

Medieval voluntarism has already been recognized as a philosophical theory that “helped pave the way for empiricism, Cartesian doubt about the senses, legal positivism and Reformation theology” (Leftow, 1998), yet it is still regarded as a uniform movement and, so far, research efforts have tended to target merely its chief medieval proponents, such as John Duns Scotus and William Ockham.

Recent studies have shown, however, that it was of multifarious and complex nature with various tendencies and trends. Some of them, such as the most common and standard version that emerged in the opposition to intellectualism, have been already examined.

There were also other facets of late medieval voluntarism that emerged in 14th-century scholarship, and especially at Oxford in the 1330s. It sparked original and sophisticated theories of action that explored internal and external factors in moral decision-making, the conditionality of the will, the temporal aspects of the will’s acting, and analogies between the will’s acting on the one hand and natural processes and logical laws on the other.

The robust development of logic and physics at Oxford in the 1330s also propelled an advancement in the application of logic and physics to ethical discourse. Richard Kilvington, a 14th-century English philosopher and one of the Oxford Calculators, was among the first authors to adopt an analytical method of applying logic and physics to ethics on a regular basis. The new methodology was undoubtedly Kilvington’s original contribution to the debate, yet he was not alone in employing it, and his inspirations went back to the writings of his older fellow, Richard FitzRalph, whose concepts of change and measurement provided a springboard for sophisticated theories soon to be formulated at Oxford. Since highly extraordinary and complex theories of action and refined analyses can be found in the works of FitzRalph and Kilvington, they are the most obvious authors to examine for a project such as this.

The project will establish how and to what extent this new methodology enabled them to formulate a unique line of argumentation and develop refined voluntarist theories. Having analyzed FitzRalph’s and Kilvington’s arguments, sources, and tools employed in their theological works, the project will investigate their possible mutual influence and their impact on the study of the will at Oxford in the 1330s–1350s.

This project aims to focus on these aspects of voluntarism to complete the picture of late medieval ethics and theology in England and on the Continent. It will lead to a profound revision of our understanding of late medieval voluntarism by revealing its multiple facets and showing how the analogies between the laws of nature/logic and the will’s acting were employed to defend the freedom of the will.

The research will result in:

- 1) publishing 2 books and a series of articles on late medieval voluntarism;
- 2) papers read at conferences in Poland and abroad;
- 3) a conference and an online seminar.