

Research Article



The Imitation by Not Imitating: Duns Scotus on Self-determined Rationality as *Imago Dei* in Humans

Taklit Etmeden Taklit: Duns Scotus'un İnsanlarda *Imago Dei* Olarak Kendi Kendini Belirleyen Akıl Üzerine Görüşleri

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Abstract

The concept of imitation creates a paradoxical paradigm in Duns Scotus' philosophy. Following the traditional framework, this medieval thinker considered rational power to be *imago Dei*, i.e., God's image in humans. A human's finite rationality imitates the divine being as an image resembles and imitates the object it depicts. This common medieval assumption—strongly connected with the theological context—is also interesting from an ontological point of view, as it clarifies historical discourse concerning the relation between the principle of beings and beings themselves. Duns Scotus' theory of imitation merits consideration because it includes not only the necessary causal aspect but also the contingent, free element of the relation. Scotus identifies rational power with free will. This presumption leads the thinker to a provocative theory of imitation. For rational finite beings, the method of imitation is paradoxically “not to imitate.” Unlike all nonrational beings, which imitate by following pre-determined nature, rational beings can imitate by not imitating and being free in their volitional acts.

Öz

Taklit kavramı, Duns Scotus'un düşüncesinde paradoksal bir paradigma oluşturur. Geleneksel çerçeveyi takip eden bu Orta Çağ filozofu, rasyonel gücü *imago Dei*, yani Tanrı'nın insandaki sureti olarak kabul eder. İnsanın sonlu akıllı, bir tasvirin kendisini konu aldığı nesneye benzemesi ve onu taklit etmesi gibi, ilahi varlığı taklit eder. Teolojik bağlamla sıkı biçimde ilişkili olan bu yaygın Orta Çağ varsayımı, varlıkların ilkesi ile bizzat varlıkların kendisi arasındaki ilişkiye dair tarihsel söylemi açıklığa kavuşturduğu için ontolojik bakımdan da önem taşır. Duns Scotus'un taklit kuramı, yalnızca zorunlu nedensel boyutu değil, aynı zamanda ilişkinin olumsal ve özgür unsurlarını da içerdiği için dikkate değerdir. Scotus, rasyonel gücü özgür irade ile özdeşleştirir. Bu kabul, düşünürün provokatif bir taklit kuramına ulaşmasına yol açar. Rasyonel sınırlı varlıklar için taklit etmenin yolu paradoksal biçimde “taklit etmemektir.” Önceden belirlenmiş doğalarını izleyerek taklit eden akıldışı irrasyonel varlıkların aksine, rasyonel varlıklar taklit etmeden ve iradî eylemlerinde özgür olarak taklit edebilirler.

Keywords

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Introduction

The concept of *mimesis* is often associated with art and the aesthetic aspect of philosophy.¹ However, this Greek word and its Latin equivalent, *imitatio*, have a much broader meaning in the history of philosophy. In the medieval period, it played a crucial role in shaping metaphysical views. Latin theologians and philosophers used the concept of *imitatio* to represent beings' ontological and epistemological structure. Specifically, they considered that all created beings imitate the forms (created by the first cause) and, in such manner, they participate in the first cause itself. For example, the drawn triangle participates in the first cause by imitating the ideal form of triangeliness. The more perfect and successful the drawn triangle imitation is, the truer being it is. For example, if one triangle's lines are straighter than another's, it is considered to be a truer triangle (as a triangle should have straight lines). This process is called only "imitation" (and not, e.g., "repetition") because none of the triangles might be as perfectly true triangle as the form of the triangle. If we zoom in on the drawn triangle, it will be clear that even the one that seemed to have straight lines doesn't have them. None of the material triangles is a perfectly true triangle, but there is more or less truthfulness in them (according to their imitation level).²

According to medieval philosophical tradition, among the various types of imitators, rational beings occupy a special position.³ They imitate not only one of the forms (created by the first principle), but the first principle, i.e., God itself. Of course, a created human is far from an uncreated being; however, human nature is the best candidate for imitating and representing the uncreated first principle. Medieval thinkers used interesting metaphors to emphasize and distinguish these imitations from each other. For example, a thirteenth-fourteenth-century philosopher and theologian, Duns Scotus, used the metaphor of "trace" for nonrational imitators and "image" for rational imitators. Nonrational beings (such as triangles and horses) express the essence of the first principle only partially, like a trace that vaguely points to an animal that left it.

¹ In western philosophical tradition, linking the term "mimesis", "imitation" with art, and literature is strongly connected with Plato's and Aristotle's assumptions about the concept. For this topic, see Hasan Baktır, "The Concept of Imitation in Plato and Aristotle (Aristo ve Plato'da Taklit)," *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1, no. 15 (2003): 167-179.

² The idea of singulars' participation in divine forms was common for several traditions (Neoplatonism, Byzantine tradition, Latin medieval tradition, etc.). In the Latin medieval tradition, this topic is briefly reviewed by Klima. See Gyula Klima, "The Medieval Problem of Universals," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, 1995), published September 10, 2000; last modified December 21, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/universals-medieval/>

³ It should be mentioned that, unlike modern understanding, for a medieval thinker, the concept "imitation," "copying" has positive significance. In this tradition, it does not imply unoriginality and is not the opposite of individuality. See Jan Ziolkowski, "The Highest Form of Compliment: *Imitatio* in Medieval Latin Culture," in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. John Marenbon (Brill, 2001), 293–307.

Rational beings imitate and resemble the first principle not just partially but entirely, as the image is the resemblance of the whole thing.⁴

However, what is rationality? What is the image of the first and all-inclusive principle? Rational power, as the *imago Dei* (i.e., the image of God) in humans, was interpreted in different ways. As the image implies an imitation of the thing represented by it, the understanding of rationality also influenced the comprehension of imitation. Duns Scotus' position is particularly noteworthy, as he identified the rational power with the will and its free, nondetermined acts. As a result, not this or that positive model but being free becomes the aim of human imitation. In other words, rational human beings do not have predetermined rules to imitate, because they imitate nonfixed, free acts.

This assumption culminates in a provocative interpretation of the word "imitation" as it extends this concept beyond its ordinary limitations and creates a paradoxical understanding. The ordinary conception of the term "imitation" implies three crucial structural elements: the imitator, the model of imitation, and the means of imitation. Medieval thinkers did not doubt that God was the model of imitation and imitators were creatures (including rational human beings). However, they disputed the means of imitation; they had different answers to the question: how does a rational human being imitate God? For example, in medieval Jewish philosophical tradition, on the one hand, Maimonides asserted that a human imitates God by trying to understand intelligible eternal realities, and, on the other hand, Gersonides thought that the most perfect imitation implies not knowing but teaching about the imperishable world.⁵ In other words, thinkers argued about what types of acts represented the imitation: if there is no act by which the imitator copies, there is no imitation. The creativity of Scotus' point emerges in this context. For him, the highest divine perfection is freedom. Neither knowing, teaching, nor other determined act can express the fullness of divine possibility. Only free acts of the will are appropriate for the uncaused first being. For this reason, the highest imitation of the model implies not some predetermined act (e.g., knowing eternal beings), but self-determined and free acts. Paradoxically, as the first cause is uncased and free from any external influences, the perfect imitation of this being implies the act of not imitating but being also free.

Correspondence between Beings, Thoughts, and Words

Medieval assumption of the truth, according to which the imitator should correspond to the imitated, might be considered as one of the forms of the correspondence theory of truth. This

⁴ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1, p. 2, q. 1, n. 286: "Vestigium est impressio, derelicta ex transitu alicuius super vacuum vel plenum, ipsum imperfecte repraesentans, - et ideo 'imperfecte', quia vestigium repraesentat aliquid confuse et sub ratione speciei, imago perfecte, quia sub ratione individui: sicut per vestigium distinguitur equus a bove, vel quod transiens est equus, non bos, non pautem distinguitur hic equus ab illo. sed imago distinguit, quia imago Iovis non repraesentat Caesarem."

⁵ Menachem Kellner, "Gersonides on *Imitatio Dei* and the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 85, no. 3-4 (1995): 275-296.

theory, which is still one of the influential explanations, has its roots in antiquity. Aristotle identifies truth and falseness in this manner: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.”⁶ In this definition, imitation is not mentioned, but it is clear that truth is representational. The intelligible content “imitates” reality, i.e., tries to imprint it as it is. If a being is correctly represented in the statement, the statement is true, and if it is wrongly indicated, then the statement is false. The statement should represent, correspond to the state of affairs (ontic condition).⁷ Correspondence between the state of affairs and statements is possible only via the correspondence between the state of affairs and thought. If we use Aristotle’s example: “It is not because we think truly that you are pale, that you are pale, but because you are pale, we who say this have the truth.”⁸ Later, this Aristotelian view was famously formulated by Thomas Aquinas: “The truth is correspondence between the thing and the intellect.”⁹

However, for there to be correspondence between things and intellect, it is necessary to be some resemblance, a common element between them. And indeed, Aristotle writes that the thoughts, which are in the soul, are similar to things.¹⁰ At the same time, the use of the word “similarity” (and not “sameness”) also implies that in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, the thing and the thought have not only common elements, but also different ones: they are not completely identical. According to tradition, the common element between the thing and the thought is the form (for example, the form of a triangleness is present both in the drawn, singular triangle and in the mind of the person thinking about a triangle). The different element is the matter, which is present in the thing, but not in the thought (it is not possible to imagine the matter of the drawn triangle, e.g., ink, in a human’s mind).

The Aristotelian-Thomistic correspondence theory of truth depends on accepting a realist position regarding the existence of universals. For them, “triangleness” is not only a concept, it represents a real form, existing independently of the mind.

It is interesting that some of these thinkers, who opposed realists and adopted a nominalist position (i.e., declaring that “triangleness,” “horseness,” and “humanness” are only concepts, existing only in the mind), nonetheless preserved the correspondence theory of truth. For example, on the one hand, William Ockham does not write about the correspondence between things and thoughts; however, he dedicates some of the chapters of his *magnum opus* (*Summa Logicae*) to the

⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4.5.1011b: “τὸ μὲν γὰρ λέγειν τὸ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ τὸ ὄν εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές.”

⁷ Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 7.19b: “ὁμοίως οἱ λόγοι ἀληθεῖς ὥσπερ τὰ πράγματα.”

⁸ Aristotle, *Met.* 9.8.1051b: “οὐ γὰρ διὰ τὸ ἡμᾶς οἶεσθαι ἀληθῶς σε λευκὸν εἶναι εἰ σὺ λευκός, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ σὲ εἶναι λευκὸν ἡμεῖς οἱ φάντες τοῦτο ἀληθεύομεν.”

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* q. 16, a. 1,3: “Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus.”

¹⁰ Aristotle, *De Int.* 1.16a: “Ἔστι μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα.”

correspondence between thoughts and language, mental and corporeal terms.¹¹ Accordingly, two types of correspondence theory of truth are distinguished in medieval philosophy: metaphysical (realistic) and semantic (nominalistic).¹² Even though these two types have completely different ontological models, they agree on one assumption: both admit the existence of representational truth. A realist would prove that there is a determined metaphysical truth, and a rational being's intellect has to imitate it in its content and represent it in this way (for example, if it is metaphysical reality that "every effect has its cause", then the intellect should passively imprint this reality in intelligible content). A nominalist would prove that there are determined logico-semantic rules, and if an individual wants to express the truth in speech, they should follow the rules of mental language in the corporeal one. In both cases, "imitating" and representing the model might be considered to be a noncreative, passive process.

Imitatio et Imago Dei: Types of Representation of Eternal and Unchangeable Principles

It was discussed that intelligible and linguistic content imitates real beings in their representations; in general, what is thought, written, or said aims to copy real beings. However, what kind of beings are imitated in thought and linguistic content? In the Augustinian tradition, two types of imitation models are distinguished: material and immaterial ones. Physical desire pushes beings to imitate earthly acts (such as stealing pears because of the instant appetite), and metaphysical desire drives them to imitate divine acts. The first type of imitation implies imitating some external model, whereas the second one is actualizing the highest inner possibilities of the rational being. For this reason, the imitation of the divine is not a self-violent act that aims to change the self to an external feature, but rather to develop the better self in accordance with natural possibilities.¹³

For this reason, the *imitatio Dei* is a crucial form of imitation. Medieval thinkers widely discussed the creatures' correspondence with their Creator. They considered that the effects should have some common elements with the cause; they should participate in the cause's nature. As Thomas Aquinas wrote: "[In a created thing the] truth is said to exist inasmuch as a created thing imitates its source, the divine intellect."¹⁴ However, they imitate not immediately divine intellect

¹¹ William of Ockham, *Summa Logicae* c. 3.2: "Est autem inter nomina vocalia et mentalia differentia, quia quamvis omnia accidentia grammaticalia quae conveniunt nominibus mentalibus etiam nominibus vocalibus sint convenientia, non tamen e converso, sed quaedam sunt communia tam istis quam illis, quaedam autem sunt propria nominibus vocalibus et scriptis, quia quaecumque conveniunt vocalibus, et scriptis et e converso."

¹² Marian David, "The Correspondence Theory of Truth," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, 1995), published May 10, 2002; last modified December 21, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/truth-correspondence/>.

¹³ Godfrey T. Baleng, "Mimetic Desire in Augustine's Confessiones as a Model for Natural Theology and Virtue Ethics," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 58, no. 1 (2024): 4-6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3030>.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* q. 1, a. 7: "In quibus dicitur veritas, secundum quod res creata imitatur suum principium, scilicet intellectum divinum."

but their respective forms, which are created and exist in the intellect. As noted earlier, the truth of being was measured according to their correspondence to the ideal form in the first cause's intellect. Everything (the triangle, the rose, the cat, etc.) is a true representative of its species to the degree it fulfils its nature and form. As a result, not all beings have the same goal in the process of imitation. For example, the drawn triangle fulfils its nature by imitating the ideal form of a triangle, and Bucephalus imitates the form of a horse.

In these different types of imitations, humans have a distinguished model. The exemplar of the human mind was considered not this or that form, created by the divine intellect, but God himself. This famous Augustinian assumption had a biblical and philosophical basis. According to *Genesis* (1:27), humans are created in the image of God. At the same time, in Aristotelian tradition, rationality was understood as the image of God in humans. God cannot be limited to rationality, but rationality, as the best part of the creature, is also the most appropriate candidate for being the image of God. However, what is rationality? How did Aristotelian thinkers define rational power? They determined rational power as the intellect. Influenced by Alexander of Aphrodisias, the first cause was identified with agent intellect, whereas human intellect was considered its passive transformation. The whole world is placed between two intellects: the divine intellect creates forms of beings, and the human finite intellect receives these forms.¹⁵ Unlike the divine active intellect, the human intellect cannot create forms by thinking about them. However, it is the (imperfect) image of the infinite intellect.¹⁶

Augustine significantly transformed the understanding of rationality, i.e., *imago Dei* in humans. He assumed that the intellect alone cannot be the image of the first cause, the principle of all beings. Observing the intellect clarifies the necessity of this power to have some motivation to be moved. Only the power to think cannot cause thinking itself; additionally, the will to think is important for actualizing this power. In the same manner, only the possibility of creating forms and singular beings is not enough to explain the reason for their creation. As a result, Augustine identified rationality not only with one but with three strongly interconnected powers: the understanding (i.e., the act of intellect), the memory, and the will. These three together are the image of the Trinity in humans.¹⁷

Including the will in the *imago Dei* also changed the possibility of understanding the form of imitation. In the model, in which *imago Dei*, i.e., an image of the principle of all beings, is identified with the intellect, there is a risk of reducing the whole structure of beings to the representational, intelligible content. How is it possible to include a non-predetermined, free part

¹⁵ Richard C. Taylor, "Averroes' Philosophical Conception of Separate Intellect and God," in *La Lumière de l'intellect. La Pensée Scientifique et Philosophique d'Averroès dans son Temps*, ed. Ahmad Hasnawi (Peeters Publishers, 2011), 391-404.

¹⁶ Alexander of Aphrodisias, "*De anima*" of Alexander of Aphrodisias: *A Translation and Commentary*, ed. Athanasios P. Fotinis (University Press of America, 1980), 89.

¹⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.7.10: "In tribus potius illis imago ista cognoscitur, memoria scilicet, intellegentia, uoluntate."

of existence in the structure of beings, if the ontological hierarchy is nothing more than unchangeable forms in the divine intellect and a more or less lack of their perfection in material life? Is actuality a more or less perfect, passive execution of an order originally written by the divine mind? Mentioning free will as part of the *imago Dei*, i.e., image of the principle of beings, makes clear that ontological structure has not only a causal, necessary side but also a free, contingent side, too. The first cause, as the principle of all beings, tends towards the creatures not only with the necessary and unchangeable forms but also with free, undetermined will. As a result, when a human's finite rationality imitates the first cause, it does not have a "full scenario" to follow it. In this case, correspondence implies not only a more or less perfect repetition of the predetermined intelligible content but also free acts.

Duns Scotus on the Imitation by Not Imitating

The Augustinian connection between rationality and the will is even more radicalized in Duns Scotus' philosophy. For this thinker, the will is not only one of the elements of rational power, but this power itself.¹⁸ For this reason, he introduces an even bolder theory of imitation.

First of all, like Thomas Aquinas and many other thinkers from the medieval period, Duns Scotus distinguishes between two types of truth in things: The truth in things corresponding to their Creator and the truth in things corresponding to the knower.¹⁹ From these two, the second one is less interesting for this article and is quite similar to the ordinary medieval correspondence theory of truth. For this reason, only the first type of truth in things will be analyzed.

There are three subtypes of the truth in things corresponding to the Creator: absolute, adequate, and imitative.²⁰ From these three, the first one expresses the thing's correspondence to the Creator in general, in an absolute way. However, this general correspondence is ambiguous, equivocal, and therefore requires further division into the other two types. From these two types, the first, i.e., the adequate correspondence with the Creator or producer, implies the complete, perfect correspondence. Such a type of correspondence might be only between the Son and the Father. Only the Son can perfectly correspond to the Creator. The second type of correspondence,

¹⁸ In this article, the will as the rational power in Duns Scotus is analyzed in the context of the imitation. In general, for Scotus' understanding of rationality, see Marilyn M. Adams, "Duns Scotus on the Will as Rational Power," in *Via Scoti: Methodologica Ad Mentem Joannis Duns Scoti*, ed. Leonardo Sileo (Antonianum, 1995), 839–854.

¹⁹ John Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* 2, l. 6, q. 3, n. 5: "Est enim veritas in rebus et veritas in intellectu. In rebus dupliciter, in genere videlicet per comparisonem ad producentem, et per comparisonem ad cognoscentem sive intelligentem."

²⁰ John Duns Scotus, *In Metaph.* 2, l. 7, q. 3, n. 24: "Primo modo dicitur veritas absolute conformitas producti ad producens, aut determinate conformitas talis secundum adaequationem, aut determinate conformitas secundum imitationem."

i.e., the imitative correspondence, characterizes creatures. They cannot perfectly, adequately correspond to the Creator; that's why they just imitate more or less successfully.²¹

Scotus also agrees with the widespread medieval assumption about different types of imitations. To make clear the huge difference between nonrational and rational imitations, he identifies two kinds of relations between the Creator and creatures. He differentiates between the trace of the Creator and the image of the Creator in creatures. In every creature, there is a trace of the Creator. He explains:

A trace is an impression left when something passes over a void or non-void space and that it represents the subject imperfectly—"imperfectly" because a trace represents something indistinctly (confuse), signaling the kind of thing only, [whereas] an image represents perfectly as it signals an individual as such. On the basis of a trace one can distinguish a horse from an ox or that it was a horse that passed by, not an ox. But this particular horse cannot be distinguished from that particular one.²²

A trace cannot help in knowing the animal (which left the trace); however, it can lead us to some general, unspecified assumptions. In the same manner, every created being reveals some characteristics of the principle of beings. For example, as there exist unity, truth, goodness, beauty and order in the created beings, it might be assumed that these perfections belong to the highest, uncreated being, too.²³

However, if a trace only partially resembles the thing, an image is a resemblance of the whole. A thing is depicted more effectively by an image than by a trace; in the same manner, the first being is expressed more effectively by the rational beings than by nonrational ones.

What has been said yet does not represent the crucial difference between Duns Scotus' and Thomas Aquinas' positions. It is not yet shown what makes Scotus' imitation theory paradoxical. This thinker, as well as several medieval authors, discussed the trace-like imitation of nonrational

²¹ John Duns Scotus, *In Metaph.* 2, l. 7, q. 3, n. 25: "Et licet primus istorum trium modorum videatur esse communis secundo et tertio, tamen si nomen veri imponatur ad significandum quod-cumque trium praedictorum secundum propriam rationem, erit aequivocum. Secundus modus invenitur in Filio Dei, qui veritas est, quia est secundum Augustinum summa similitudo principii, haec enim est conformitas cum adaequatione. Tertius modus invenitur in creatura, quae imitatur exemplar, cui aliquo modo assimilatur, defective tamen, alias non diceretur imitari."

²² John Duns Scotus, *Ord.* 1, p. 2, q. 1, n. 286: "Vestigium est impressio, derelicta ex transitu alicuius super vacuum vel plenum, ipsum imperfecte repraesentans, - et ideo 'imperfecte', quia vestigium repraesentat aliquid confuse et sub ratione speciei, imago perfecte, quia sub ratione individui: sicut per vestigium distinguitur equus a bove, vel quod transiens est equus, non bos, non pautem distinguitur hic equus ab illo."

²³ John Duns Scotus, *Ord.* 1, p. 2, q. 1, n. 298: "Haec tria [unitas, forma, ordo] sic sumpta repraesentant, sub ratione similitudinis, tria correspondentia eis in Deo, quia unitas repraesentat summam unitatem primi principii, a quo est origo." See also John Duns Scotus, *Ord.* 1, p. 2, q. 1, n. 299: "Possunt et alia multa in creaturis assignari, quae velut similia repraesentant in divinis aliqua appropriata personis, puta unum, verum et bonum: unum in creatura repraesentat unitatem appropriatam Patri, verum veritatem appropriatam Filio, bonum bonitatem appropriatam Spiritui Sancto."

beings and the image-like imitation of rational beings. They argued about details; however, this general framework was widely acknowledged. The paradoxical nature of Scotus' imitation theory becomes evident when it is analyzed in connection with this thinker's definition of rationality.

Scotus defined nonrational and rational powers in this manner: 1. The nonrational power is determined to act in a specific manner in a particular context, and it is not possible for it not to act, if it is not prevented from outside. For example, the sun has nonrational power to dissolve the ice. This process will take place if another cause does not prevent it (e.g., placing the ice in the fridge). Unlike nonrational power, the rational one is not determined in advance. It is self-determined. It can perform opposite acts or not perform an act at all. The sun's power cannot choose to dissolve or not to dissolve the ice. Unlike this nonrational power, the will, as the rational power, can decide for itself to act or not. The will can choose to dissolve or not dissolve the ice: this power determines itself independently. In other words, nonrational powers are the parts of necessary causality; they are natural and are completely determined by their nature and external conditions. Conversely, the rational power is not determined by external causality. It creates its own causality; it is self-determined.²⁴ If we want to talk about the nature of the will, paradoxically, its nature is not to have nature, not to be predetermined.²⁵

However, does this assumption not seem counterfactual? There are plenty of occasions that clarify the dependency of the acts of the will. This empirical observation is not missed by Duns Scotus. He differentiates the will as the power (or potency) and acts of the will. Not acts themselves, but the power of the will is self-determined and free. As Scotus writes:

Freedom is in something preceding the [volitional] act, as I agree, but not absolutely in it, but rather it states a respect of it to the act, and naturalness likewise states another respect of the same preceding absolute thing to the other act.²⁶

If a rational being wills something (for example, riding Bucephalus), this act of the will is not necessarily free, i.e., it is not necessarily the result of self-determined potency of the will. It might

²⁴ In medieval tradition, Scotus was not the first thinker who outlined the significance of the will. Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Henry of Gent, and some other crucial figures also emphasized the philosophical significance of the will. However, they did not identify this concept with complete rational power. The voluntaristic school, which claimed the primacy of the will, became influential in the late thirteenth century. Nevertheless, post-Scotistic, Ockhamist voluntarism leaves no place for the will as the metaphysical principle and cause of the metaphysical truth. As was mentioned, in the nominalistic tradition, truth is understood more semantically than metaphysically.

²⁵ John Duns Scotus, *In Metaph.* 2, l. 9, q. 15, n. 22: "Iste autem modus eliciendi operationem propriam non potest esse in genere nisi duplex. Aut enim potentia ex se est determinata ad agendum, ita quod, quantum est ex se, non potest non agere quando non impeditur ab extrinseco. Aut non est ex se determinata, sed potest agere hunc actum uel oppositum actum; agere etiam uel non agere. Prima potentia communiter dicitur 'natura', secunda dicitur 'uoluntas'."

²⁶ John Duns Scotus, *Ord.* 1, d. 13, q.1, n. 48: "Libertas est in aliquo praecedente actum, concedo, sed non absolute in illo, sed dicit respectum illius ad actum, - et naturalitas similiter dicit alium respectum eiusdem absoluti praecedentis, ad alium actum."

be caused by habit (riding the horse before), the high desirability of the object itself (natural pleasure that is guaranteed by riding Bucephalus), etc. Any act of the will is only potentially self-determined. It also implies the potency to follow the natural, predetermined causality. The act of the will is free if it does not have any external cause. This explains empirical evidence: the possibility of calculating volitional acts of the person or masses comes from the fact that not all but only some acts of the will are undetermined and free. Freedom necessarily applies only to the will as the power and not its acts.

Unlike acts of the will, acts of the intellect are always natural and non-free. In this model, the intellect, which was traditionally identified with rationality, turns out to be a natural, nonrational power. The reason is simple: the intellect is not self-determined. The act of the intellect is necessarily determined by its object. The intellect cannot decide if “Two plus two equals four” is true or false. In this case, the mathematical truth determines the act of the intellect, but not the other way around. In general, the intellect cannot decide to agree or disagree with some truth; it naturally and passively receives the dictation from its objects.²⁷

It does not mean that Scotus completely excludes the importance of the intellect in rationality. According to him: “As a matter of fact, speaking precisely, even as regards its intrinsic acts it [the intellect] is irrational. It is rational only in the qualified sense that it is a precondition for the act of a rational potency.”²⁸ It is not possible to will the object without knowing it. The intellect is not a rational power, but it is a necessary prerequisite for the act of rational power, i.e., the will.

Contrasting natural (including intellectual) and volitional powers enriches the image of the principle of beings. According to this assumption, the world of beings, on the one hand, includes predetermined, necessary causality and, on the other hand, self-determined, free, active power. The common nature and forms of the beings do not express the completeness of existence. There is not only a predetermined causality, but also the will, which separates the passive causal moments from each other with free acts. Being in the world does not imply only the necessary following of an already “written scenario,” because it implies unpredictable, active rationality. Finite rational beings might have predetermined relations with other beings, but they can also have a vibrant and lively engagement with them; their lives can be an authentic and unique example of existence.

In the Aristotelian view, which identifies the principle of beings with the super intellect, which thinks of its perfect thought, and as a result creates necessary forms,²⁹ it is easy to interpret the singular life as much actualized and fulfilled, as well as it imitates a fixed image of itself,

²⁷ John Duns Scotus, *In Metaph.* 2, l. 9, q. 15, n. 36: “Et sic intellectus cadit sub natura. Est enim ex se determinatus ad intelligendum, et non habet in potestate sua intelligere et non intelligere siue circa complexa, ubi potest habere contrarios actus, non habet etiam illos in potestate sua: assentire et dissentire.”

²⁸ John Duns Scotus, *In Metaph.* 2, l. 9, q. 15, n. 38: “Immo praecise sumptus, etiam respectu extrinseci, est irrationalis; solummodo autem secundum quid rationalis, in quantum praeequitur ad actum potentiae rationalis.”

²⁹ Aristotle writes about this topic in *Metaphysics*’ twelfth book.

already put in its nature. Metaphorically, in this model, the finite rational being is comparable to a skilled actor who follows the script. By contrast, in Scotus' ontology, imitation of the Creator, the principle of all beings, requires free, independent acts. In this paradoxical model, the object of the imitation is self-determination and freedom from external causes; the imitator imitates by being free and therefore imitates by not imitating. The Scotistic world is not a closed, fully calculated system; it is an open structure that enables rational beings not to be passive participants of the staged narrative but to actively improvise and live the moment.

In the classical secondary literature (Etienne Gilson's influential and valuable texts),³⁰ Scotus is considered the thinker who separates the thinking process and its product (knowledge) from actuality and existence. This assumption has persuasive grounds, as Scotus is concentrated not on what is, but on what might be. In his metaphysics, there are no forms that indicate necessary and actual imitation of the infinite being. Unlike some medieval thinkers, he does not prove that imitation of an all-inclusive first principle and the most desired being is knowing eternal beings, teaching about imperishable beings, etc. Instead of these guarantees, he presupposes the possibility of actualizing rational imitation power in numerous opposite ways. However, developing metaphysics on nondetermined opposite potencies instead of non-alternative actuality might be interpreted as not sinking into a non-actual, possible world, but rather as opening the way for nondetermined actuality.

As Ludger Honnefelder pointed out, such a position allowed Scotus to develop a revolutionary approach in philosophy.³¹ Against widespread Aristotelian tradition, according to him, the world is not a predetermined necessity with minor contingencies. The first principle structures the world in a way that contingency and, therefore, rational decision are infinitely crucial. Not some predetermined scenario, but self-determinacy transcends the natural causal world. From this point of view, Scotus is close to modern philosophers, who declined to search for a predetermined truth that just needs to be discovered. Instead, they started to find formal ground with opposite possibilities to embrace the wholeness of beings.

Conclusion

In general, imitation implies copying acts or the essence of other beings. However, according to Duns Scotus, not all imitation includes mimicking the specific essential features or actions. According to this thinker, the world of the beings is not an unbroken causal chain; natural, causal relations and connections are separated by self-determined, free will. Unlike other powers, the will is not natural and therefore, its acts cannot be exactly calculated. This ontological framework

³⁰ Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence K. Shook (University of Notre Dame Press, 1957), 55.

³¹ Ludger Honnefelder, "Franciscan Spirit and Aristotelian Rationality: John Duns Scotus's New Approach to Theology and Philosophy," *Franciscan Studies* 66, no. 1 (2008): 470, <https://doi.org/10.1353/FRC.0.0014>.

balances the necessary and contingent, same and different, and transcends the ordinary understanding of imitation by imitating freedom. At this point, the imitation transcends itself, because it imitates by “not imitating.” If, for one medieval author, the imitation of the highest being implies knowing the eternal beings, for another, teaching about imperishable beings, for a third, suffering like Christ, etc., according to Scotus, no determined act might be a rational imitation. A rational act does not imitate some determined act but freedom and self-determinacy in a volitional act. It should be noted that, of course, the medieval religious thinker does not write about libertarianism. It is not the human being, but the human’s power to will that is free. Even more, not a human’s acts of the will but the will, as the power is free. A human is a mix of natural and volitional powers. Sometimes he imitates pre-determined, natural principles; however, sometimes he can become free and imitate by not imitating.

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