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William of Ockham and the *odium Dei*

Abstract: Ockham's reflection on the omnipotence of God has long been considered as one of the most radical in the field of late-medieval philosophy. This work is aimed to show how this traditional interpretation should be resized in the light of the issue of the *odium Dei*. The analysis of some passages of Ockham's works will demonstrate that the domain of the *potentia Dei* is regulated, even according to this author, by some eternal truths which cannot change. God's will, in fact, is supposed to comply with both the necessity of the principle of non-contradiction and the moral nature of His essence. Even in a topic that is often considered as an example of Ockham's voluntarism, the divine intervention will turn out to be firmly anchored to some eternal and uncreated conditions. The Ockhamist analysis therefore does not conflict with the previous philosophical tradition, but it still remains within that cultural horizon.

Keywords: *Odium Dei*; omnipotence; principle of non contradiction; eternal truths.

Ancient and Medieval Authors: William of Ockham.

Resumo: A reflexão de Ockham sobre a onipotência de Deus foi durante muito tempo considerada como uma das mais radicais no campo da filosofia do final da Idade Média. Este trabalho tem como objetivo mostrar como essa interpretação tradicional tem que ser redimensionada à luz da questão do *odium Dei*. A análise de algumas passagens das obras de Ockham pretende demonstrar que o domínio da *potentia Dei* é regulada, mesmo para este autor, por algumas verdades eternas que não podem mudar. A vontade de Deus, na verdade, espera-se que esteja em conformidade quer com a necessidade do princípio de não-contradição quer com a natureza moral da Sua essência. Mesmo num tema que é muitas vezes considerado como um exemplo

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do voluntarismo de Ockham, a intervenção divina é firmemente ancorada em certas condições eternas e incriadas. A análise de Ockham portanto não entra em conflito com a tradição filosófica anterior, mas ainda permanece dentro desse horizonte cultural.

Palavras-chave: *Odium Dei*; onipotência; princípio da não contradição; verdades eternas.

Autores antigos e medievais: Guilherme de Ockham.

The Ockhamist reflection on the *potentia Dei* has long been regarded as one of the most radical perspective in the entire panorama of medieval philosophy. Despite this belief has been by now widely resized, thanks to the works of William J. Courtenay¹ and Mary A. Pernoud², the conviction that Ockham's thought represents one of the more consistent expressions of a voluntarist conception of divine action is still current. Even who has tried to show the inadequacy of this mere category to describe the Ockhamist foundation of Ethics³ did not abandon the idea that the *Venerabilis Inceptor* was «somewhat subversive», given the absolute contingency associated with his idea of divine freedom⁴.

Nevertheless, the emphasis of the scholars on the consequences resulting from the Ockhamist treatment of *potentia Dei* should be further delimited. In this work on the *odium Dei* we aim to show how this topic, often considered as an example of Ockham's voluntarism, does not conflict with the image of divine morality inherited from the previous tradition. For this purpose, three passages will be discussed in order to identify both the common thread and the intrinsic coherence of Ockham's investigation.

¹ W. J. COURTENAY, «*Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion*», in H. A. OBERMAN and C. TRINKHAUS (eds.), *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, Brill, Leiden 1974, pp. 26-59; W. J. COURTENAY, «*The Dialectic of Omnipotence in High and Late Middle Ages*», in T. RUDAVSKY (ed.), *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, Dordrecht 1985, pp. 243-269.

² M. A. PERNOD, «*Innovation in William of Ockham's references to the Potentia Dei*», *Antonianum* XLV (1970), pp. 65-97; M. A. PERNOD, «*The Theory of the Potentia Dei according to Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham*», *Antonianum*, XLII (1972), pp. 69-95.

³ See D. W. CLARK, «*Voluntarism and Rationalism in the Ethics of Ockham*», *Franciscan Studies*, IX (1971), pp. 72-87.

⁴ «The exercise of divine liberty is not restrained by eternal truths or divine psychology or the metaphysical entailments of "common natures" as in Duns Scoto. The Ockhamist brand of freedom means that moral laws could change radically; that the revealed path to salvation could be altered drastically; that the entire structure of natural causality might warp», D. W. CLARK, «Ockham on Human and Divine Freedom», *Franciscan Studies*, 38 (1978), pp. 122-160, p. 152.

In the *quaestio* 14 of the III *Quodlibet*⁵, Ockham wonders whether acts of will are necessarily virtuous. In his opinion, no action, *de virtute sermonis*, can be regarded as necessarily virtuous. Ockham advances two reasons to support this thesis: a virtuous act cannot be necessary because there is no act that could be deemed as *absolute* necessary; moreover, since God can realize whatever is possible without the concurrence of second causes, there cannot be anything which could limit the power of God's free will⁶. Starting from a different point of view, however, it is possible to consider an act as necessarily virtuous, namely both if we consider it in relation to a divine command, which can never be vicious, or if we consider it as simply connected to the will of the *homo viator*, which is forced to virtuously cause this act⁷.

In Ockham's opinion, a necessarily virtuous act is that of loving God above everything. This act is then so virtuous that it could never be vicious. Any creature, in fact, is obliged, in every place and at every time, to love God *super omnia*: the love towards God cannot therefore be vicious, being the first of all the possible good deeds⁸. But what would happen if God forced His creature to study so intensely that the creature would not be capable of thinking and loving Him above everything? The example presented by Ockham seems to create a paradox: if the *homo viator* followed this command, he would love God, accomplishing His will; at the same time, however, fulfilling the divine command, the same creature,

⁵ Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum solus actus voluntatis sit necessario virtuosus*, *Quodl. III*, q. 14, in *Quodlibeta Septem. Opera Theologica* (Vol. IX), ed. J. C. WEY, St. Bonaventure, New York 1980, pp. 253-257.

⁶ «Dico primo quod de virtute sermonis nullus actus est necessario virtuosus. Hoc probatur, tum quia nullus actus necessario est, et per consequens non est necessario virtuosus; tum quia omnis actus potest fieri a solo Deo, et per consequens non est necessario virtuosus, quia talis actus non est in potestate voluntatis», *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

⁷ «Tamen aliter potest intelligi actum esse necessario virtuosum, ita scilicet quod non possit esse vitiosus stante praecepto divino; similiter non potest causari a voluntate creata nisi sit virtuosus. Et sic intelligendo actum virtuosum, dico secundo quod sic potest aliquis actus esse virtuosus necessario. Quod probo, quia impossibile est quod aliquis actus contingenter virtuosus, ita quod indifferenter potest dici virtuosus vel vitiosus, fiat determinate virtuosus nisi propter alium actum necessario virtuosum. Hoc probatur, quia actus contingenter virtuosus, puta actus ambulandi, fit determinate virtuosus per conformitatem ad alium actum», *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁸ «Ille actus necessario virtuosus modo praedicto est actum voluntatis, quia actus quo diligitur Deus super omnia et propter se, est huiusmodi; nam iste actus sic est virtuosus quod non potest esse vitiosus, nec potest iste actus causari a voluntate creata nisi sit virtuosus; tum quia quidlibet pro loco et tempore obligatur ad diligendum Deum super omnia, et per consequens iste actus non potest esse vitiosus; tum quia iste actus est primus omnium actuum honorum», *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

sub eodem, would not love God *super omnia*, being completely immersed in the study. Man's will, therefore, would love God *and* would not love Him⁹. How is it possible to reconcile this seeming contradiction?

Respondeo: si Deus posset hoc praecipere, sicut videtur quod potest sine contradictione, dico tunc quod voluntas non potest pro tunc talem actum elicere; quia ex hoc ipso quod talem actum eliceret, Deum diligeret super omnia, et per consequens impleret praeceptum divinum, quia hoc est diligere Deum super omnia: diligere quidquid Deus vult diligere; et ex hoc ipso quod sic diligeret, non faceret praeceptum divinum per casum; et per consequens sic diligendo, Deum diligeret et non diligeret, faceret praeceptum et non faceret¹⁰.

Ockham settles this conflict by distinguishing what the *voluntas Dei* can realize from the possibilities available for His creatures. If God can decide not to be loved by a creature, since this eventuality does not entail any contradiction in the horizon of His volition, the will of the creature cannot instead – at least *pro tunc* – perform this act. The contradiction thus concerns *only* the finite domain of human possibilities, and it has nothing to do with the extension of divine power.

The answer provided by the *Venerabilis Inceptor* in his *Quodlibeta* seems to conflict with another short passage of a *quaestio* of the Fourth Book of *Sentences*¹¹. Although the issue is here discussed much more briefly than the previous passage, Ockham's position is very clear: since «*omnis voluntas potest se conformare praecepto divino*», and since God can order a creature to hate Him, the will of the creature can follow this command. Besides, if everything which is right *in via*, given the current configuration of the world, is also right *in patria*, and if the hate towards God, following His command, might be judged right *in via*, then it will be right even *in patria*¹². Under this condition, it is not contradictory for a *voluntas*

⁹ «Si dicis quod Deus potest praecipere quod pro aliquo tempore non diligatur ipse, quia potest praecipere quod intellectus sit sic intentus circa studium et voluntas similiter, ut nihil possit pro illo tempore de Deo cogitare. Tunc volo quod voluntas tunc eliciat actum diligendi Deum; et tunc aut ille actus est virtuosus, et hoc non potest dici, quia actus diligendi Deum super omnia non est virtuosus», *Ibid.*, p. 256.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

¹¹ Guillelmus de Ockham, *Quaero utrum voluntas beata necessario fruatur Deo*, q. XVI, in *Quaestiones in Librum Quartum Sententiarum (Reportatio). Opera Theologica* (Vol. VII), eds. R. WOOD and G. GAL, St. Bonaventure, New York 1984, pp. 340-361.

¹² «Omnis voluntas potest se conformare praecepto divino. Sed Deus potest praecipere quod voluntas creata odiat eum, igitur voluntas creata potest hoc facere. Praeterea, omne quod potest esse actus rectus in via, et in patria. Sed odire Deum potest esse actus rectus in via, puta si praecipatur a Deo, igitur in patria», *Ibid.*, p. 352.

creata hating God, since it is not contradictory that God himself commands to a creature of being hatred. This *voluntas* will be therefore capable of hating his own Creator even *in via*, without giving rise to any contradiction.

The two passages just described seem inconsistent: in his *Quodlibeta*, Ockham holds that the will of the creature is not capable of not loving God *pro tunc*, even if God, *formaliter*, could order to the *homo viator* to not love Him above all, since this command does not involve any contradiction *ex se*; in the Fourth Book of *Sentences*, on the contrary, taking as a point of reference only the divine will, man can hate God, both *in via* and *in patria*, since this eventuality is not *tout court* contradictory, and we cannot exclude that it could happen.

Despite this apparently contradiction, it is possible to demonstrate the substantial compatibility of the two formulations, bringing out the metaphysical framework of the Ockhamian reflection upon Ethics and Morality. In a *quaestio* of the Second Book of *Sentences*¹³, the *Venerabilis Inceptor* provides us the guidelines to adequately understand his thought. Ockham asks if an *angelus malus* always remains in his wickedness. Before providing an adequate response to the question, Ockham presents two preliminary conclusions: in the first place, there is something that does not fall within the power of the damned angel; secondly, God can cause, *totaliter et immediate*, any act in the will of the evil angel¹⁴. There are hence some actions that are not in power of the *voluntas creata*¹⁵.

We can then identify the reason of the wicked man hostility in the fact that God, being *causa totalis*, might establish to be hated. The *voluntas creata* cannot escape the divine command, not even *de potentia sua absoluta*. Since God can cause *omne absolutum* without the concurrence of second causes, even the act of being hatred – at least if it is considered absolutely, namely without considering the deformity and malice usually associated with that action – might be

¹³ Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum angelus malus semper sit in actu malo*, q. XV, in *Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum (Reportatio)*. *Opera Theologica* (Vol. V), eds. R. Wood and G. Gál, St. Bonaventure, New York 1981, pp. 338-358.

¹⁴ «Secunda conclusio est quod aliquis est actus in angelo damnato qui non est in eius potestate. Quod probatur, quia licet voluntas damnati non possit se facere sine omni actu, tamen potest se suspendere ab omni actu qui est in potestate sua et elicere alium (...) Tertia conclusio est quod Deus totaliter et immediate causat aliquam actum in voluntate angeli mali. Quod probatur, quia omnem actum causatum in voluntate a voluntate libere potest voluntas impedire. Actum causatum a solo Deo non potest voluntas impedire», *Ibid.*, p. 340.

¹⁵ «Igitur est aliquis actus qui non est in potestate voluntatis», *Ibid.*, p. 341.

commanded by God¹⁶. As Alessandro Ghisalberti has rightly pointed out¹⁷, the *actum odiendi Deum* can be separated from the moral connotations which are usually linked to it. The *potentia Dei*, therefore, can cause what is absolute in the act of hating God [«*Deus potest causare quidquid absolutum est in actu odiendi Deum*»], without putting this act in relation to any «*deformatatem vel malitiam*». If God can realize everything that does not entail a «*contradictionem, nec malum culpa*», there is no reason to exclude the *odium Dei* from divine possibilities, as long as this action is not linked to any moral connotations. Hate, in fact, is not *formaliter* a sin, and it could be caused by God¹⁸.

If everything which is not a sin can fall under the divine precept [«*omne quod non est peccatum potest cadere sub praecepto Dei*»], and if the act of hating God can be commanded by God and realized *sine peccato* by the *voluntas creata*, God can then command to be hatred¹⁹. Furthermore, since this *voluntas* acquires some merits following the divine precept, Ockham has to admit that a creature might merit [«*potest mereri*»] his own salvation by hating God²⁰.

But what should be answered somebody who asserted that hate, along with many other actions, cannot be caused by God²¹, since it immediately evokes «*malitiam annexam et deformatatem*»? Ockham is very clear about this point:

¹⁶ «Et quod Deus possit causare actum odiendi Deum quantum ad omne absolutum in actu in voluntate creata probatur, quia Deus potest omne absolutum causare sine omni alio quod non est idem cum illo absoluto. Sed actus odiendi Deum quantum ad omne absolutum in eo non est idem cum deformatate et malitia in actu, igitur Deus potest causare quidquid absolutum est in actu odiendi Deum vel nolendi, non causando aliquam deformatatem vel malitia in actu», *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹⁷ See A. GHISALBERTI, «*Amore di Dio e non contraddizione: L'essere e il bene in Guglielmo di Ockham*», in L. BIANCHI (ed.), *Filosofia e teologia nel trecento. Studi in ricordo di Eugenio Randi*, Louvain-La-Neuve 1944, pp. 65-83, p. 77.

¹⁸ «Item, odium non est formaliter peccatum, igitur potest causari a solo Deo», Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum angelus malus semper sit in actu malo*, q. XV, in *Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum*, cit., p. 343.

¹⁹ «Item, omne factibile a solo Deo sine peccato, quod etiam potest fieri a voluntate, potest cadere sub praecepto divino, et potest Deus praecipere voluntati ut faciat illud, quia omne quod non est peccatum potest cadere sub praecepto Dei. si igitur actum odiendi Deum potest fieri a solo Deo sine peccato et potest etiam fieri a voluntate creata, igitur potest Deus praecipere voluntati ut odiat Deum», *Ibid.*, pp. 347-348.

²⁰ «Et tunc cum voluntas creata mereatur implendo praeceptum divinum, voluntas creata potest mereri odiendo Deum», *Ibid.*, p. 348.

²¹ «Item, contra hoc quod ponitur odium posse totaliter a Deo causari. Quia secundum Philosophum, III Ethicorum, aliqui sunt actus qui statim nominati habent malitiam annexam et deformatatem, et nullus talis potest fieri a Deo. Sed odium est huiusmodi; statim enim ut nominatur habet malitiam annexam et deformatatem. Igitur non potest causari a solo Deo», *Ibid.*, p. 347.

Licet odium, furari, adulterari et similia habeant malam circumstantiam annexam de communi lege, quatenus fiunt ab aliquo qui ex praecepto divino obligatur ad contrarium, tamen quantum ad omne absolutum in illis actibus possunt fieri a Deo sine omni circumstantia mala annexa. Et etiam meritorie possunt fieri a viatore si caderent sub praecepto divino, sicut nunc de facto eorum opposita cadunt sub praecepto. Sed stante praecepto divino ad eorum opposita non posset aliquis tales actus meritorie nec bene exercere, quia non possent [exerceri] meritorie nisi caderent sub praecepto divino. Sed opposita non possunt simul cadere sub praecepto divino. Sed si sic fierent a viatore meritorie, tunc non dicerentur nec nominarentur furtum, adulterium, odium, etc., quia ista nomina significant tales actus non absolute sed connotando vel dando intelligere quod facies tales actus per praeceptum divinum obligatur ad oppositum²².

In the quoted passage, Ockham clarifies all the conditions of his investigation. The *Venerabilis Inceptor* holds that, although hate, theft, adultery are considered, *de communi lege*, in a negative way, since who commits these actions disobeys the divine command, if they were considered in themselves, they might be carried out «*sine omni circumstantia mala annexa*». Indeed, the *homo viator* could perform these actions in a meritorious way if they were ordered by God himself. Nevertheless, in the current configuration of the world [«*stante praecepto divino*»], these acts cannot be meritoriously realized by any created will, since they are not subjected to the divine command. If man wants to gain his salvation, he cannot therefore hate God, as well as he cannot steal or commit adultery. In any way, if theft, adultery and hate were considered in an absolute sense, there is no reason why they could not be performed by the will of the *viator*.

The epistemological premise which guides Ockham's analysis is his Nominalism. In order to illustrate this point of view, we will consider an example closely linked to the topic we are discussing, that is the intuitive knowledge of a non-existing object²³. This example, far from leading to skepticism, as Étienne Gilson²⁴ e Anton C. Pegis²⁵ have claimed, is fully consistent with the assumptions of the Ockhamist epistemology²⁶.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 352.

²³ See Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum sit possibile intellectum viatoris habere notitia evidentem de veritatibus theologiae*, q. 1, a. 1, in *Scriptum in Librum Primim Sententiarum. Prologus et Distinctio Prima. Opera Theologica* (Vol. I), eds. G. GAL and S. BROWN, St. Bonaventure, New York 1967, pp. 16-47; Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum cognitio intuitiva possit esse de obiecto non existente, Quodl. VI*, q. 6, in *Quodlibeta Septem*, cit., pp. 604-607.

²⁴ É. GILSON, «The Road to Scespticism», in Id., *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1937, pp. 61-91.

²⁵ A. C. PEGIS, «Concerning William of Ockham», *Traditio*, 2 (1944), pp. 465-480.

²⁶ See P. BOEHNER, «The notitia intuitiva of non-existents According to W. Ockham», *Traditio*, 1 (1943) 223-275; R. C. RICHARDS, «Ockham and Skepticism», *New Scholasticism*, 42 (1968), pp.

According to the *Venerabilis Inceptor*, each single individuality is an atomic fact. Objects are therefore released from any archetypal structure which threatens their individuality, since they are exclusively bound to the will of divine liberty²⁷. God's omnipotence could then subtract any entity from its system of common relations. Now, if there is a difference between the intuitive knowledge of an object and the object intuited, and if God, in addition, could subtract each *res* from the set of its current relations, the *homo viator* cannot exclude that the absolute fact [«*res absoluta*»] represented by the *intuitive knowledge* of a non-existing object could not exist without the presence of the *object* – since, for instance, the sensible representation of a color [«*visio coloris sensitiva*»] could be preserved by God even if the color does not exist (the two things, in fact, are wholly distinct)²⁸.

We have to focus our attention on the possibility that God, *de potentia absoluta*, allows man to have an intuitive knowledge of a non-existing object. In spite of appearances, this possibility does not overturn the system of human knowledge.

345-363; M. McCORD ADAMS, «Intuitive Cognition, Certainty and Scepticism in W. Ockham», *Traditio*, 26 (1970) 389-398.

²⁷ According to Ockham, Nominalism is then a consequence of the emphasis on the role played by the *potentia Dei* within the theological and philosophical perspective. In this regard, see L. BAUDRY, *Le Tractatus de Principiis Theologiae attribué a G. d'Occam*, Vrin, Paris 1936, pp. 39-40; H. A. OBERMAN, «Some notes on the Theology of Nominalism with attention to its Relation to the Renaissance», *The Harvard Theological Review*, 52 (1959) 47-76; A. de MURALT, «Epoché - Malin Génie - Théologie de la toute puissance divine. Le concept objectif sans l'objet», *Studia Philosophica*, 26 (1966) 159-191.

²⁸ «Ex istis sequitur quod notitia intuitiva, tam sensitiva quam intellectiva, potest esse de re non existente. Et hanc conclusionem probo, aliter quam prius, sic: omnis res absoluta, distincta loco et subiecto ab alia re absoluta, potest per divinam potentiam absolutam existere sine illa, quia non videtur verisimile quod si Deus vult destruere unam rem absolutam existentem in caelo quod necessitetur destruere unam aliam rem existentem in terra. Sed visio intuitiva, tam sensitiva quam intellectiva, est res absoluta, distincta loco et subiecto an obiecto. Sicut si videam intuitive stellam existentem in caelo, illa visio intuitiva, sive sit sensitiva sive intellectiva, distinguitur loco et subiecto ab obiecto viso; igitur ista visio potest manere stella destructa; igitur etc. Patet etiam ex praedictis quomodo Deus habet notitia intuitivam omnium, sive sint sive non sint, quia ita evidenter cognoscit creaturas non esse quando sunt, sicut conoscit eas esse quando sunt. Patet etiam quod res non existens potest cognosci intuitive, quantumcumque primum obiectum illius actus non esista, - contra opinionem ali quorum, - quia visio coloris sensitiva potest copnservari a Deo ipso colore non existente; et tamen ista visio terminator ad colorem tamquam ad primum obiectum, et eadem ratione visio intellectiva», Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum sit possibile intellectum viatoris habere notitia evidentem de veritatibus theologiae*, q. 1, a. 1, in *Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum*, cit., pp. 38-39.

A similar occurrence, in fact, is already connected to a well determinate bond: the intuitive cognition of a non-existing *res* is conceivable *just* because its realization does not appear contradictory. The *quaestio* of Ockham should thus be placed within this context:

De nullo absoluto realiter distincto ab alio absoluto debet negari quin possit fieri sine eo per divinam potentiam absolutam nisi appareat evidens contradictio. Sed non apparet evidens contradictio quod iudicium sequens apprehensionem sit, et tamen quod apprehensio non sit²⁹.

Even for the *Venerabilis Inceptor*, the *voluntas Dei* is forced, by necessity, to recognize the fundamental value of the *principium firmissimum*. It is not the divine omnipotence that makes possible the intuition of a non-existing object, but rather it is the non-contradiction of such an occurrence which allows God to accomplish this possibility. God can do a certain thing *not only* because He is free to act in His sovereign *omnipotentia*, but because it is not immediately contradictory that this could happen. Thus Ockham, far from being the champion of an absolute voluntarism, remains – at least on this particular issue – in full continuity with the previous tradition: even in his reflection, God’s omnipotence is placed within a domain which narrows *ab origine* the conditions of His activity.

The same consideration can also be applied to the problem of the *odium Dei*. At present, the *voluntas creata* is obliged to love God *super omnia* by the divine precept; for this reason, man cannot hate God nor cause the act of hating Him in a meritorious way [*non potest bene odire Deum nec causare actum odiendi*], but he is obliged to do the opposite. As long as this precept remains in force, even God cannot command the contrary. However, God is not obliged to cause any act [*Deus ad nullum actum causandum obligatur*]: *de potentia absoluta*³⁰, He would be free to cause any absolute act «*sine omni malo culpae*». As God could cause the act of being loved without calling into question any goodness, for the same reason He could totally cause the act of being hatred «*sine bonitate vel malitia morali*», since He is not obliged to do anything³¹.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁰ See Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum homo possit salvari sine caritate creata, Quodl.* VI, q. 1, in *Quodlibeta Septem*, cit., pp. 585-589.

³¹ «Voluntas creata obligatur ex praecepto Dei ad diligendum Deum, et ideo stante illo praecepto non potest bene odire Deum nec causare actum odiendi, sed necessario male causat malitia moris. Et hoc quia obligatur ex praecepto Dei ad actum oppositum. Nec stante primo praecepto potest sibi Deus oppositum praecipere. Sed Deus ad nullum actum causandum obligatur, ideo quemlibet actum absolutum potest sine omni malo culpae causari et eius oppositum. Et ideo sicut potest

If the act of hating God was released from the moral connotation that accompanies it, the *voluntas creata* might therefore hate his own Creator. Although this conception may seem radical, there is no inconsistency – despite what has been argued by Lindwood Urban³² – in Ockham’s analysis of the *odium Dei*. In fact, both the action of hating God and the moral connotation which is currently associated with this act could be separated by virtue of a free decision of God. If this happened, the act of hating God would not be linked to the current moral order, and then a creature could follow the divine command and hate his own God without giving rise to any contradiction. Indeed, if God decided to modify the laws which regulate at this time the principles of morality, ascribing the hatred towards Himself in the group of the highly meritorious actions, the creatures could then reach their beatitude by refusing their Creator.

What is important to underline is that this extreme possibility does not overturn, despite the appearances, the moral view which necessarily belongs to the divine *essentia*:

Dico quod si odium Dei causatur a solo Deo, semper erit propter bonum finem, quia Deus ex odio creaturae in nullo damnificatur. Sed odire Deum propter indebitum finem est malum, et sic est actus creaturae et non a solo Deo³³.

According to Ockham, every possible occurrence is seen in relation to the moral nature of God. Even what seems to be incompatible with the divine essence is nonetheless possible because it does not contradict the infinite goodness that guides the *potentia Dei*. Man can hate God and earn his salvation because, performing this action, he could reach a *bonum finem*. Therefore, God’s omnipotence could change the moral proportions of the world, modifying the criteria which govern the behavior of the creatures, *just* because this is not in conflict with that *ratio boni* which binds the acting *ad extra* of God.

causari totaliter actum diligendi sine bonitate vel malitia morali, quia bonitas moralis vel malitia connotant quod agens obligatur ad illum actum vel eius oppositum, ita potest causari totaliter actum odiendi Deum sine omni malitia morali propter eandem causam, quia Deus ad nullum actum causandum obligatur», Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum angelus malus semper sit in actu malo*, q. XV, in *Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum*, cit., p. 353.

³² See L. URBAN, «William of Ockham’s Theological Ethics», *Franciscan Studies*, 33 (1973) 310-350.

³³ Guillelmus de Ockham, *Utrum angelus malus semper sit in actu malo*, q. XV, in *Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum*, cit., pp. 353-354.

God's will, hence, is constrained by *two criteria* that cannot change in any way, not even if God decided, *de potentia absoluta*, to intervene in the world with the purpose of changing it. First of all, God cannot violate the principle of non contradiction: the extension of the *omnipotentia Dei* is limited to what involves no contradiction. Secondly, the divine action is always directed to a *bonum finem*: what is in contrast with this fact cannot be neither commanded nor accomplished by God. In fact, God might command a creature to hate Him simply because this eventuality does not contradict His moral nature, an *essentia* which is *never* subjected to any change.

This idea will remain unchanged also in the further Ockhamian tradition. Gabriel Biel, for instance, one of the most radical Nominalist theologians, remains into the space traced by the *Venerabilis Inceptor*³⁴. Even for him, God is not the author of evil [*«Deus non est auctor mali»*], since He is incapable of sinning³⁵.

The *potentia Dei* is then always in relation to a positive reality:

Nullus est actus positivus cui essentialiter annexa est malitia: nam deformitas aut malitia non est aliquid sed privatio iustitiae debitae, et illa nulli positive entitati est inseparabiliter annexa, quia nulla est entitas positiva, quam Deus operatur cum secunda causa, quin eam efficere posset Deus sine causa secunda: quod, si faceret, nulla annecteretur iniustitia (...) Et ad illud quod postea additur de latrocinio, adulterio, etc., dicitur quod actu illi in specie et numero et quicquid est positivum in eis possunt fieri sine deformitate (...) Immo si Deus qualitatem illam, quae est odium Dei, crearet in voluntate, quod non est impossibile, non esset peccatum nec actus deformis³⁶.

According to Biel, God is able to entertain a causal relation only with those possibilities which are not connected to any moral specification incompatible with His essence, since the *deformitas* and the *malitia* are not a positive reality, being nothing but a *«privatio iustitiae debitae»*. Within this approach, therefore, God can do everything, taken for granted the necessity of the *principium firmissimum* and provided that His acts are realized *sine deformitate*, namely without that moral characterization which is usually linked to theft, adultery and *odium Dei*.

³⁴ H. A. OBERMAN, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass 1963, pp. 90-111

³⁵ See Gabriel BIEL, *In II Sent.*, dist. 1, q. 2, a. 3 l, in *Collectorium in IV Libros Sententiarum Guillelmi Occam*, Tübingen 1501 (repr. Hildesheim – New York: Georg Olms Verlag, II Voll., 1977).

³⁶ Gabriel BIEL, *In II Sent.*, dist. 37, q. un., a. 3 l, in *Collectorium in IV Libros Sententiarum Guillelmi Occam*.

Biel's analysis does not differ on this issue from the reflection of the *Venerabilis Inceptor*. For both authors, God has to conform His actions to some limits deeply-rooted in His own *essentia*. Hence, the voluntarism commonly associated to Ockham and to the later tradition should be resized. Even the examples which might seem capable of modifying the moral and metaphysical *ordo* established by God could not change nor contradict His eternal essence. The domain of the *potentia Dei*, in fact, will always be regulated by some *eternal truths* which cannot in any way change.

The contingency of the universe described by William of Ockham turns out to be firmly anchored to some eternal and uncreated conditions. God's intervention in the world will have to comply with both the intrinsic necessity of the principle of non contradiction and the moral nature of His essence. The possibility of the *odium Dei*, although it may appear as the most extreme consequence of an omnipotence truly *absoluta*, does not conflict with any of the eternal truths which rule the divine action. Even one of the most radical examples that can be found in Ockham's works, therefore, shows that the reflection of the *Venerabilis Inceptor* remains within the horizon of a common theological tradition.