
ARTICLES

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John Rodington: The Primacy of the Will over the Intellect in Relation to the Ultimate End*

Keywords: Beatific Enjoyment, Contingency of Fruition, Metaphysics, Rodington, Free Will

Słowa kluczowe: Uszczęśliwiające Oglądanie, Kontyngencja Spełnienia, Metafizyka, Rodington, Wolna Wola

Abstract

In this paper I present John Rodington's opinion on the contingent fruition of the supreme good. Upholding Duns Scotus's opinion against William Ockham's criticism, Rodington states that the beatific enjoyment is contingent and depends only on the will. In debating this issue, Rodington delves into the nature of the human will, which he conceives as entirely independent from the intellect's knowledge. In relation to this specific aspect, Rodington distances himself from Richard FitzRalph, despite the fact that the two authors display certain conceptual affinities, which the present article seeks to highlight. Furthermore, Rodington manifests a notable affinity with the theses advanced by Francis of Marchia, an Italian Franciscan who occupies a comparatively marginal position within the English intellectual milieu. The study concludes with a concise examination of what Rodington designates as *dubia*, a series of subordinate questions that engage with the most distinctive and original dimensions of his thought.

* The research for this article has been funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, under grant agreement UMO-2022/47/B/HS1/00071.

1. Introduction

A widely shared idea about the English Franciscan John Rodington (?–1348) is that he was a follower of John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308) and disagreed with some views of William Ockham (ca. 1287–1347).¹ As is the case with many other medieval masters, the scarcity of critical editions is one of the principal obstacles that prevent Rodington's thought from being widely known. Apart from Martin Tweedale's Ph.D. dissertation, which dates back to 1965,² very few questions from Rodington's *Sentences* commentary and from his *Quodlibet* have been edited so far.³ Rodington's *Sentences* commentary is supposed to have been composed at Oxford around 1328,⁴ while it is uncertain whether or not he had previously stayed in Paris, but, if so, it must have been before 1322.

My paper focuses on the analysis of an unpublished question by Rodington, which I have transcribed in its entirety, and which I will approach from both a theoretical perspective—by examining its most significant doctrinal content—and a historical-philosophical one, by situating Rodington in relation to the most relevant authors of the period. I will analyze Rodington's *Sentences* commentary, Book I, distinction 1, question 4,⁵ where he asks whether the intellectual knowledge of the ultimate end determines and necessitates the will to enjoy it (*Quarto, quaero utrum fine apprehenso per intellectum*

¹ Courtenay, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780192683120.013.23935>: “In the areas of his thought that have been studied, such as his views on human cognition, the object of knowledge, and the doctrine of grace and justification, Rodington shows himself to have been a follower and defender of Duns Scotus, and critical of some of the opinions of William Ockham.” See also Schabel & Friedman, 2003, pp. 42–43: “[...] the Franciscan John of Rodington takes as his point of departure a detailed critique of the view of William of Ockham from a Scotistic point of view.”

² Tweedale, 1965, containing editions of Rodington's Prologue, qq. 1–4, and I Sent., dist. 2, qq. 1, 6, dist. 3, q. 3.

³ For an edition of Rodington, I Sent., dist. 11, see Schabel, & Friedman, 2003, pp. 80–88; for an edition of Rodington, I Sent., dist. 3, q. 3, see Nardi, 1952, pp. 74–92 (re-edited by Tweedale in his Ph.D. dissertation).

⁴ Schabel & Friedman, 2003, p. 43: “[...] Rodington's *Sentences* commentary, which stems from lectures probably given in 1328–29 [...]”

⁵ My analysis is based on manuscript *V* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 5306) checked against manuscript *P* (Tarragona, Biblioteca provincial, 93).

voluntas necessario fruatur illo).⁶ This question proves to be crucial in bringing to light a plurality of elements: the attempt to preserve the validity of Duns Scotus's philosophy; a sharply articulated critique of William Ockham's approach; a close intellectual affinity with Richard FitzRalph; and the likely confirmation of Rodington's Parisian stay, insofar as Rodington refers on several occasions to the Franciscan Francis of Marchia (ca. 1285/1290–after 1343), an author apparently not given particular consideration by Oxford-based thinkers. The wording of Rodington's question is almost identical to that of Duns Scotus,⁷ who also asked whether the will necessarily enjoyed the ultimate end known through the intellect (*Utrum scilicet fine apprehenso per intellectum necesse sit voluntatem frui eo*).⁸ Scotus relied on his concept of the freedom of the will, which rested on the will's ability to suspend its acts, to solve the issue by claiming that the enjoyment of the supreme good was contingent. He proposed four conclusions warranting the contingency of enjoyment: in general, in particular, without supernaturally elevating habit, and even in the presence of charity, whereby he repeatedly stated that the will *non necessario fruatur*.⁹ In Scotus's terms, the contingency (that is, non-necessity) of enjoyment does not entail its possible absence, but only the fact that the "control" of the act of loving God entirely depends on the will. At first glance, even Ockham embraces an identical outcome,

⁶ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, ff. 38vb–44ra; P, ff. 36rb–41vb).

⁷ It is thus possible to add Rodington to the small group of English authors who upheld Duns Scotus's position, including Henry of Harclay, John of Reading, and the Benedictine Robert Greystones. See Henninger, Andrews & Ottman, 2017, p. lxxx: "From our examination of this long question, it is clear that Henry of Harclay and Greystones are among the very few at Oxford to share and defend Duns Scotus's teaching on the contingency of beatific fruition. Guido Alliney has uncovered only one other defender of Scotus's doctrine at this time at Oxford, John of Reading."

⁸ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 1, pars 2, q. 2, n. 77 (editio Vaticana, II, 1950, p. 59).

⁹ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 1, pars 2, q. 2, nn. 143–146 (editio Vaticana, II, 1950, pp. 96–97): "Quantum ad primum articulum dico quod sicut voluntas fruatur non necessario his quae sunt ad finem, sic nec fine obscure apprehenso et in universali. Quantum ad secundum articulum concedo cum prima opinione quod non necessario fruatur fine obscure viso et in particulari. Quantum ad tertium articulum dico quod voluntas elevata non necessario quantum est ex parte sui fruatur fine sic viso. Quantum ad quartum dico quod voluntas non elevata supernaturaliter potest frui illo fine."

affirming that the will contingently and freely enjoys the supreme good.¹⁰ However, on closer inspection, all of Ockham's subsequent conclusions make the opposite point, insisting that human beings (*in via*) and even saints (*in patria*) constantly have the ability to nill God.¹¹ What the possibility of nilling God involves is not merely the suspension of the act of loving God, but rather a positive act of nilling the supreme good understood as such.

Although the root of the two arguments is similar—namely, the will can control its own acts, irrespective of what the intellect has understood in relation to the willed object—their outcomes are totally different, as the “moderate” Scotistic outcome (the good will contingently chooses to enjoy and love God) is supplanted by a “harsher” result: the possibility of refusing God as such. Echoes of the conflict between these two radically different approaches also reverberate in Richard FitzRalph (ca. 1300–1360), who was well aware of the novelty of both Scotus's and Ockham's thought, as recently shown by Monika Michałowska and Michael W. Dunne in their edition of FitzRalph's *Lectura super Sententias*, question 10.¹² More than that, FitzRalph could actually have been Rodington's *socius*,¹³ which would confirm the date of Rodington's *Sentences* commentary at around 1328/1329.

¹⁰ William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, p. 503): “Prima igitur conclusio erit ista quod voluntas contingenter et libere—modo exposito—fruitur fine ultimo ostenso in universali.”

¹¹ William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, pp. 504–506): “Secunda conclusio est quod aliquis potest nolle beatitudinem in particulari. Tertia conclusio est quod aliquis potest nolle beatitudinem in particulari creditam esse possibilem, ita quod potest nolle habere beatitudinem. Quarta conclusio est quod videns divinam essentiam et carens fruitione beatifica potest nolle illam fruitionem. Quinta conclusio est quod talis videns divinam essentiam, carens per potentiam divinam absolutam dilectione Dei,—de quo patebit in quarto,—potest nolle Deum.”

¹² Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, p. 29: “Rather, when invoking Scotus's concept of the will's capability to suspend its own acts, which was one of the greatest novelties of Scotus's voluntarism, FitzRalph seems in fact to refer to other thinkers whose writings indeed upheld the possibility of nilling God. [...] Nilling God freely and with a clear cognition was an issue that surfaced time and again in discussions at Oxford, with the prevalent stance denying human beings such an option. However, there were authors—prominently, William Ockham—who professed a different view on this subject and might be subsumed under the enigmatic *plurimi moderni doctores* moniker.”

¹³ See Dunne, 2023, pp. 63, n. 5, 64, 70.

2. After Duns Scotus and Ockham

Rodington's *Sentences* commentary has a peculiar structure. Unlike most of the English commentaries of the time, which are question-based, it is a distinction-based *Lectura*, where each distinction encompasses one or more questions.¹⁴ After a few arguments pro and contra, each question is divided into two distinct sections: the first one contains the conclusions that answer the opening question, complete with their sets of proofs, objections, and solutions; the second one, labelled as *dubia*, proposes a series of sub-questions. Each *dubium* has its own set of arguments pro and contra, and the arguments that are rebutted reveal which part of the *dubium* is true and which is false. In the modern edition, each of these *dubia* takes up from half a page up to a page and a half.

Devoted to the solution of the question, the first part of distinction 1, question 4, contains four conclusions, which are almost identical to those provided by Duns Scotus.¹⁵ They establish the contingency of the act of enjoyment¹⁶ according to different levels: *in universali*, *in particulari*, *cum caritate*, and *superelevata*.¹⁷ The first and the third levels are crucial, since the objections against these conclusions represent a long string of arguments coming from Ockham's *Sentences* commentary, which highlights Rodington's attitude as a concerted attempt to reassert the value of Duns Scotus's perspective after Ockham's harsh criticism.

¹⁴ See Lechner, 1935, pp. 236–246, for a complete *tabula quaestionum* covering all four books of Rodington's *Sentences* commentary.

¹⁵ See above, footnote 9.

¹⁶ See also Robert Greystones, *Lectura super Sententias*, I, dist. 1, q. 3 (ed. Henninger, Andrews & Ottman, 2017, p. 172): "Teneo igitur quod voluntas velit contingenter finem ostensum, sicut ea quae sunt ad finem. Et hoc maxime quia quilibet experitur hoc in seipso." Despite his affinity to Scotus, Greystones does not appear to share Rodington's constant rejection of Ockham's positions.

¹⁷ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4, concl. 1–4 (V, ff. 38vb–41rb): "Prima conclusio est quod voluntas non necessario fruitur fine ultimo in universali apprehenso [...]. Secunda conclusio, quod non necessario fruitur fine obscure apprehenso et in particulari, et hoc dico necessitate naturali [...]. Tertia conclusio, quod stante caritate et claritate visionis voluntas potest non frui fine clare viso [...]. Quarta conclusio, quod voluntas supernaturaliter elevata per habitum non necessario fine ultimo fruitur." See footnote 9 above.

Yet the issue is in fact inherently more complex than this straightforward approach might suggest. Because both Duns Scotus and Ockham seem to espouse, at least in their first conclusions, the same notion of the ultimate end being enjoyed in a contingent manner,¹⁸ it should be understood more accurately why Rodington contradicts Ockham with so much patience and persistence. The first reason is that Duns Scotus advanced his first conclusion with five main arguments (presented by Rodington in a different order than in Scotus's text),¹⁹ which contained elements that Ockham refused to accept.²⁰ Without elucidating them here, let me note that one of these arguments implies the formal distinction between the intellect and the will, which Ockham repeatedly rejected.²¹ This issue is philosophically fundamental: the formal distinction between the intellect and the will enables the intellect to grasp the truth of being, and the will the goodness of being. Hence, it is no coincidence that a metaphysical reductionist, like Ockham, simply disregarded the idea of the formal distinction, and it is equally important to examine why and how other philosophers and theologians responded to Ockham's metaphysical minimalist approach.

Another, more profound reason is connected with the fact that Rodington appears to refute Ockham's theses by imputing excessive empiricism to him. Indeed, the first argument that sustains Ockham's first conclusion (namely, that the enjoyment of the ultimate end is contingent) is grounded in the inference that the intellect can affirm that no beatitude is possible because the only existing reality is the one we live in.²² The implicit belief that the wayfarer's

¹⁸ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 1, pars 2, q. 2, concl. 1, n. 143 (editio Vaticana, II, 1950, p. 96); William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, p. 503).

¹⁹ See John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 1, pars 2, q. 2, nn. 80, 92–93, 133 (editio Vaticana, II, 1950, pp. 60, 66–67, 88–89).

²⁰ See William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, pp. 491–492, 493–494, 495, 498).

²¹ William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, p. 491): “Praeterea, intellectus et voluntas nullo modo distinguuntur ex parte rei, et tamen secundum istum intellectus necessario causat intellectionem, et contingenter et libere voluntas causat volitionem.” On the conflict between Ockham and Duns Scotus over the formal distinction, see my recent paper (Nannini, 2026).

²² John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 39va): “Ad istam conclusionem arguunt isti qui dicunt ad rationes Doctoris aliter sic: ‘Illud potest esse nolitum quod potest recta ratione dictari esse nolendum; sed intellectus

own condition was the sole one that existed could lead Ockham to claim that the intellect was able to nill beatitude because there was no state of existence, which would be the condition of the *fruitor* (or *comprehensor*) in *patria*. Ockham's second, even more empirical argument, states that since anyone might desire to not-be, anyone might also refuse or nill beatitude because not being blessed directly follows from non-being. In this case, too, the argument is based on the materialistic premise that one's body, or one's material existence, is the only kind of existence involved in the desire of not-being at all.²³ Ockham's third argument, which has received little attention, states that believers can freely choose to sin so that, consequently, they do not desire beatitude.²⁴

In his reply to Ockham, Rodington affirms that the first argument is incorrect because it cannot be inferred, from the point of view of this life, that there is no further life, or that there is only this level of existence. As Rodington states, it can be rightly maintained that there might be no beatitude, at least for someone, but not that beatitude as such is impossible.²⁵

potest dictare beatitudinem non esse possibilem, quia potest credere tantum statum istum esse possibilem quem videmus; igitur potest nolle quod isti statui repugnat, et sic nolle beatitudinem.' For Ockham's text, see William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, p. 503).

²³ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 39va): "Secundo, 'Quicumque potest efficaciter velle antecedens, potest velle consequens scitum esse consequens vel opinatum; sed aliquis potest efficaciter velle non esse, et non esse beatum consequens est ad non esse, et hoc potest sciri evidenter; igitur.' Minor patet de occidentibus se ipsos, qui fuerunt multi." For Ockham's text, see William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, p. 504).

²⁴ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 39va): "Tertio sic, aliqui fideles elegerunt peccare, scientes vel credentes se poena aeterna dammandos pro peccato; igitur noluerunt beatitudinem in communi nec in particulari: credebant enim, si non peccarent, quod haberent beatitudinem." For Ockham's text, which is more refined than Rodington's version, see William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum Primum Sententiarum, Ordinatio*, dist. 1, q. 6 (ed. Brown & Gál, 1967, p. 504).

²⁵ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 39va–b): "Ad primum, prima ratio non videtur concludere, quia concessa maiori, qualiter accipis beatitudinem in minori? Aut in particulari, quam beatitudinem expectamus, et sic nihil aliud istam conclusionem, aut beatitudinem in communi quam omnes homines appetunt [...], et tamen videtur minor falsa, quia scilicet aliquis <non> potest dictare talem beatitudinem non esse possibile. Et quando probatur 'quia potest credere', videtur quod non sequitur

So, while the empiricist way of arguing (the razor) confines the possible within the exclusive boundaries of what can be experienced, a broader philosophical attitude conceives of the possible as more extensive than the domain of what currently exists or can be experienced now. Rodington appears to share the latter approach, and this explains why he takes issue with Ockham's objections so persistently.

Rodington's answer to the second argument continues along these lines. He attacks Ockham by asking how it can be conceived that someone desires to not-be at all. What exactly does Ockham mean by non-being? Non-being as such, Rodington points out, would be bizarre, and it is highly doubtful that someone might actually desire absolute non-being. A person might imaginably not want to be, in the sense that they do not desire to live any longer in their material body, from which they suffer a lot.²⁶ Rodington implicitly restates here his previous argument that the domain of existence is far bigger than one's mere material life, thus assuming that philosophy should not be restricted to the realm of what can be experienced through the senses.

At this point, the matter becomes intriguing as FitzRalph, too, relies on the same device when debating the same argument from Ockham: to equate the desire to commit suicide with the desire to not-be at all is misguided; it should rather be understood as the person no longer wanting to live in their material body, which only causes them to suffer.²⁷ The crucial aspect of this argument is not the conception of "non-existence" as such, which has a long

ex hoc quod posset dictare beatitudinem non esse possibilem, sed forte quod beatitudo non sit, non tamen quod non sit possibilis, cum includeret contradictionem ex terminis summum bonum non esse posse esse."

²⁶ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, ff. 39vb–40ra): "Similiter, posito quod assumptum secundi argumenti sit verum, tamen in alio peccaret argumentum: arguitur 'aliquis potest velle non-esse, et ad non-esse sequitur non esse beatum'; quaero: qualiter accipis 'non-esse'? Aut non esse simpliciter, aut non esse in corpore in quo miseria patitur. Si primo modo, dubium est an aliquis potest velle sic non esse. Sed quidquid sit de hoc, argumentum non probat de occidentibus se ipsos, quia tantum volunt non esse in corpore mortali in quo molestias patiuntur."

²⁷ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 1, art. 3 (ed. Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, p. 34, footnote 69): "Ad quartum cum arguitur quod viator potest velle se non esse, si intellegatur per non esse omnino nihil esse secundum animam et secundum corpus [...], dico quod hoc est falsum, sicut ibi dicit Augustinus, et concedo quod aliqui se ipsos occiderunt sed non ut non essent, sed ut non amplius miseri essent."

tradition in the history of philosophy, but rather the fact that both Rodington and FitzRalph use the same “anti-empiricist argument” against the same interlocutor (Ockham). This suggests that they were probably *socii*, quoting and influencing each other at this stage in their careers.

The third argument from Ockham, that believers can commit sins, is not properly solved. Yet Rodington makes an interesting point about it, which opens a new section of his question. Namely, a direct proportionality between knowledge and desire would imply that the more one knows, the more one is able to love, but this reasoning is patently false, according to Rodington, who resorts to the classic argument saying that an old woman can love much more than a theologian.²⁸

3. Proportion and Proportionality: Knowledge and Desire

Consequently, the correlation between the level of knowledge and the necessity of desiring is dismantled. Admitting that it is not knowledge (not even the clearest possible one) that determines the necessity of enjoyment raises the question of how the will can contingently desire and love the supreme good. There are only two alternatives: either the act of enjoyment can be made not to be enjoyment by God’s intervention (*de potentia absoluta*), or the will maintains its control of every object and every act, regardless of the amount or quality of the subject’s acquired knowledge.²⁹

²⁸ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 40ra): “Praeterea, argumenta sua nihil valent ad conclusionem, quia conclusio est, si ostenderetur aliquid summum bonum et apprehendatur, utrum aliquis potest non velle. Nec autem argumenta sua probant quod potest dictari non esse aliquid summum bonum. Ideo arguo pro conclusione Doctoris: si ex cognitione tali sequitur necessario volitio, ipsa stante, quanto aliquis sic magis cognoscat, tanto magis diligit, quod falsum est, quia vetula minus cognoscit quam philosophus, tamen magis diligit.”

²⁹ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 40ra): “Tertia conclusio, quod stante caritate et claritate visionis voluntas potest non frui fine clare viso. Ista conclusio potest intelligi multipliciter: vel quod, stantibus illis quae Deus posset facere, quod non sit dilectio, vel quod voluntas possit suspendere actum suum. Quantum ad primum intellectum, dico quod sic, quia omne absolutum creatum distinctum ab alio potest Deus conservare sine alio; sed clara visio et fruitio sunt huiusmodi; igitur [...]” (V, f. 40rb): “Quantum ad secundum intellectum, utrum beatus posset suspendere actum suum etc., sicut voluntas potest etc. Quod sic, quia si necessario fruitur Deo,

This is a rather standard Scotistic approach to the issue, but in the Calculators' philosophical-theological tradition,³⁰ this line of reasoning can be extended to observe that while it is entirely natural that an object of greater intensity—a more beautiful or more pleasant one—generally makes it more difficult for the will to resist it, challenging questions arise when an infinite object, namely the divine essence, is at stake. Does such an object make it infinitely difficult for the will to resist it?³¹ If it were so, the will would not be fully free. At the same time, saying that the will can resist such an object invites a counterargument. Specifically, this kind of inference implies that every living entity possesses an effort (*conatus*) with which it interacts with the surrounding world. Different entities can have various efforts, and the intensity of a particular effort might determine what a living entity can do and what it cannot do.³² In order to resist an infinite attractive object, the will should have an infinite effort, which immediately risks overlapping with God's infinity.

The solution provided by Rodington apparently avoids both these unwelcome outcomes. It splits the will into two layers, distinguishing between essential and accidental freedom. Strictly speaking, essential freedom is the will itself, which is in total control of its power, and accidental freedom is the will that can be more or less facilitated or hindered in pursuit of an object by the object itself.³³ A graphic representation of this structure

hoc non esset nisi ratione voluntatis, vel caritatis, vel visionis. Non primum, quia eadem est in vi[t]a et in patria, et in vi[t]a non fruitur necessario; igitur. Nec secundum, propter idem. Nec tertium, quia sic quando non videret non causaret dilectionem necessario, et quando videret necessario causaret dilectionem, igitur tunc visio esset pars potentiae volitivae vel potentia volitiva.”

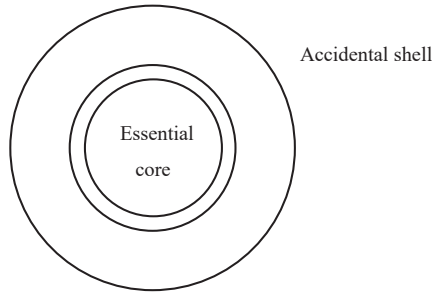
³⁰ About the Calculators' tradition, see the recent book by Lukács & Michałowska, 2024.

³¹ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 40va): “Praeterea, obiectum magis intensum inducit maiorem difficultatem; igitur infinitum obiectum inducit infinitam difficultatem [...]. Quanto ratio obiectiva inducit maiorem difficultatem, tanto requiritur maior conatus potentiae ad resistendum, et quanto augetur difficultas, tanto proportionaliter requiritur maior conatus; conatus autem infinitus non est possibilis in virtute finita.”

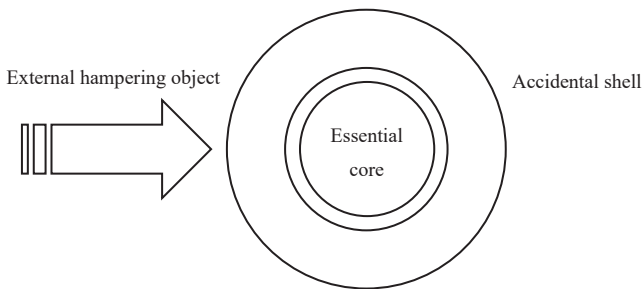
³² Michael Szlachta has extensively discussed the *conatus* theory, attributing its origin to Richard Middleton as the founder of this concept. See Szlachta, 2026.

³³ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 40va): “[...] dico quod quaedam est libertas essentialis, quaedam accidentalis. Essentialem voco

can be easily provided if “essential freedom” is regarded as an unmodifiable core, and “accidental freedom” as a modifiable responding shell.³⁴



An external object can act upon and influence the accidental shell of the will, but it cannot affect its essential core.³⁵ Thus an intense object may diminish the accidental shell of the will, and a more intense external object may diminish the accidental shell even more, but the essential core of the will remains unaffected (and metaphysically unaffected).

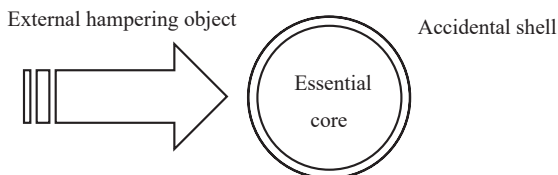


qua simpliciter potest voluntas in actum suum; accidentalem voco qua potest faciliter vel non” (italics mine). On the first-person “dico,” see below, p. 000.

³⁴ This may be an elaboration of Anselm’s doctrine of the essential and accidental freedom of the will. See, for instance, Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, cap. 1 and cap. 13 (ed. Schmitt, 1946, pp. 207–209, 225).

³⁵ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 40vb): “[...] maior allectio vel minor nihil diminuit vel auget de libertate essentiali quae non est nisi ipsa voluntas.”

We might also imagine a total annihilation of the accidental shell of the will (its accidental freedom), and the will concomitantly confronting the maximum possible difficulty in resisting the object.



Unfortunately (for the external object!), the essential core of the will is left intact so that it preserves its ability to control its acts. Such a structure has an impact first and foremost on the effort (*conatus*) theory, implying that the core of the will is simply its essential ability to act or to not-act (without any degree of intensity), while it is only its external shell that is exposed to the effects of an external hampering object. No greater or lesser effort is essentially required for the exercise of the will because even if an object of infinite influence is posited, the essential freedom of the will retains its ability for action or non-action in relation to it. In other words, two layers are distinguished, one consisting in the attraction of the object (acting on the will), the other in the will itself (responding to the object). This distinction enables Rodington to affirm the absolute freedom of the will, which cannot be overridden by any external object, regardless of its intensity. Moreover, this distinction allows for a clearer understanding of the attempt to go beyond Ockham by reinstating Scotus's doctrine of contingent fruition: it is not necessary to admit a positive act of nilling (*nolle*) God, since the freedom of the will is such that it remains essentially free with respect to any object whatsoever, including the divine essence. This is not because the will does not, or cannot, desire God, but rather because it always chooses God with absolute freedom and merit.

Besides, the distinction between these two levels in the will might apparently be another point of contact with FitzRalph's thought, since he also distinguishes between freedom *per se* and freedom *per accidens*.³⁶

³⁶ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 1, art. 3 (ed. Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, p. 35, footnote 72): "Ideo ad istum articulum dico quod libertas contradictionis est duplex respectu alicuius: una per se et alia per accidens. Libertas per se respectu alicuius

However, FitzRalph's distinction is embedded in a broader theory of the intellect/will relationship, where the will is much more dependent on the intellect's knowledge than Rodington's will. Consequently, FitzRalph cannot be considered Rodington's source in this particular respect. Noticeably, the theory of accidental and essential freedom is derived from the Italian Franciscan Francis of Marchia, who presents it in exactly the same terms as Rodington: essential freedom is the will as such, while accidental freedom coincides with greater or lesser ease in producing the will's action.³⁷ Since Francis of Marchia was active a few years before Rodington, the theory presumably comes from Marchia himself, contradicting Rodington's first-person "dico."³⁸ To my knowledge, Francis of Marchia, who lectured in Paris in 1319/1320, does not appear to have been one of the Oxonians' privileged sources. Jointly, these facts imply that Rodington traveled to Paris and his stay predated 1328, the year of his *Lectura super Sententias*.

The link between the two Franciscans is further corroborated by another reference in which Rodington mentions Francis of Marchia. It is found in Book I, distinction 2, question 6, of Rodington's *Sentences* commentary. In his rebuttal of Duns Scotus's theory of the univocity of being (which is, indeed, an exceptional case of Rodington parting ways with Duns Scotus), Rodington mentions a set of arguments, all of them called *viae* (*prima via*, *secunda via*, etc.),³⁹ where the first argument is explicitly attributed to

est potestas volendi illud et non volendi stantibus his quae nunc ponuntur in voluntate et in intellectu scilicet cognitione et aliis. Libertas per accidens est potestas volendi aliquid et illud non volendi per corruptionem vel amissionem alicuius nunc habiti a voluntate vel intellectu sicut sit per diversionem ad aliquo considerato."

³⁷ Francis of Marchia *Commentarius in IV libros Petri Lombardi*, lib. I, dist. 1, q. 9, art. 2, nn. 62–63 (ed. Mariani, 2006, p. 140): "Responsio: potest dici quod duplex est libertas voluntatis: quedam enim est libertas essentialis, et ista est ad posse simpliciter; quedam est libertas voluntatis accidentalis, qua voluntas potest faciliter elicere actum et faciliter non elicere ipsum, et haec est libertas secundum quid. Prima est inseparabilis a voluntate, nec diminuitur per aliquem habitum, nec aliquis habitus, quantumcumque in infinitum augeatur, attingit ipsam; set habitus respectu huiusmodi oppositi, diminuit secundam libertatem respectu alterius oppositi, et in tantum posset augeri quod simpliciter tolleretur ipsam."

³⁸ See above, footnote 33.

³⁹ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 2, q. 6 (ed. Tweedale, 1965, pp. 404–406): "Sed primo probetur quod non convenit aliquid reale esse commune deo et creaturae indifferens de se ad utrumque. Sic si esset aliquod (indifferens de se

“a certain doctor.” Tweedale was not able to identify that “doctor,” but this seven-way argumentation is drawn from Francis of Marchia’s *Sentences* commentary, Book I, distinction 8,⁴⁰ which is quoted in an abridged but clearly recognizable form.

When applying the essential/accidental argument, Rodington explains that an infinite alluring object would induce so much difficulty in the accidental freedom of the will that the opposite act (rejection) is *de facto* precluded; this, however, does not mean that it is impossible as such.⁴¹ A metaphysical structure like this one implies that there are multiple layers of reality, and any relationship between various elements must be established between entities that belong to the same layer. The essential core of the will remains entirely impervious to the pleasure exerted by any created or uncreated object, and this indicates that the freedom of the will is, according to Rodington, absolute. This inference is substantiated by the fact that Rodington immediately connects the essential/accidental freedom theory (according to which no external object altogether can possibly necessitate the will) with Duns Scotus’s theory,

ad utrumque), determinetur ad illa vel se ipso vel per aliud. Non se ipso, cum sit possibile ad illa; nec per posterius, quia praesupponit prius determinatum ad ipsum; nec per prius, cum nihil sit prius tali conceptu et illis quae determinantur [...]. Ista ratio est cuiusdam doctoris. Non concludit, quia maior videtur falsa, quia quando aliquid magis accedit ad aequivocationem tanto magis determinatur ad supposita. Secundo arguitur via necessitatis divinae, quia illud commune aut est de se necesse esse aut non [...]. Tertio arguitur via infinitatis. Nihil includens aliquid potentiale est infinitum intensive; sed si esset tale commune ad deum etc., deus includeretur aliquid potentiale, quia illud commune etc.; igitur (etc.). Quarto via actualitatis, quis tale commune habet differentias extra rationem suam ad quas est in potentia, et sic aliquid in deo esset in potentia. Quinto via simplicitatis, quia aut illa intentio est de se potentialis, et sic in deo esset potentialis, aut non est de se potentialis, et tunc nulla ratio posterior est magis potentialis, quia non contrahens magis quam contractum; et ita nihil in creatura est potentiale, sed purus actus sicut deus. Sexto via perfectionis, quia entis per participationem in aliquibus habet tantum de perfectione in uno sicut in alio. Septimo via unitatis, quia ex quo uniformiter se haberet ad deum etc. (et ad creaturam), ita praedicaretur in abstracto de creatura sicut de deo.”

⁴⁰ Francis of Marchia, *Commentarius in IV libros Petri Lombardi*, lib. I, dist. 8, q. 2, art. 2, nn. 16–17 (ed. Mariani, 2006, pp. 479–487).

⁴¹ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 40vb): “Praeterea, si ratio concluderet, non concludit plus nisi quod inducit tantam difficultatem quae excludit omnem actum ad oppositum de facto; non tamen concludit impossibilitatem ad oppositum, quia possibilitas ad oppositum semper manet.”

which holds that the will is free toward opposite acts, objects, and effects.⁴² Since Rodington provides an explicit reference to Scotus's *Sentences* commentary, Book I, distinction 39,⁴³ Rodington's question is bolstered and enriched by his use of Francis of Marchia's theory to support Duns Scotus's notion of the absolute freedom of the will beyond any possible necessitation, at the same time refusing a more "metaphysically minimalist" approach like Ockham's. In fact, Duns Scotus's framework of the freedom of the will requires regarding contingency as a metaphysical matrix of possibilities and the will as an active agent that generates a selection of these possibilities.⁴⁴

4. The *Dubia* Section: Some Insights into Rodington's Most Original Approaches

To delve into the sixteen *dubia* of the second part of Rodington's question would be impossible in this paper. One of them, however, deserves at least a short examination. Addressing the issue of the instantaneous or temporal nature of volitions, which was an oft-discussed theme in the period,⁴⁵ Rodington states that the will (element 1) can use its own freedom (element 2) in a twofold way: positively, generating an act (element 3), or privatively,

⁴² John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4 (V, f. 40vb): "Ad primum, quod quanto est magis voluntarium tanto potest esse magis liberum libertate accidentali, non essentiali, quia maior allectio vel minor nihil diminuit vel augeat de libertate essentiali quae non est nisi ipsa voluntas. Maior igitur est vera, et minor falsa, unde dico quod esset contra libertatem essentialem quod necessitaretur ad aliquod obiectum vel ad aliquem effectum ita quod non posset in oppositum, sicut ait Doctor, quia est libera ad oppositos actus et ad oppositos effectus et ad opposita obiecta, et potest imperare diversos effectus."

⁴³ John Duns Scotus, *Lectura I*, dist. 39, q. unica, n. 45 (editio Vaticana, XVII, 1960, p. 493): "Voluntas enim nostra libera est ad actus oppositos (ut ad volendum et nolum, et amandum et odiendum), et secundo mediantibus actibus oppositis est libera ad obiecta opposita ut libere tendat in ea, et tertio est libera ad effectus quos producit sive immediate sive movendo alias potentias executivas."

⁴⁴ See Nannini, 2023, pp. 129–187.

⁴⁵ On instantaneous volition and the Oxford milieu, see Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, pp. 19–28.

suspending its action.⁴⁶ Thus, any free act of the will is not an atom-like, indivisible object; rather, it is akin to a process, where several components and phases are involved. This raises the issue of the instantaneousness of volition in specific terms: what is the instantaneous element in the volitional process, if there is one in the first place? Is it the volition itself? Or is it the willed act? Rodington seems to share the idea that the volition in the sense of the *electio* of an act is the instantaneous element, but when the election is the positive choice of an act, the subsequent act itself is necessarily temporal. The act will have a temporal beginning and a temporal end and will extend over various instants. Were it not so, every volition would have to be admitted to be wholly instantaneous, and this would lead to the idea of an infinite series of volitions (one for every instant of time), which is something that Rodington does not appear inclined to accept.⁴⁷

However, the instantaneous nature of volition cannot be wholly excluded either, and this is where another point of contact with FitzRalph is found. FitzRalph, too, admits instantaneous volition although he does not rule out the existence of temporal volitions as well.⁴⁸ In this way, the will is not always and not inevitably necessitated to perform a temporal act (if it does not want to); nor is it limited to a singular instant within which to express its freedom. In this sense, both Rodington and FitzRalph appear to maximize the active capacity of the will.

⁴⁶ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4, dubium 3 (V, f. 41vb): “[...] dico quod (1) [voluntas] potest uti (2) libertate sua positive, idest (3) per actum, vel privative, et hoc potest sine actu, quia hoc non est nisi non elicere aliquem actum.”

⁴⁷ John Rodington, *Lectura super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1, q. 4, dubium 3 (V, f. 41ra): “Ideo aliter potest dici quod volitio potest esse per instans, ita quod non duret plus, sed quod eliciantur tot volitiones quot sunt instantia in tempore, hoc est impossibile, quia si quis eliciat nunc unam volitionem, necessario antequam potest elicere aliam erit tempus tale intermedium in quo erunt infinita instantia, licet quasi imperceptibiliter videretur quod una volitio potest esse prius aliam, et tunc dico quod necessario erunt finitae volitiones, non infinitae, et sic finitum meritum.”

⁴⁸ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 10, art. 2 (ed. Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, pp. 197–198): “Cum ergo quaeritur utrum volitio fiat subito, ita quod sit aliquod primum instans volitionis, vel in tempore, ita quod non sit primum instans volitionis, dico quod alicuius volitionis creatae est primum instans, scilicet istius volitionis quae generatur per intensionem, scilicet per partem qualitativam ante aliam, sicut credo semper esse in hominibus.”

5. Conclusion

FitzRalph, again, offers us a conclusive hint by identifying three positions—two extreme and one moderate—on the relation between the intellect and the will. The two extreme positions affirm either that nothing whatsoever, not even clear and perfect knowledge, can necessitate the will, or that the act of loving something is premised on the prior (and somehow necessitating) act of knowing it.⁴⁹ An intermediate position, like FitzRalph's, tries to avoid both the extremes, but since it grants the intellect (or knowledge) a prominent role vis-à-vis the will,⁵⁰ I have the impression that it tends to frame the will as a rational appetite, thereby undermining its true and purely desiderative nature. For his part, Rodington appears to be one of the authors—of Scotistic inspiration—who tend to preserve an entirely autonomous role for the will. This approach will lead to a strong form of voluntarism, holding not that the will can do what it wants, but that every activity of the will, whether positively culminating in an act, or privatively suspending action, entirely depends on the will of an individual human being, irrespective of what the intellect has suggested. This is the only way to grant a moral merit to any action as grounded not in its own trueness, but in the free choice of the human agent.

⁴⁹ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 10, art. 2 (ed. Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, p. 237): “In isto articulo sunt tres opiniones: duae extremae et una media. Prima est quod ad nullam comprehensionem alicuius rei sequitur necessario amor sive volitio, immo nec ad claram visionem essentiae divinae sequitur volitio sive amor istius, sed ipso ostenso clare potest voluntas actum suum suspendere et non velle [...]. Et haec est opinio Subtilis Doctoris I libro, distinctione 1, quaestione 4, et est etiam opinio doctorum modernorum plurium;” (ed. Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, p. 239): “Alia est opinio opposita huic, scilicet quod ex notitia actuali cuiuscumque delectabilis vel commodi sequitur necessario delectatio et volitio. Cuius opinionis ratio talis est, quia delectabile apprehensum quantum est ex se agit naturaliter et uno modo in appetitu animalis bruti et hominis sive angeli.”

⁵⁰ Richard FitzRalph, *Lectura in Sententias*, I, q. 10, art. 2 (ed. Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, p. 244): “Si tamen in intellectu fuerit notitia aliqua actualis distincta et clara alicuius obiecti per se delectabilis et non fuerit tunc in intellectu notitia alia actualis per quam apparet illud non esse prosequendum, tunc dico quod ad talem notitiam sequitur necessario pro tunc delectatio et amor simili modo.” See Michałowska & Dunne, 2025, pp. 34–37.

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Citation

Nannini, A. (2026). John Rodington: The primacy of the will over the intellect in relation to the ultimate end. *Analiza i Egzystencja*, 75 (3), 43–62. DOI: 10.18276/aie2026.75-03.