Ockham finds a way to retain and reconcile divine foreknowledge and human free will, whereby his criticism of John Duns Scotus's voluntaristic position serves him as a springboard. Specifically, Ockham explains that while propositions of *divina praescientia* are verbally (*secundum vocem*) related to the present, they in fact (*secundum rem*) concern the future, from the perspective of which they can be determined as being true or false. Consequently, the truth-value of propositions about the future is guaranteed by their being objects of divine foreknowledge, but these propositions are at the same time amenable to the choices of free will, because they are still undetermined in the present. By scrutinizing Ockham's ideas of and solutions for safeguarding the freedom of the will, Fedriga builds a platform for our analyses in Parts 2 and 3.

Part 2 (Chapters 4–5), entitled "The Complex and Multifarious Nature of the Will and Its Acts," illumines the diversity of the will's acts and the manifold structure of the will as envisaged by Walter Chatton and Richard Kilvington. Chapter 4 by Monika Michałowska depicts the concept of the will articulated

by Chatton in his quodlibetal questions and in his question commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Although Chatton never penned an ethical commentary, an avid interest in the freedom of the will and in the interaction of the intellect and the will in moral decision-making is clearly visible in his works. Michałowska examines the structure of the will-act as posited by Chatton to highlight its diverse components. In Chatton's framework, although moral decision-making is associated with the activity of the intellect, the will possesses the power to accept, reject, or act against the intellect's judgments, and even to suspend the intellect's activity in order to redirect it or act without its further involvement. This approach to the will-intellect relationship serves Chatton to prove the dominance and independence of the will in moral decision-making.

Chapter 5 by Michałowska studies the concept of second-order volitions in Chatton and Kilvington. To highlight the novelty of their approaches and solutions, she first sketches a doctrinal background of the problem, outlining how the issue was spawned by the works of Augustine and Anselm of Canterbury. Subsequently, she shows how it was later pondered by 12<sup>th</sup>-century theologians, such as Peter of Poitiers and Stephen Langton, who focused on the conditionality of the will to debate higher-level acts of the will. Finally, she looks into John Duns Scotus and William Ockham as the sources of Chatton's and Kilvington's ideas to present the way higher-order volitions were interpreted by the two Oxonian philosophers and elucidate the purposes second-order volitions served in their theories of the will. This study reveals that a) both Chatton and Kilvington employed the distinction into first- and second-order volitions to emphasize the self-determination and self-reflexivity of the will and to prove its freedom; and that b) their strategy for the defense of the freedom of the will by stressing its higher-order acts relied on Ockham's theory.

Part 3 (Chapters 6–8), entitled “The Will and Time,” concentrates on the complexity of the temporal entanglements of the will's acting and shows how the problem of simultaneous contradictories was advanced by the Oxonian philosophers to finally develop into a separate issue, known as the contradiction theory of change. The possibility of change in the will's acts was analyzed by both Chatton and Kilvington, with their explorations generating different specific themes and solutions for the scrutiny of the will's causality and its temporality. Chapter 6 by Fedriga and Michałowska investigates the origin of the problem that can be traced back to the Condemnation of 1277 and the conundrum of how “rectitude and malice can/cannot be present in the will at the same time,” faced by 13<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers. First attempts to solve this puzzle were undertaken by Henry of Ghent and by John of Pouilly, who are considered the founders of the contradiction theory of change. However, Scotus's contingency theory can be suggested as another possible origin of the simultaneous

contradictories problem. By detailing Scotus's position, Chapter 6 offers an introduction to the Oxonian approaches depicted in Chapters 7 and 8, which look into volitional acts, changes in the will, causal chains, and the problem of necessity and freedom. These classical disputes are closely related to debates on canonic theological queries such as, for instance, whether God can save a human being without the sacraments. Or, can God do so, even more radically, without giving a human being grace? In general, how can God directly cause what is normally caused by an intermediate agent? What is the relationship between changing causal chains and the establishment of deviant orders of the world?

In Chapter 7, Fedriga retraces some historiographically well-established points, such as God's absolute and ordained powers, the role of free will, and the idea of righteous action in order to delve into the themes of change, wayward causal chains, and the influence of Scotus's doctrine on Chatton and Adam Wodeham, two of Ockham's most important interlocutors.

Chapter 8 by Michałowska portrays a different facet of the simultaneous contradictories issue by pondering the temporal factor in the will's acting as discussed by Richard Kilvington in question 5.1 in his *Questions on the Sentences* (*Utrum voluntas eliciens actum voluntatis pro aliquo instanti debeat ipsum actum per aliquod tempus necessario tenere*). In order to capture Kilvington's position, Michałowska delves into the role that the circumstance of time plays in the acting of the will, and into his reasoning on the extent of resemblance between the will's acting and natural processes. By highlighting Kilvington's unique analytical methods and tools, Michałowska elucidates Kilvington's idea of the uniformity of ethical and physical processes, a perspective that eventually led him to approach ethical and physical processes in a similar manner. Chapter 8 is accompanied by the first critical edition of question 5.1 and an introduction to it.

Any history of philosophy that neglects analytically informed philosophizing is futile. We consider ourselves as much historians of philosophy as philosophers; therefore, in our study, we occasionally take the liberty of doing philosophy along with critically assessing the concepts we investigate. We realize that while some readers may welcome this combination, others may be less obliging, but we hope that this will become a starting point for further discussions on the robustness and diversity of the will-debate at Oxford in the 1330s.





PART I

**WILLIAM OCKHAM  
AN ACTION-GUIDING SENSE  
OF FREEDOM**



# CHAPTER 1

## WILL, MIND, AND FREE ACTION

### OCKHAM'S WAY OUT OF FATALISM

Riccardo Fedriga

#### 1.1 Introduction

The relationship between necessity and contingency, between the stable and certain order of the world and free, contingent actions, is of great relevance to any cultural tradition, religious or otherwise. While Aristotle himself wondered how to reconcile the entirely natural requirements of propositional logic and the freedom of choice, the introduction to philosophy of the analytical attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness of the Christian God made future contingents an even more pivotal issue for the interpreters of the revealed datum. If God knows everything with certainty, God also know what I and any other human will or will not do tomorrow or at any other moment. This, however, does not preclude my freedom to choose between doing something or not, between performing one action or its opposite.

Free will lies at the core of medieval Christian thought and attempts to solve the conflict between God's omniscience and the freedom of will have repeatedly revealed new aspects of the problem, just like when untying a knot, one finds new, variously entangled ends time and again. How can an absolutely single and simple God want such different things? What is the relationship between an essentially simple and eternal God, and the world in which time passes? All things were created, but was their creation instantaneous or stretched over time? Has it been concluded or can it be further expanded? Faced with the entirely regulated and ordered world (*ordinatio*), what would happen if one admitted that God could act with complete freedom, regardless of the laws and the world's order God has set in motion? And, most importantly, how can free will be safeguard in this scenario?

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Among this multitude of problems, the possible creation of deviant causal chains is a particularly thorny issue. The introduction of contingency to the world and competition among different causes—particularly causal competition between free agents—may spark the birth of deviant causal chains. These are a result of either an unwanted effect from the first agent of an action, or of a desired effect obtained through means other than those initially foreseen. Furthermore, deviant causal chains rupture the more rigorously deterministic models of the world, precisely because the entire concatenation of cause and effect evades the determination originally established by the action—whether free or not—of the first cause and is instead open to the intervention of a random mix of different and differently ordered agents.<sup>1</sup> Such deviant causal chains are explored in theology, where the *magisters* ponder whether the divine will can be impeded by creatural action, or whether God can stir up an evident cognition of the things to be believed in the human mind (without this being derived from a vision that has God as its object). Efforts to tackle these pertinent questions were perhaps at their peak between the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, breeding solutions of utmost sophistication and originality.

## 1.2 The Freedom of Indifference

Let us start with William Ockham's outlook. While Ockham's life alone is worthy of a novel (and has actually been given a novelistic rendering), here we shall retrace only the stages of Ockham's philosophical and theological production. The English theologian's conceptions lie at the core of the analysis below.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Anscombe 2001, pp. 57–73; Davidson 1973, pp. 685–700; Searle 1983. For works following the medieval tradition, see Bunge 2009; Courtenay 1990, pp. 77–94; Esposito, Porro (eds.) 2002; Hintikka 1981, pp. 57–72; Knuuttila 1981, pp. 163–258; Maier 1949, pp. 219–250; McCord Adams 2007, pp. 47–76; McCord Adams 2013, pp. 3–26; Porro 2013, pp. 113–147. See also Demange 2007, pp. 48–65, 115–157.

<sup>2</sup> For an accurate account, see Courtenay 2008; Panaccio, Spade 2016; Spade 2006. Much of Ockham's philosophical and theological writing dates from 1317 to 1323: His *Summa logicae*, later completed in Avignon; the *Scriptum* or *Ordinatio*, on Book I of Peter the Lombard *Sentences*; the *Reportatio* on books II–IV of the *Sentences*; a series of commentaries on the logical works of Aristotle and Porphyry, from the *Expositio in libros artis logicae, proemium et expositio in librum Porphyrii de Praedicabilibus* to the *Expositio in librum Praedicamentorum Aristotelis*, and from the *Expositio in librum Perihermeneias Aristotelis* to the *Expositio super libros Elenchorum*; texts on Aristotelian physics, such as the *Expositio in libros Physicorum Aristotelis* (incomplete), the *Summula philosophiae naturalis*, the *Brevis summa libri Physicorum* and the *Quaestiones in libros Physicorum Aristotelis*; the *Quodlibeta septem* on theological questions,

In this part, we will address free will understood as a freedom of indifference by way of preparation for the analysis of the relationship between intentions and causal chains in the next section (1.3). Grasping Ockham's vision of the human will is fundamental to examining his solutions to the dilemma of free will and its relation to divine foreknowledge and fatalism. An especially salient feature to consider is the choice between good and evil in which one exercises what can be defined as the "freedom of indifference."<sup>3</sup> In Ockham's view, when the will faces the choice between good and evil, it is essentially indifferent to both, and therefore entirely autonomous and free to opt for the end it prefers.<sup>4</sup> Both good and evil entail an obligation, where "[t]he good is the intention to respect it, and the evil is the intention to escape it."<sup>5</sup> Ockham is, therefore, not simply a theorist of the freedom of indifference, but first and foremost an opponent of the concept of indifference as a purely pre-intentional state of the will. The freedom of indifference calls for interpretation, and contrary to those who, like Scotus and Henry of Ghent, conceived it as a freedom to choose between indistinguishable objects, Ockham considers it to be doubly independent. Specifically, within the determinism of natural phenomena, the will is not determined either by external natural factors (perceived objects) or by internal ones (passions). At the same time, the will is independent of reason, as there is a causal break between what is known and what is wanted. Following Marilyn McCord Adams and, more recently, Valentin Braekman, we can list the two consequences of the will's independence regarding reason: the will is the sole cause of its action (the causal indifference of the will), and does not have to obey the injunctions of reason (the

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later completed in Avignon; probably treatises on the Eucharist *Tractatus de quantitate et De corpore Christi*; The *Tractatus de praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei respectu futurorum contingentium*, (hereinafter *Tractatus*) which is in all probability chronologically overlaps with or shortly follows the *Scriptum* (1321–1324), where the problems addressed in five questions of the *Tractatus* are widely discussed.

<sup>3</sup> Ockham, *Quodlibeta septem*, Q. I, q. 16 (ed. Wey 1980, pp. 87–89). For the historical rise of the expression "freedom of indifference," see King 1999; McCord Adams 1986; Panaccio 2012, p. 90; Pinckaers 1985 [Eng. transl. 1995].

<sup>4</sup> Ockham, *Sent.* III, *Reportatio*, q. 6 (ed. Kelley, Etzkorn 1982, pp. 175–176): "Et ideo, quia voluntas non habet inclinationem naturalem ad aliquid quod fit in ea plus quam ad eius oppositum, ideo voluntas non potest moveri violenter, quia violenter movetur aliquid quod movetur contra inclinationem naturalem in eo." As observed by Vincent Spade and Claude Panaccio, this does not imply that the will does not have any natural inclination, but rather that its inclination is but a tendency and not a decisive factor in the voluntary act. Cf. Spade, Panaccio 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Ockham, *Sent.* IV, qq. 10–11 (ed. Wood, Gál, Green 1984, p. 198): "Obligatio igitur facit aliquem peccatorem (...)." For further details, see King 1999, p. 231.

## SUMMARY

### SAFEGUARDING FREE WILL WILLIAM OCKHAM, WALTER CHATTON, AND RICHARD KILVINGTON ON THE WILL

*Safeguarding Free Will: William Ockham, Walter Chatton, and Richard Kilvington on the Will* features an array of varied issues that made up the much-debated will problem in late medieval philosophy and theology. The book discusses concepts of the will produced in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, whereby its special focus is on the ideas that sprang up and evolved at Oxford in the 1330s. Although the literature on medieval concepts of the will and will-related issues is indeed extensive, this particular timeframe remains under-researched. There are several reasons for this neglect. Firstly, some important textual sources are still available solely in manuscripts. Secondly, some authors whose merits as ingenious philosophers and/or logicians have already been acknowledged did not pen texts explicitly or entirely devoted to the will and have thus been regarded as irrelevant to debates on the will. Consequently, their writings have not been studied from the will-perspective. Thirdly, the contemporary discourse on late medieval theories of the will developed by scholars working on ethics, the metaphysics of the will, and moral psychology has of late been dominated by a tendency to marginalize “minor authors” and those whose reputation lay elsewhere. We believe that this trend has particularly disadvantaged the Oxford Calculators, therefore, this book seeks to shed some light on the concepts of the will hatched at Oxford in the 1330s by exploring the themes and approaches adopted by Walter Chatton (an opponent of William Ockham) and Richard Kilvington (one of the Oxford Calculators).

This threefold volume starts with the theories of William Ockham to show how he paved the way for the Oxonian thinkers of the 1330s, some of whom were his conversation partners and opponents in disputes. In Part 1, we offer a detail study of his notions of the human and the divine wills, the freedom of the will as entwined with the problem of future contingents and divine foreknowledge, the will and time, and the will in relation to causal chains. Part 2 illuminates the diversity of the will’s acts and the manifold structure of the will as envisaged by Walter Chatton and Richard Kilvington. Part 3 focuses on the complexity of the temporal entanglements of the will’s acting and shows how the problem of simultaneous contradictories was advanced by the Oxonian

philosophers to develop finally into a separate issue, known as the contradiction theory of change.

**Keywords:** Medieval Philosophy, 14<sup>th</sup>-Century Ethics, Oxford Calculators, Philosophy of Action, Logic of Freedom, Compatibilism

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CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, Turnholti 1953–

CSEL Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, ed. consilio et impensis Academiae Scientiarum Austriacae [*olim* Academiae Litterarum Caesariae Vindobonensis], Wien 1866–

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Albertus Magnus (1891) *Ethicorum libri X, Opera omnia*, ed. J. Quétif, J. Echards, A. Borgnet, Paris: Vivès.

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This book features an array of varied issues that made up the much-debated will problem in late medieval philosophy and theology. It discusses concepts of the will produced in the first half of the fourteenth century, whereby its special focus is on the ideas that sprang up and evolved at Oxford in the 1330s. Its aim is to shed some light on the concepts of the will hatched at that time by exploring the themes and approaches adopted by William Ockham, Walter Chatton, and Richard Kilvington.



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