

# 13

## Duns Scotus on Divine Illumination

[Article IV. Concerning Henry's Conclusion]

In the fourth article I argue against the conclusion of [Henry's] view as follows: What, I ask, is meant by certain and unadulterated truth? Either it means infallible truth, that is, a truth which excludes all doubt and deception. And in this case, we have proved and declared already in the second and third articles that such truth is possible on purely natural grounds. Or by such truth he means truth as an attribute of "being". In which case, since we can know "being" we can also know its attribute "true". And if we know "true" we can also know truth by a kind of abstraction. For any form that can be recognised in a subject can also be known in itself and in the abstract apart from the subject. Or truth is to be understood in still another way, as truth of conformity to an exemplar. If the exemplar in question is taken to be created, we have what we seek to prove. If conformity to an uncreated exemplar is meant, why such conformity cannot be recognised unless the exemplar itself is known, for unless the term of a relation is known the relation itself cannot be known. Consequently, it is false to assume that an eternal exemplar is the reason why we know something when this exemplar itself remains unknown.

Secondly, I argue further that simple intelligence can know by way of definition all that it knows in a confused manner by the simple expedient of discovering the definition of the thing known by way of division. This definitive knowledge seems to be the most perfect kind of knowledge that pertains to simple intelligence. From this most perfect knowledge of the terms, however, the intellect can understand the principle most perfectly; and from the principle, the conclusion. Intellectual knowledge seems to be complete with this, so that no further knowledge of truth over and above the aforementioned truths seems necessary.

In the third place, either the Eternal Light, which you say is necessary in order to have unadulterated truth, causes something naturally prior to the act or not. If it does, then this thing is produced either in the object or in the intellect. But it cannot be produced in the object, because the object, in so far as it exists in the intellect, has no real existence but only intentional existence. Therefore, it is incapable of any real accident. If this thing is produced in the intellect, then the Eternal Light transforms [the mind] to know pure truth only through the medium of its effect. If this be the case, then it seems that common opinion attributes knowledge to the Uncreated Light to the same extent as does this, for the common view

assumes that knowledge is seen in the active intellect, which is the effect of the Uncreated Light, and indeed is a more perfect effect than this accidental created Light would be. If this Uncreated Light does not cause anything prior to the act, then either the Light alone causes the act [of knowledge], or the Light with the intellect and object do so. If the Light does so alone, then the active intellect has no function whatsoever in knowing pure truth. But this seems inconsistent because the latter is the most noble function of our intellect. The active intellect, then, which is the most noble [faculty of knowledge] in our soul, must concur in some way in this action.

And the inconsistency here inferred also follows from the aforesaid opinion in another way. For according to the one who holds this opinion, any agent using an instrument is incapable of performing an action which exceeds the action of the instrument. Therefore, since the power of the active intellect could not arrive at the knowledge of pure truth, the Eternal Light using the active intellect could not produce this knowledge or have anything to do with the act whereby pure truth is known and still have the active intellect function as an instrument. And if you say that the Uncreated Light causes this unadulterated truth together with the intellect and the object, this is the common opinion which assumes that the Uncreated Light acting as the remote cause produces all certain truth. Consequently, either this opinion [of Henry] is inconsistent or it is not at variance with the common view.

#### [Article V. Solution of the Question]

As to the question, then, I say that because of what Augustine has said, one should concede that infallible truths are seen in the eternal rules, where the term “in” can be taken in the sense of “in an object”. There are four ways in which this could be done: (1) either as in a proximate object, or (2) as in that which contains the proximate object, or (3) as that in virtue of which the proximate object moves [the intellect], or (4) as in a remote object.

#### [The first way]

In explanation of the first, I say that all the intelligibles have an intelligible being in virtue of the act of the divine intellect. In these intelligibles all the truths that can be affirmed about them are visible so that the intellect knowing these intelligibles and in virtue thereof understanding the necessary truths about them, sees these truths in them as in an object. Now these intelligibles inasmuch as they are secondary objects of the divine intellect are “truths” because they are conformed to their exemplar, viz. the divine intellect. Likewise, they are a “light” because they are manifest. And there they are immutable and necessary. But they are eternal only in a qualified sense, because eternity is characteristic of something really existing, and these intelligibles “exist” only in a qualified sense. This then is the first way in which we can be said to see in the Eternal Light, i.e. as in the secondary object of the divine intellect, which object is truth and eternal light in the sense explained.

#### [The second way]

The second way is also clear, because the divine intellect contains these truths like a book, as Augustine testifies in *De Trinitate*, bk. xiv, c. xv: “These rules are written in the book of Eternal Light”, that is, in the divine intellect inasmuch as it contains these truths. And although this book itself is not seen, nevertheless those truths are seen which are written in this book.

And to this extent, our intellect could be said to see truths in the Eternal Light, i.e. to see things which are in that book as in something which contains the object.

And Augustine's statement in *De Trinitate*, BK. XII, c. xiv, that the meaning of "square body" remains incorruptible and immutable, and so on, can be understood seemingly in either of these two ways. For the meaning of a square body remains incorruptible and immutable only inasmuch as it is a secondary object of the divine intellect.

But there is a doubt about this first way. We do not see these truths as they are in the divine intellect, because we do not see the divine intellect itself. How then can we be said to see things in the Uncreated Light – things, which exist indeed in the Uncreated Light as objects known by that intellect, but which we see only in something which is the eternal light in a qualified sense. To this the third way gives the following answer.

[The third way]

These intelligibles in so far as they are secondary objects of the divine intellect have existence only in a qualified sense. But something that exists only in a qualified sense, to the precise extent that it "exists" in this way, is incapable of any truly real operation. If such an operation pertains to it at all, it does so only in virtue of something which exists in an unqualified sense. Therefore, these secondary objects do not enjoy the power to move the intellect, to speak precisely, except by virtue of the existence of the divine intellect, which exists in an unqualified sense and through which the intelligibles have existence in a qualified sense. And so we see in the eternal light in a qualified sense as in the proximate object. But according to this third way we see in the Uncreated Light as in the immediate cause by virtue of which the proximate object moves [the intellect].

We can also be said to see in the Eternal Light in this third way inasmuch as this Light is the cause of the object itself. For the divine intellect produces this intelligible in existence and by its act gives to this object one type of being and to another a second type of being. Consequently, the divine intellect gives them such intelligible content as they possess as objects of knowledge. Now it is through their intelligible content that they afterward move the intellect to certain knowledge. And, properly speaking, it could be said that our intellect sees in the Light, because the Light is the cause of the object. This is clear from a simile: for we are said to understand properly in the light of the active intellect, although this light is nothing more than the active cause (i.e., that which makes the [potential] object actual, or that in virtue of which the object moves, or both).

The fact then that the divine intellect, the true Uncreated Light, has a twofold causality (viz. that it produces objects in intelligible being and that it is also that in virtue of which the secondary objects produced actually move the intellect) – this fact can supply as it were a third type or mode of interpretation as to how we can be said to see truly in the Eternal Light.

But suppose someone should object to these two ways of supplying a third interpretation on the following grounds. We should rather be said to see in God willing or in God in so far as He is will, for the divine will is the immediate principle of every act directed towards something outside Himself.

I reply that the divine intellect, as far as it is in some way prior to the act of the divine will, produces these objects in intelligible being, and thus the intellect seems to be a purely natural cause in their regard. For God is not a free cause of anything unless volition as an elicited act somehow precedes the thing in question. Now, inasmuch as the intellect

produces objects in intelligible being prior to the act of the will, it would seem to co-operate as a prior cause with these intelligibles in the production of their natural effect – which effect consists in this: Once these intelligibles are grasped and formulated in a proposition they cause the conformity of what is grasped [viz. the proposition] to themselves [as terms]. Consequently, it seems to involve a contradiction that an intellect should form such a proposition and still not have this proposition conform to the terms even though it is possible that the intellect should not grasp the terms or formulate them in a proposition. For even though God freely co-operates with the intellect when it combines or does not combine these terms, still once the terms have been formed into a proposition, the conformity of the latter with the terms seems to follow as a necessary consequence from the very meaning of the terms – a meaning which they have by reason of the fact that the intellect of God has naturally produced these terms in intelligible being.

From all this, it is clear why a special illumination is not required in order to see in the eternal reasons, for Augustine assumes that we see in them only such truths as are necessary in virtue of their terms. Now it is in just such truths that we have the greatest necessity between the effect and both its proximate and remote causes (that is, both on the part of the divine intellect in its relation to the objects which move [our intellect] and on the part of the objects in relation to the truth of the propositions about them). Even though the necessity of perceiving such a truth is not so great that not to perceive it would include a contradiction, still there is a necessity present which arises from the proximate cause [viz. the intelligibility of the terms] assisted by the remote cause [viz. the divine intellect which gives such ideas their intelligibility]. For once the terms are grasped and formed into a proposition, they are naturally able to make evident the conformity that exists between the proposition and its terms even though it be granted that God co-operates with these terms in producing their effect, not by a natural necessity, but by a general [free] influence. But whether it be by a general influence, or what is more, by a natural necessity, that God co-operates with the terms in producing their effect, it is quite clear that no special illumination is required.

The assumption as to what Augustine meant is clearly justified by what he says of the infidel philosophers in *De Trinitate*, BK. IV, c. xxxv: “Some of them have been able to see through and beyond all creation and with their mind’s eye to reach at least in some degree the light of immutable truth, a thing which they ridicule many Christians, who live meanwhile by faith alone, for not being able to do.” He wishes to say, therefore, that Christians do not see in the eternal rules the things they believe and yet the philosophers see many necessary truths therein. And the same with *De Trinitate*, BK. IX, c. vi: “Not of what sort the mind of one particular man happens to be, etc.” – as if he were to say: “It is not contingent but necessary truths that are seen there”. And in the same work he argues against those philosophers: “Just because they argue most truly that all that happens in time takes place on account of eternal reasons, are they therefore able to perceive therein how many kinds of animals exist or how many seeds of each there were in the beginning, and so on. . . . Have they not sought all these things not by that unchangeable knowledge, but by the history of places and times, and have they not believed the written experience of others?” Consequently, he means that contingent truths known by the senses alone or believed on the account of others are not known through the eternal rules. And yet special illumination is required even more for what must be believed than for necessary truths. Indeed, this special illumination is least needed in the case of the latter; general illumination alone suffices.

On the contrary. Why then does Augustine say in *De Trinitate*, BK. XII, c. XIV: "It is only for the few to attain the intelligible reasons with their mind's eye", and in the *Eighty-three Questions*, q. XLVI: "Only the pure of soul reach them"? I reply that he does not mean by this purity a freedom from vices, for in *De Trinitate*, BK. XIV, c. XV, he holds that the unjust man sees in the eternal rules what a just man must do and how he must regard things in their light. And in the fourth book, in the chapter cited above, he maintains that the philosophers saw truth in the eternal reasons even though they lacked faith. And in the same question, he holds that no one can be wise without a knowledge of the ideas in the way, for instance, that they would concede Plato to be wise. But this purity must be understood of the elevation of the intellect to the contemplation of these truths as they are in themselves and not as they appear in the sense image.

Here we must remember that the sensible thing outside causes a confused sense image, something with only an incidental unity in the faculty of imagination, which represents the thing according to its quantity, colour and other sensible accidents. And just as the sense image represents things only confusedly and according to an incidental unity, so many perceive only such incidental combinations. Now, primary truths are primary precisely because their terms are grasped in their proper nature and apart from all that is merely incidental to them. Now this proposition, "The whole is greater than its part", is not primarily true of the whole as realised in a stone or in wood, but of "whole" in the abstract, i.e. apart from everything with which it merely happens to be joined. Consequently, the mind which never conceives totality except in an incidental concept such as the totality of a stone or the totality of wood, never really understands the pure truth of this principle, because it never grasps the precise nature of the terms to which the principle owes its truth. It is only within the power of the few to attain the eternal reasons, because it is only the few that have an understanding of the essentials, whereas the many grasp things merely in incidental concepts such as those mentioned above. But these few are not said to be distinguished from the others by a special illumination, but by better natural powers, since they have a sharper and more abstractive mind, or because of greater research which enables one person to know those essences which another equally talented individual does not discover because he does not investigate them.

And in this way we can understand Augustine's statement in *De Trinitate*, BK. IX, c. VI, regarding the individual on the mountain who sees the pure light above and the mist below. For whoever grasps nothing but incidental notions in the way that the sense image represents such objects, viz. as a kind of accidental aggregate, is like one in a valley surrounded by mist. But by grasping just what things are of themselves, a person separates the essences from the many additional incidental features associated with them in the sense image. Such a one, as it were, has the sense image in the mist beneath him, but he himself is on the mountain to the extent that in virtue of the uncreated intellect, the Eternal Light, he knows this truth and sees what is true from above, as a more universal truth.

[The fourth way]

And finally, we can concede that pure truths are known in the Eternal Light as in a remotely known object. For the Uncreated Light is the first source of speculative things and the ultimate end of practical things. The first speculative and practical principles, then, are derived from it. Hence, the knowledge of speculative and practical things by means of principles derived from the Eternal Light, where the latter is known, is more perfect and prior to knowledge

derived from principles from the respective class of things as such, as has been pointed out in the question on the subject of theology. Such knowledge is more eminent than any other. Now it is in this way that the knowledge of all things pertains to the theologian. In this way pure truth is said to be known, since truth alone without admixture of anything else is known, for it is known through the First Being. And once this Being is known, the principles for knowing in this perfect way are derived therefrom. But any other thing from which principles of knowing something in kind are derived is defective truth.

Only God knows all things purely in this perfect way, for as we have said in the question on the subject of theology. He alone knows all things precisely through His essence. Nevertheless, every intellect can be moved by some object to know that something is true in virtue of Him, and in this way the knowledge of all things pertains to the theologian, as has been said in the question on the subject of theology. For to know that a triangle has three [angles equal to two right angles], in so far as this is a kind of participation of God and that it has such an order in the universe that it expresses more perfectly as it were the perfection of God, – this is a nobler way of knowing a triangle has three [angles, etc.] than to know this truth from the notion of a triangle itself. Similarly, to know that one should live temperately in order to attain the supreme happiness, which consists in attaining the essence of God in Himself, is a more perfect way of knowing this practical truth than to be aware of it through some principle in the class of mores, for instance, through the principle that one is obliged to live uprightly.

And in this manner Augustine speaks of the Uncreated Light as known in *De Trinitate*, bk. xv, c. xxvii, where addressing himself, he says: “You have seen many things and these you have discerned through that Light in which you saw them shining forth to you. Turn your eyes to the Light itself and fasten them upon it, if you can, for in this way you will see how the nativity of the Word of God differs from the procession of the Gift of God.” And a little later: “This and other things this Light has revealed to your inner eyes. What then is the reason with fixed glance you are unable to see the Light itself, if it is not indeed your weakness? . . .”

