William of Ware
Teaching Philosophy and Theology in the 13th Century
between Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.

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Pontificia Università della Santa Croce (PUSC) – Pontificia Università Antonianum (PUA)
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The Destiny of Man and the Possibility of Resurrection

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Premise

The rediscovery of Aristotle's texts in the Western Latin World and the spread of University model of teaching and studying, deeply marked the culture of the thirteenth century. Thus, it is not strange that in dealing with theological questions, philosophical issues were crucial. This emerges clearly in the way in which authors such as Alexander of Hales and Albert the Great, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome and Henry of Ghent discussed the theme of the Resurrection of the Dead. Furthermore, we might take into account two important pronouncements of ecclesiastical authority:

1) in 1215, the IV Lateran Council had established that "all rise with their individual bodies".
2) in 1277, Étienne Tempier, the Bishop of Paris, condemned 219 theses, taught at the University of Paris. Some of those condemnations are directed against the idea that, on the basis of physical statements, it's impossible that what was corrupted might be repaired, even if by God, and that people can rise with their own bodies **[See Text 1]**.

So, we could ask whether the new Aristotelian vision of the world facilitated or instead hindered the understanding and the acceptance of this article of faith. Thus, it should not surprise us if theologians, during the last decades of the thirteenth century, were concerned with the possibility of Resurrection, focusing their attention on this kind of issues:

1) the possibility, established by reason, of a life after death;
2) the question of the true nature of man, which implies a close union between soul and body;
3) the possibility that something destroyed can be repaired and be really the same as before, rather than a new thing.

William of Ware faced these problems, disputing the question *utrum resurrectio sit possibilist*, that corresponds to question 223 of his *Commentary on the Sentences,* according to Danieels' list. We have a transcription of this question published by Hermann Weber in *Die Lehre von der Auferstehung der Toten in der Haupttraktaten des scholastischen Theologie*, Freiburg 1973, pp. 362-369 to which we will usually refer.

The question 223 of Ware's *Commentary on the Sentences*

William of Ware elaborates his solution by dividing it into three points:
1) What is the resurrection?
2) What makes it possible?
3) Whether Resurrection is to be considered a natural or supernatural event?

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Quoting a passage from John Damascene's *De Fide orthodoxa*, William observes that the resurrection is an *iterata surrectio*. It therefore produces the full identity of man – identity of both, soul and body – before and after death. So, the resurrection of the dead poses a difficulty that goes far beyond the question of the immortality of the soul and the "simpler" idea of a permanence of life after death. The main problem is the following: how is it possible to get life back, after losing it? This does not necessarily mean opposing immortality and resurrection: usually, thirteenth century-authors, in particular Franciscans, considered the immortality of the soul one of the conditions that made resurrection possible. Despite this, William does not appear engaged in a philosophical demonstration of the immortality of the soul. However, we do not even find in him the attitude that will be of Duns Scotus, who emphasized the insufficiency of the philosophical proofs of the immortality of the soul.

At the beginning of his solution, William divided the consideration of the possibility of the soul in two points: *in speciali* et *in generali.* Concerning the first, he says that, according to some authors, the soul is the only form of the body and is immortal; moreover, matter is an incorruptible principle in itself, which joins directly the substantial form, without mediations. Therefore, because of the incorruptibility of the principles of human life, it becomes easy to say that resurrection is possible and that substantial unity is sufficient for man's identity. We can see that, speaking in this way, William is doing nothing but reporting what Henry of Ghent had already argued in his *Quodlibet* VII **[See Text 2]**.

After putting forward this argument *in speciali*, William considers the possibility of resurrection *in generali.* He takes into account three reasons:

1) The condition of human nature;
2) The divine justice;
3) The ultimate destiny of man.

Concerning the first, William remarks that since the soul is the form of the body, it has a natural inclination to the body; therefore, the soul, without its own body, would be in an unnatural, almost violent condition. Now, taking up the Aristotelian adage, *nullum violentum est perpetuum*, William concludes that, for these reasons, the resurrection is possible, and will take place in the future.

The divine justice is another condition for the possibility of resurrection, because our human life on the Earth does not guarantee justice for good people. Only God can do it. Since we become bad or virtuous people in our body and with our body, it is with our body that God will reward or will punish us. The last condition concerns the tension towards human happiness. Happiness is not attainable in this life, because we are always exposed to unhappiness and afflictions. Besides, it is with *all* of ourselves that we wish to be happy. By choosing precisely these three arguments in favor of the possibility of the resurrection, William maintains continuity with what has already been established by Thomas Aquinas and by Bonaventure **[See Text 3]**.

At this point, William might be expected to move on to the third point he proposed to discuss, namely whether the resurrection is natural or not. Instead, he goes back to follow Henry of Ghent's development of the question 16 of the *Quodlibet* VII: after having considering how the partisans of the unity of the substantial form can support the possibility of the resurrection, Henry asks whether it is possible to achieve the same goal for those who believe that in man there is a plurality of substantial forms. Since the lower forms are totally corrupted with death, the

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resurrection would not be a simple reunification of two incorruptible principles, but it should bring back to being something that had been destroyed. This is more difficult to accept, because the termination of a new mutation does not seem to be something new. Henry states that even it is impossible for a natural agent repairs what is destroyed, this is possible for God. A long passage of a *Homily on Ezekiel* (II, hom. 8, n. 8) by Gregory the Great was posed as a supporting authority of this statement. William doesn't find this answer completely satisfying **[See Text 4]**. It appears better to William of Ware what Giles of Rome writes in the question *De resurrection,* that he expressly names. Giles, in that text, established three differences between the natural agent and the divine one:

1) the natural agent gives being after having produced a transmutation, while the immediate effect of God is to give being;
2) God acts without transmutation and motion, whereas the natural agent acts only with transmutation and motion;
3) the natural agent acts on matter with the mediation of quantity, while God can directly intervene on the essence of matter.

According to William, the application of these three criteria allows Giles to better explain in what sense God can do what natural agent cannot do in resurrection.

William follows Giles of Rome also in dealing with the third issue, namely whether the resurrection is something supernatural or natural: it must be considered supernatural, although the terminus of the resurrection is natural. In fact, for considering a transmutation natural, it is not enough that the term be natural, but the way in which the change occurs must also be natural. Giles explains this statement taking into consideration what Aristotle had said about the violent motion: when an agent pushes something towards its natural place, but accelerating its achievement, it produces a motion that is not natural, but violent, because although it is natural the terminus, the way in which it has been reached is not natural. Similarly, the resurrection may well be said to be natural according to the terminus, but not according to the way in which it occurs. William's solution is nothing but a summarized re-presentation of this Giles's argument **[See Text 5]**.

At the end of the solution and in answering to the *argumenta*, William discusses in a detailed way the issue of the identity of the raised man, before and after death. It does not seem possible, however, that what has been destroyed is repairable, because different motions correspond to different terms: two productions to two products, two generations to two generated things. Furthermore, the *ratio continuitatis* necessarily implies that the order between what is anterior and what is posterior cannot be violated. In fact, God cannot ensure that the past has not passed or has not happened.

William grants the discussion of these topics a truly significant space, which also goes beyond the limit of this question, finding its achievement in the next one. He presents two kind of way to overcome this difficulty. According to the first, we should distinguish between *motus* and *mutatio* (or *transmutatio*): given that the resurrection should be considered as a *mutatio* and not as a *motus*, the opposite argument falls immediately, because in no way would the *ratio continuitatis* be contradicted. However, the second solution seems to William better: in fact, nothing more belongs to the *ratio mutationis* than having a being that was not possessed before. Now, an agent causes a mutation when it causes exactly this type of passage. So, just as God, creating, can give being to what does not yet have being, for the same reason he can give it to something that has already been for some time at least. Using this principle, in the following question, William argues

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that under certain circumstances even in nature the same entity can be the term of two different motions **[See Text 8]**. So, the principle according to which a natural agent cannot repair a thing that has become corrupted is not universally valid, not even concerning natural agents. Finally, William shares his solution with Giles of Rome and Henry of Gent: the resurrection doesn't imply a second mutation, because God acts directly, without any motion or mutation different form the act of his divine will **[See Text 6 and 6bis]**.

We know that Duns Scotus will want to correct this position, specifying that although divine action is without mutation, it cannot be denied that resurrection implies a mutation, because matter, deprived of its substantial form, re-acquires it with resurrection **[See Text 7]**.

Conclusion

Dealing with the resurrection of the dead, William built his own solution by a significant comparison with the perspectives of several theologians of his time, such as Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome and Henry of Ghent. In determining the solution, he certainly follows Bonaventure and Aquinas for determining the fundamental reasons that make the resurrection possible, but he takes into considerations the texts of Henry of Ghent and Giles of Rome to address the issue related to the relationship between identity and motion, linked with the adoption of the Aristotelian definition of change.

About this latter issue, we can surely consider William of Ware as a witness to the increasing importance that it assumed, in addressing the theme of the resurrection. *This* debate, concerning the relationship between identity, change and the possibility of resurrection will still have a long way to go in modern philosophy.