

William of Ockham on God's Grace, Power and Freedom

GRACE:

God is able, in principle, to do anything that isn't simply contradictory. E.g., God can't make a square circle. (This isn't "something" that God can't do, since a square circle is "no-thing", nonsense by definition.)

Note: [1] the nominalist understanding of grace begins with philosophical speculation. The Reformers will begin elsewhere.

[2] the nominalists understand grace in terms of power. The Reformers will understand grace very differently.

POWER:

There are two kinds: *potentia absoluta*, and *potentia ordinata*.

PA: God's metaphysical freedom to do anything at all that isn't self-contradictory.

PO: God's limited capacity, power or freedom on account of God's self-limitation.

E.g., God has willed to create. He was under no necessity to do so. But once he has created a finite world (PA), he is bound by his self-imposed order. If he were to violate this order he would be inconsistent. God has willed that water slake thirst. He was under no metaphysical necessity concerning this. But if he subsequently wills that water slake thirst at times but increase thirst at other times, then he's inconsistent (and human existence is impossible.)

Note: the Reformers will maintain that this notion of power as God's "will" is indistinguishable from arbitrariness, since God's will has no relation to God's nature.

God has willed that we obey him. His will is the basis of the command.

Note: the Reformers will maintain again that this notion renders the Christian life a human-destroying submission to caprice. It is impossible to say that the Christian life is "good" in any sense.

FREEDOM:

God's freedom is his capacity to do anything at all. God is subject neither to external nor internal constraint.

Note: the Reformers will argue that this notion of freedom is indistinguishable from philosophical indeterminism. Freedom, rather, is the absence of any impediment to acting in accord with one's (true) nature.