INFLUENCES OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY SKEPTICISM ON LITERARY STRUCTURE
IN THE POETRY OF LANGLAND AND CHAUCER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by
Jane F. Abelson
August, 1972

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Fourteenth century thought in England was characterized by an
attitude of skepticism which is reflected in the poetry of Langland
and Chaucer, who both deal explicitly with the major theological and
philosophical issues which William of Ockham's nominalist epistemol-
ogy had made highly controversial. These issues centered around
questions pertaining to the relation between faith and reason, the
ability of God to foresee and preordain the future, and the relative
validities of different sources of natural and supernatural knowledge.

Although Langland and Chaucer make these questions the subject
matter of much of their poetry, their underlying poetic approaches
to them are quite different. Langland strives implicitly to show
that the realms of faith and reason are joined in a unified epistem-
ological system, while Chaucer does not attempt to join the two
realms; in fact, he uses a variety of structural devices to emphasize
the gulf between them.

The difference between these underlying approaches suggests a
difference in the way in which Langland and Chaucer view the poet's
role. For Langland the poet's imagination seemingly can bridge the
gap between reason and faith, whereas for Chaucer the realm of faith
remains completely inaccessible to human reason even in its most
imaginative aspect.

CONTENTS

I. FOURTEENTH CENTURY SKEPTICISM: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Early fourteenth century thought in England was dominated by
a growing dissatisfaction with the faith-reason synthesis earlier
achieved by St. Thomas Acquinas; and, by the middle of the century,
theologians' efforts to redefine the relation between faith and
reason and to delineate the boundaries within which each was
thought to operate had produced two distinct and opposing
philosophical systems: nominalism, which stressed empiricism in
the natural world and the essential freedom of God and man; and
neo-Augustinianism, the conservative reaction to nominalism, which
emphasized faith in all spheres and the utter dependence of both
God and man on God's preordained created order. Common to both
systems despite their differences, however, was a rejection of St.
Thomas' natural theology: a theology which marked the culmination
of eight centuries of attempts by Christian thinkers since St.
Augustine to reconcile the limitations of man's intellect with his
need to understand divine truth.[1]

Before the thirteenth century the Christian model of reality
had been based on St. Augustine's synthesis of Neoplatonic
epistemology with the tenets of Christian faith.[2] The model,
presupposing a dualistic, hierarchic reality composed of spirit

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and matter, began with God, the Divine Mind in whom all truth
resided eternally as perfect, immaterial Ideas or forms. When
these forms were made physical, or materialized into bodies and
objects, the resulting physical beings imperfectly reflected the
Ideas in the Divine Mind that were both prior and subsequent to
their creation and destruction. The metaphysical links between
God and man was man's soul: an immaterial manifestation of an
eternal Idea which, though a separate, complete substance,
informed the material, mutable body and was the vehicle through
which man could begin to approach an understanding of divine truth.
Human knowledge, for St. Augustine, was of two types: spiritual,
eternal knowledge which the soul was inherently capable of
apprehending, and the limited, impermanent, material knowledge
that the body received through its senses, which it could not
interpret without the soul's intelligence, and which represented
no more than the shadow of truth. Only by transcending the
shadowy, transitory material world could man hope to reach the
true and enduring world of Ideas.

The way in which man transcended the material world was by
turning inward to his own thoughts, whose existence was presumed
to be independent of knowledge based on sense data. The knowledge
available to the soul was considered to be distinct from the
body's knowledge because the soul's makeup was conceived of as
being entirely separate from that of the body. Each had its own

form and substance: an immaterial substance in the case of the soul, a material one in the case of the body. The soul, then, could receive purely immaterial or spiritual knowledge, while the body was limited to knowledge of material objects and events.

Starting with an apprehension of his own soul through thought, then, the individual could proceed to an awareness of internal concepts that remained constant and uninfluenced by the fluctuations of the material world: concepts such as goodness, being, color, and number. Such concepts St. Augustine identified as eternal truths, since they could exist apart from actual beings. These immaterial truths, which the soul could grasp, were thought to mirror the eternal, immaterial Ideas that resided in God as part of His actual nature.

When we consider the question of what constitutes "proof" in St. Augustine's epistemology, we see that physical evidence and the knowledge gained by experience are of no value to one who is trying to understand spiritual, and thus ultimate, reality. True knowledge is based not on external events, but on internal intuitions which essentially are beliefs, for since the source of one's knowledge is one's mind, then to know a concept is the same as believing in its existence.

Thus, for a man to have an idea of God, or, in other words, a belief in the idea of God, meant that he had begun to apprehend Him. But, according to St. Augustine, because of man's fallen

state he could no longer have such a belief by himself; it was
necessary, first, for him to receive God's supernatural gift of
grace, which would dispose his soul toward seeking God out and
perceiving the illumination of God's truth implanted within it.
God's grace, then, preceded the beliefs which were the basis of
knowledge.

St. Augustine did not distinguish between the realms of faith
and reason, as later theologians were to do. First of all, there
was not yet an accumulated body of Christian philosophy to be
dealt with apart from theology: it was only as this body of
thought developed during the middle ages that conflicts arose over
the relative importance of philosophical truth. Secondly, St.
Augustine was not concerned with proving his beliefs by means of
reason; he took for granted the idea that belief was the highest
form of knowledge because he considered the soul to be metaphysically
separate from the body; his main epistemological concern was to
account for how the soul in its corrupted state could return to a
condition which would enable it to recollect the divine Ideas
which were contained within it. And here again, St. Augustine's
emphasis on God's grace as the necessary prerequisite for even the
beginning of an understanding of His nature and will shows that
man's reason could play no independent part in the search for
divine truth.

St. Augustine's Neoplatonic epistemology remained virtually
unchallenged in the west until the twelfth and thirteenth
centuries, when the influx of Aristotle's writings prompted its
reevaluation and led to St. Thomas' great synthesis of
Aristotelian thought and Christian doctrine in the late thirteenth
century.[3]

St. Thomas' synthesis was predicated on two significant
departures from Augustinian thought: first, he postulated the
senses to be the source of all human knowledge, and second, he
allowed faith and reason their separate domains.

The basis of St. Thomas' epistemology was the Aristotelian
conception of being as potency and act. All things, including
God, had being in common; the differences between God and His
creatures, and among the various states of being in creation itself,
lay in their different degrees of actualization. Unrealized or
potential being was non-existent being whose forms had not yet
been actualized; all material beings in existence were beings
composed of spiritual form which had been inseparably combined
with matter, while non-material existent beings, such as angels,
also existed by virtue of their actualized forms. Despite their
different states of actualization or the nature of their
composition, however, all created beings were alike in that they
all were contingent. All were dependent for their existence on

form transforming potency into actuality; all were, therefore, subject to causality.

By analogy, God was seen as having being in common with His creation. But where God differed from His creatures was in the nature of His being. God's nature could contain no potency, since He, as first cause, could not be dependent on a cause outside of Himself. God, then, was pure act: a self-subsisting, eternal Being.

When we compare St. Thomas' view of the composition of the created world with that of St. Augustine, we see that there are significant differences between them. St. Thomas rejected the Augustinian ultra realist conception that spiritual forms, or universal ideas, existed independently of the concrete bodies they informed. For St. Thomas existence itself was, by definition, the combination of form and substance; neither form nor substance could exist in isolation. While St. Thomas, like St. Augustine, was a realist in that he, too, considered abstract universals to be real and of higher order of reality than matter, he was, unlike St. Augustine, a moderate realist in that he held that universals were manifested not apart from, but within individuals.

We can see that St. Thomas' conceptualization gave to matter an importance which Platonism had denied it, for matter was now considered a necessary aspect of existence; in fact, it was the principle by which form took on individuation in the physical

world. As far as the human being was concerned, the soul was no longer thought to be able to operate apart from the body or have innate ideas apart from sense knowledge; as the body's form it was metaphysically inseparable from the body, and thus was dependent on the body's senses for all its knowledge. Sense data, then, now had its own justification. No longer was it viewed as the deceptive stumbling block to clear perception which had to be overcome if man were to gain the truth; rather, it was thought to be the natural means of gathering information which had been intended for man. Thus, it was considered not only possible, but reasonable that man should infer, from the evidence of his senses, the presence and workings of a higher reality.

With the proofs he gives for the existence of God, in which he shows God and man to be linked by reason of their shared state of being, St. Thomas demonstrates his philosophical distance from St. Augustine as well as from the theologians who followed him in the fourteenth century. First of all, he attempts to arrive at supernatural truth by starting with sensible reality: with God's effects rather than with God Himself. St. Thomas argued that because the human intellect was, by nature, dependent on sense data for its knowledge, it had to begin with sense data, even in its search for an understanding of God, who transcended the natural world. Since being was considered the common link between man's nature and God's, then it was in the concept of being that man

could look for a rational approach to God. Man could be rationally led to a concept of necessary being, or God, from his knowledge of contingent being.

St. Thomas' proofs, then, are not proofs by faith, but by reason. In perceiving the need for rational proof of God, and in maintaining that such rational proof was possible, St. Thomas revolutionized Christian epistemology. For, although he never intended that reason should substitute for or take precedence over faith, he did allow to reason a distinct and legitimate function: reason could participate in the search for divine truth on a level independent of, though subservient to, faith.

Dissatisfaction with the Thomist synthesis was closely related to the general suspicion with which certain aspects of Aristotle's thought had been regarded since his works had first appeared during the twelfth century. Originally, Aristotle was introduced into the West through the translations of Arabic philosophers who had felt no obligation to relate Aristotelian thought to Christian doctrine. Without the theological "safeguard" of an all-encompassing Christian God immediately involved with His creation, the mixture of Aristotelian and Arabic thought being advanced at the University of Paris seemed dangerously deterministic and pantheistic.[4] In 1270 there occurred the first of several condemnations of Aristotelian propositions--in particular, those propositions which denied the idea of personal immortality and

divine providence, and those which uphold the view that man's will was subject to astral determinism, that the world was eternal, and that God had no knowledge of individual things and events. Not only did the Church condemn these teachings because they contradicted the tenets of Christian faith; it also regarded as erroneous the so-called "double truth" of Aristotle's Averroist supporters: the contention that philosophical and theological truth could be contradictory and equally true at the same time.[5] In a decisive effort to combat the growing influence of pure philosophy, the Bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, in 1277 condemned 219 theses, including the Thomist propositions "that matter was the principle of individuation; that spiritual beings were species, without matter; that the body participated in the intellectual operations of the soul; that the will was controlled by the intellect."[6]

Following closely on the Paris condemnations were those of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Kilwardby, who carried the attack on Thomism further by challenging St. Thomas' doctrine that each created being consisted of one spiritual form combined with substance, rather than separate forms for both spirit and substance. This doctrine was particularly unacceptable to a number of theologians because it seemed, ultimately, to limit God's supremacy. It made man's soul dependent on sense data for all its spiritual knowledge, doing away with the traditional Augustinian emphasis on the soul's direct contact with spiritual

reality independent of the body's knowledge. Thus, it invested the unaided human intellect with unprecedented powers of spiritual understanding, for, if the intellect could reach abstract truth on its own by means of sense data, it seemingly had no vital need for supernatural assistance. The conventional roles of intellect and will had become reversed, with will (traditionally the most important link between man's soul and God's grace) now taking second place to intellectual abstraction.[7]

St. Thomas' system had represented a theologian's attempt to synthesize what had become the accepted natural philosophy of Aristotle with the traditional tenets of Christian faith. But most of the theologians who immediately followed St. Thomas, although still faced with a similar problem, could not fully accept his solution, for they felt that, scrupulous as St. Thomas had been in trying to keep reason subordinated to faith, the human-elevating implications of his system could not be overlooked. St. Thomas' complementing of faith with reason, and his analogizing from man's being to God's, had endangered God's transcendental status. The only way, then, to restore to God His proper power was to remove reason from faith's realm altogether and to confine its activities solely to the physical world. This separation, which was first effected by Duns Scotus in the late thirteenth century, opened the way to the development of the two dominant systems of the fourteenth century: nominalist epistemology, which explored in

detail the nature of man's understanding of physical reality, and neo-Augustinianism--a return to an outlook based wholly on faith-- which stressed man's total dependence on God in all areas of life.

John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) took the first significant step toward redefining the realms of faith and reason with his introduction of two new concepts which struck a blow not only at Thomism, but at traditional Augustinianism as well.[8] First, he limited drastically the type of spiritual knowledge that could be understood by reason. In distinguishing between the sciences of metaphysics and theology, he pointed out that whereas knowledge of metaphysics, the science of being, derives ultimately from sense data, theological knowledge, on the other hand, derives from revelation, the tenets of which, though true, are not self-evident to the human mind and must be accepted on faith.[9] Here Scotus differs from St. Thomas in refusing to consider theological truths as being open to rational discussion, since to consider them in such terms would imply that they fell within the rational experience of man; and man's rational experience, Scotus argued, could lead him no further than the idea of being, which his mind formulated as a result of the abstractions it made from sensible data. At the same time he also rejected the Augustinian idea of non-sensible spiritual illumination as a possible source of actual knowledge.[10]

After sharply delineating the kinds of knowledge which he sees as appropriate to the respective realms of faith and reason,

Scotus explicates the nature of the metaphysical link between man's reason and divine truth. This link is the concept of being, but not analogous being as St. Thomas had posited. Since for Scotus man's notion of being culminated in the idea of being that he could abstract from the sensible, contingent world, then being of a type that went beyond this world, or in other words, Infinite Being, was by definition inconceivable to the human reason.. Thus, any analogical knowledge of the supernatural was beyond reason's scope.

This concept of being, which was abstract enough to include the idea, if not the intellectual knowledge of Infinite Being, Scotus called univocal. By this term he meant a concept "which possesses sufficient unity in itself, so that to affirm and deny it of one and the same thing would be a contradiction."[11] That is, a univocal concept is one which is unified enough to comprehend within it, at the same time, the possibility of an actual contradiction, such as the one that would obtain if one were to assert that in reality God both exists and does not exist. Scotus saw univocity as the only way whereby God and man could be viewed within a common framework, since univocal concepts were the only ones abstract enough to transcend the material world, as they preceded any actual, material events.

In placing actual knowledge of God's attributes beyond the scope of human reason, then, Scotus did away with both the Thomist

and traditional Augustinian belief that abstract ideas in the human mind directly reflect Divine Ideas contained in God's essence. There could no longer be any certainty that man's abstractions, based as they were on sense data, in any way resembled God Himself; the most that could be said was that they reflected God's expression of Himself as manifested through His will, for although the divine intellect produced an infinite number of ideas, it was up to the divine will to determine their creation.[12]

This assertion of the importance of God's will as the link between Himself and His creation was the second main aspect of Scotus' thought which marked a break with the past; and it helped prepare the way for one of the dominant characteristics of fourteenth century thought—an extreme and absolute emphasis on the unhampered freedom of God's will.

In his discussions of the human soul Scotus also lays great stress on the primacy of the will; he considers the will to be more perfect than the intellect for a variety of reasons: first, whereas the intellect is bound by what it apprehends, the will is free to make choices; second, the will has the potential power to sin more deeply than the intellect: hating God is worse than not knowing Him; third, whereas the object of the intellect is knowledge, the object of the will is love, which is a greater good;

and, finally, because of its functions, the will is more immediately involved with God.[13]

Scotus' elevation of both human and divine will carried with it important implications which formed the basis for some of the major issues of the fourteenth century. One of these had to do with the role of the will in ethics. Scotus voices a concern in his ethical writings not only with right actions, but with right intentions, as determined by the will. An act, such as *giving* alms, is neither good nor bad in itself: its goodness depends on the will's intention in doing it.[14] One can see here foreshadowings of fourteenth century debates over grace and merit, and whether actions alone may suffice to remove a state of sin. Similarly, another issue debated by the radical fourteenth century followers of Ockham concerned the nature of evil itself: if God's will were supreme, then presumably He could will man to do an evil act; and His will alone would make the evil act a good one, since God Himself was the goodness toward which the human will was inclined.

The thinking of Duns Scotus provides a bridge, then, between the earlier Augustinian and Thomist syntheses, which had posited a direct metaphysical link between man's soul and God's nature, and the fourteenth century dissolution of all metaphysical bonds between man and God. Scotus retained the idea of a metaphysical link between man and God, but the connection was now between man and God's transcendental will rather than His nature; thus a sure

knowledge of God Himself became impossible for man. In denying that God's nature could be deduced from His effects, Scotus removed supernatural knowledge from reason's grasp altogether. Furthermore, his thinking helped to cast doubt on the validity of realist metaphysics, since he held that universals could not be considered direct reflections of God's essence. The way was open for William of Ockham to dispense entirely with realism and complete the removal of human knowledge from the realm of certainty to that of probability. Thus, Scotus may be called a precursor of skepticism in that his doctrines helped pave the way for the skeptical attitudes toward knowledge that abounded in England during the fourteenth century.

William of Ockham (c. 1290-1349), like Duns Scotus, was a Franciscan who shared his order's general aversion to St. Thomas' natural theology. But, to an even greater extent than Scotus, Ockham saw any attempt by man to define and comprehend God's nature as an attempt to limit God's freedom; underlying Ockham's entire system of thought was his belief in the overriding supremacy of God's will, and the power of God to supersede what He previously had ordained.

The most radical element of Ockham's approach was his emphasis on God's absolute power, known in scholastic terminology as the potentia dei absoluta. In contrast to the potentia dei ordinata: God's ordained power, which was the created and revealed order that

men knew and lived by, God's _potentia_ _absoluta_ operated completely
beyond the limits of the ordained world; it represented the realm
outside of what actually existed or was known by man; it was the
realm whose only reality was God's will. In other words, God was
not necessarily committed to maintaining the established order of
the universe which He Himself had ordained. His will could
intervene and alter any aspect of creation whenever and however He
wished. Everything, then, outside of God, was contingent on His
will.[15]

The implications of Ockham's approach were far-reaching, extend-
ing to metaphysics and epistemology, as well as to theology. First
of all, Ockham challenged the foundations of realist metaphysics.
He rejected realism on the grounds that it set limits on God's
freedom to create or alter His creation at will, for if universals
mirrored eternal Ideas, then these Ideas were fixed, and God, as
well as man, was bound by them.[16] Furthermore, Ockham attacked the
reality of universals on logical grounds. He maintained that
universals were no more than mental constructs, and that only by
signification could universals stand for more than one thing; in
reality only singulars existed. In his discussion of the natures
of singulars and universals Ockham identifies two senses of the
word "singular," showing how, in fact, universals can only be
singular. "Singular" in one sense signifies "whatever is one
thing and not several." Thus, if a universal "is a certain

quality of the mind predicable of many things . . . [one would]
have to say that every universal is truly and really a singular.
For just as every word, no matter how common it may be by convention,
is truly and really singular and numerically one, since it is one
thing and not many, so likewise the mental content that signifies
several things outside is truly and really singular and numerically
one, since it is one thing and not many things, though it •
signifies several things."[17]

"Singular" in its other sense signifies "that which is
[numerically] one and not several things and is not of such a
nature as to be the sign of several things." In this sense a
singular is not a universal; thus, "nothing is universal except
by signification, by being a sign of several things."[18]

Ockham argued, then, that it was impossible for universals to
be substances existing outside of the mind:

> No universal is a substance that is single and numerically
> one. For if that were supposed, it would follow that Socrates
> is a universal, since there is no stronger reason for one
> singular substance to be a universal than for another;
> therefore no singular substance is a universal, but every
> substance is numerically one and singular. For everything is
> either one thing and not many, or it is many things. If it
> is one and not many, it is numerically one. If, however, a
> substance is many things, it is either many singular things
> or many universal things. [If the first, then] a substance
> would be several singular substances; for the same reason,
> then, some substance would be several men; and thus, although
> a universal would be distinguished from one particular thing,
> it would yet not be distinguished from particular things.
> If, however, a substance were several universal things, let us
> take one of these universal things and ask 'Is this one thing
> and not many or is it many things?' If the first alternative

is granted, then it follows that it is singular; if the second is granted, we have to ask again 'Is it many singular or many universal things?' And thus either this will go on in infinitum, or we must take the stand that no substance is universal in such a way that it is not singular. Hence, the only remaining alternative is that no substance is universal.[19]

Further, a universal cannot be a substance shared in common by members of the same species, because if it were, then if God destroyed one individual in the species the others would also be destroyed, since they, as well as the first individual, would no longer still have the universal within them. Similarly, if universals were shared substances, then God could not create an individual out of nothing, for part of the individual would have pre-existed in another being. Again, Ockham shows that if the universal were part of an individual's essence, then the individual itself would no longer be singular, but would be a universal.[20] Thus, he concludes "that a universal is a mental content of such nature as to be predicated of many things. . . . All agree that every universal is predicable of things. But only a mental content or conventional sign, not a substance, is of such nature as to be predicated. Consequently, only a mental content or a conventional sign is a universal."[21]

Ockham was not the first fourteenth century theologian to consider the individual, rather than the universal, as the sole reality. His nominalist approach had been shared, to some extent, by two of his contemporaries, Peter Aureole and Durandus of St.

Pourçain.[22] Where Ockham broke with the past most completely was

in insisting not just that reality was composed of only individual

things, but that only individual things could be accurately

apprehended by man. For Ockham, the conclusions that men drew

from their apprehensions of individual things did not necessarily

represent reality at all; such conclusion were merely subjective

judgments.

Ockham distinguished between two types of knowledge: the

intuitive and the abstractive. Intuitive knowledge was based on

the direct awareness of individual things; Ockham defines it as

"cognition that enables us to know whether the thing exists or

does not exist, in such a way that, if the thing exists, then the

intellect immediately judges that it exists and evidently knows

that it exists, unless the judgment happens to be impeded through

the imperfection of this cognition."[23] Here the individual thing

may be an internal state of mind, such as an emotion or a concept,

as well as a physical object:[24] the essential character of

intuitive knowledge is that it arises directly from an actual

sensible or mental experience of an existent thing.

Abstractive knowledge, on the other hand, Ockham defines as

"that knowledge by which it cannot be evidently known whether a

contingent fact exists or does not exist. In this way abstractive

cognition abstracts from existence and non-existence; because, in

opposition to intuitive cognition, it does not enable us to know

the existence of what does exist or the non-existence of what does
not exist."[25]   Here we see the basis of Ockham's distinction
between reality itself and what man can know of it. As soon as
man leaves the realm of direct experience, his knowledge becomes
uncertain. Ockham points out that "through abstractive cognition
no contingent truth, in particular none relating to the present,
can be evidently known. This is clear from the fact that when
Socrates and his whiteness are known in his absence, this
non-complex knowledge does not enable us to know whether Socrates
exists or does not exist, or whether he is white or is not white,
and the same for other contingent truths. But yet it is certain
that these truths can be evidently known. . . . Hence these . . .
things can be known by a cognition which is different from that
which cannot give us knowledge of such contingent truths; and this
will be intuitive cognition."[26]

Intuitive knowledge, then, is the only sure knowledge that
man can have, for abstractive knowledge deals only in
interpretations, and not in real things themselves, and it cannot
occur without a prior intuitive experience. Thus we see how
completely Ockham's epistemology cuts man off from any natural
understanding of anything beyond individual contingent things in
the physical world.

In keeping with his emphasis on the unlimited freedom of God's
will, Ockham theorized that it was possible for God to cause in a

person an intuitive cognition of something non-existent. What
Ockham meant here was not that God could produce in man intuitions
of objects which had never existed (for that would be a contradiction,
and therefore impossible), but that He could allow man to have
intuitions of objects which were non-existent at the time of the
intuition.[27] With this concept Ockham is reinforcing his
principle that all of reality apart from God is utterly contingent
on His will; Ockham recognizes no necessary relations among
singular things or events in the created world. In other words,
the act of intuition does not necessarily need the physical
presence of a thing in order to occur: intuition and the thing
intuited are separate and independent entities, just as abstractive
knowledge is independent of intuitive knowledge in that abstractive
knowledge of a thing does not guarantee its existence.

Ockham's entire system of thought did away with logical and
metaphysical necessity. In establishing the individual as the
sole basis of reality and knowledge, and in viewing universals as
hypothetical mental constructs rather than as realities, Ockham
revolutionized medieval philosophy and science. Prior to Ockham,
the subject of the study of universals had been metaphysical
categories; now, with Ockham's nominalist approach, the objects
studied were propositions about terms representing natural concepts:
those concepts (universals) which the mind formed on the basis of
experience.[28] In physics, too, Ockham cut away superfluous

abstractions. In discussing projectile motion, for example, he rejected the Aristotelian idea that a metaphysical "quality" separate from but within a moving body itself was responsible for the body's movement. He maintained that a body moved, not through any inner compulsion to move toward a certain end, but because the body itself had been given impetus by an external physical agent.[29] One of the guiding principles of Ockham's thought was the principle of economy known as "Ockham's razor," which is summarized in his statements: "Nothing must be affirmed without a reason being assigned for it, except it be something known by itself, known by experience, or it be something proved by the authority of holy scripture," and "Plurality must not be asserted without necessity."[30]

Ockham combined his empirical approach to contingent reality with a fideistic approach to questions concerning the nature of God Himself. God's existence could be known only by faith; man was incapable of knowing, by natural means, whether or not God existed, since a natural intuition of God was impossible.[31] Similarly, whether or not God possessed certain qualities, such as goodness or wisdom, was a matter of belief, not rational proof.[32] All the accepted beliefs about God, and, by extension, all the tenets of religion, Ockham considered to be outside the realm of rational certainty.

The statements of natural theology, then, were no more than statements of probable truth, since they could only be based on

concepts abstracted from intuitive knowledge. At the same time,
it was only by means of such concepts that man could have any idea
at all of God's existence. Man's idea of God began with the
universal concept of being which he abstracted from his intuitions
of individual beings. Ockham agreed with Duns Scotus that there
could be a concept including God and man which transcended all
actual beings: " . . . there is a concept which is one and is
predicable of God and of creatures. . . . the spoken word
corresponding to this concept is simply univocal."[33] From the
univocal concept of being one can proceed to a concept of the
individual being, God—although for Ockham as we have seen, the
fact that one has a concept of God does not guarantee His
existence. There is an unbridgeable gulf between the kind of
knowledge contained in the statement "God exists," uttered by a
person speaking from faith, who has had a vision of God, and in
the statement, "God exists," uttered by someone who has not had
such a vision. In the first case, the person has sure (but not
natural) knowledge; in the second, he has natural knowledge, but it
is only probable; furthermore, his knowledge is not of God Himself,
but of a concept of God.[34]

Since God's nature was unknowable, the distinctive attributes
traditionally assigned to God became meaningless. As far as man
was concerned, God was a unitary being: His will, intellect, and
essence were identical; individuals were created directly and

separately, without any Ideas intervening between God's will and His creation. Ockham still used the term "idea," but with a radically new meaning. Only individuals existed, and the way in which God knew each individual was as a separate idea. "The ideas. are not in God subjectively and really; but they are in Him only objectively, that is, as certain things themselves which are producible by God."[35] Individuals were known eternally by God: before their creation God saw them as exemplars; after their creation He saw them as existent beings. For Ockham, then, the idea was not an attribute of God; it was the individual itself, as it was seen by God.[36]

In his treatment of questions relating to God's foreknowledge, Ockham characteristically placed certainty about such questions beyond the range of man's understanding: " . . . it has to be held without any doubt that God knows all future contingent facts evidently and with certainty. But to explain this evidently, and to express the manner in which He knows all future contingent facts, is impossible for any intellect in this life."[37] Here Ockham was not implying that God was bound by future events; rather, he was stressing man's inability to comprehend the way in which God did know the future, since Ockham held that the future was both indeterminate and known by God beforehand at the same time: a contradiction which he admitted he could not resolve. Ockham maintained that God knows future contingents "contingently;"

that is, if two contradictory statements are made about what will happen, God knows which statement is true and which is false, but His knowledge does not determine the outcome.[38]

When we look at Ockham's views on predestination and free will, we see the basis for what was to be one of the major controversial issues of the fourteenth century: the debate over grace and merit. In keeping with his desire to avoid any doctrine that would limit the free exercise of God's will, Ockham rejected the traditional approach to the predestination-free will question. Traditionally, both Augustinian and Thomist theology had upheld the doctrine of predestination. For both St. Augustine and St. Thomas, those individuals who were saved were those who had persevered in the state of grace which God had bestowed on them. It was held that God knew beforehand which individuals would accept His gift of grace, and, hence, which individuals would be saved, since God was thought to have present, eternal knowledge of all things—past, present, and future. God's foreknowledge of an individual's salvation or damnation, then, was inseparable from that person's actual eventual fate, for God could not be wrong in what he knew to be true. In this sense God's foreknowledge of the outcome was equivalent to His predetermination of it.[39]

In positing the future to be contingent rather than necessary, Ockham cut away at the foundations of the doctrine of predestination. He refuted the idea that an actual state of

eternal salvation could inhere in a person before the day of judgment. If this were true, then God would necessarily be bound by the past to save someone in the future. Yet, for Ockham, the future remained undecided until the possible choices that could be made had been made in fact.[40]

One of the main consequences of this position was the weakening of the traditional belief that a supernatural habit of grace was necessary for salvation. Here, as elsewhere in his thinking, Ockham refused to accept the idea that God could be dependent on anything outside of His own free will. Rather than considering grace a necessity, he saw it as no more than an "accidental" attribute which God could infuse into an individual if He so wished; but no causal relationship could be said to exist between grace and salvation. Whether or not an individual was saved depended solely on God's immediate and direct decision.[41] Ockham maintained that: "Grace and glory are two effects produced by God: grace comes first because it applies to this life while glory is its consummation. . . . God could confer grace and charity upon a person without also giving him glory; similarly, God, having given a man grace and charity, could annihilate him: there is no need for charity to involve divine acceptance. God, in His absolute power, is bound by no conditions." Furthermore, if He wished to, God could also "enable an infant to be born free from

sin, actual and original _[and]_ ordain it to eternal life without first giving it any supernatural habit."[42]

In theology, as well as in metaphysics and epistemology, Ockham applied his "razor" to concepts and relationships which he felt limited God's freedom and were beyond the possibility of rational proof. The following three conclusions summarize his position on supernatural habits: "First, that we cannot prove by reason that they are necessary for following God's ways; second, that it cannot be proved that they are necessary for beatitude; third, that in the case of those habits that we can have, these can be natural, not supernatural."[43] In keeping with his principle of economy, then, Ockham saw the relationship between God and man as direct and uncomplicated by any intermediary concept. On the one hand there was God's will, which eventually freely determined an individual's fate; on the other, there was the individual himself, who was now left to rely on his own will and actions, and to hope that they would be acceptable to God.

For Ockham, as well as for Duns Scotus, the elevation of God's will resulted in a corresponding elevation of man's will. But, with his denial of the necessity of grace for salvation, Ockham went further than any theologian before him in seeming to allow man's will an almost unlimited amount of freedom: to his critics, as we shall see, Ockham's thought bordered on heresy in its possible

implication that man could achieve ultimate salvation solely on
the basis of his own merits.

In his discussions of the will and its relation to morality,
Ockham upheld the Franciscan tradition of elevating the will over
the intellect. He established the reality of free will, which he
proved by experience: "'it /free will/ can . . . be known
evidently through experience, that is, through the fact that every
man experiences that however much his reason dictates something
his will can will it or not will it.'"[44] Similarly, the will was
free to act in opposition to the body's physical needs.[45] Given
its perfect freedom, then, the human will was under a moral
obligation to will whatever God commanded, and, conversely, to
avoid willing whatever God forbade: "'Evil is nothing else than
to do something when one is under an obligation to do the opposite.
Obligation does not fall on God, since He is not under any
obligation to do anything.'"[46]

It is to be expected that Ockham considered the basis of
morality to be adherence to God's will; this idea, in itself, was
not untraditional and did not necessarily imply a conflict with
the existing moral order, since God presumably had already
revealed the moral code He wished man to follow. The radical
aspect of Ockham's approach was his emphasis on the contingency of
the present created order. For Ockham, the moral law, no less
than the existent world, was totally subject to God's _potentia_

absoluta; God could just as well have ordained a different morality.
Therefore, the present one was to be obeyed not because in itself
it was immutable, but because, for the present, it was the moral
law God wanted obeyed. In other words, traditional theology had
held that certain acts were intrinsically evil; and that God
forbade them because they were evil. In Ockham's theology acts
were not considered evil in themselves; they only were evil by
virtue of the fact that God had forbidden them.[47]

Carrying out this principle to its logical conclusion, Ockham
maintained that as long as no logical contradiction was involved,
God could will a person to perform an act which would have been
morally wrong if the person had willed it himself; in that case,
the act—such as adultery, for instance—would no longer be evil;
it would be good. The only justification needed for an act to be
good was God's willing it.[48] Thus, God could even will someone to
hate Him, and this would be good, since God's will was the only
standard by which goodness could be measured: "'By the very fact
that God wills something, it is right for it to be done. . . .
Hence if God were to cause hatred of Himself in anyone's will,
that is, if He were to be the total cause of the act . . . neither
would that man sin nor would God; for God is not under any
obligation, while the man is not (in the case) obliged, because
the act would not be in his own power.'"[49]

Although Ockham stated that God could will a man not to love Him, he showed that it would be impossible for this command to be obeyed, since in obeying, the man would be loving God; only in this sense did Ockham feel that a free act of man's will could be performed without a possibly bad intention.[50] Like Scotus, Ockham placed heavy emphasis on the importance of the will's intention rather than on outward acts. He argued that any act (except the act of loving God) could be performed with a bad as well as a good intention: " . . . every act, remaining identically the same, can be indifferently laudable or blameworthy; and it can be first laudable and afterwards blameworthy inasmuch as it can be successively in in accordance with a righteous and with a vicious will. This becomes clear if we consider the act of going to church, first with a good intention, and then with a bad intention. Furthermore, no act is virtuous or vicious unless it is voluntary and in the power of the will, because a sin is a sin only because it is voluntary;".[51] As we have seen, Ockham stressed the point that man's primary obligation was to love God and to freely will the acts that were pleasing to Him. Thus, for Ockham, man could, on his own and without a previous habit, perform meritorious acts which were acceptable to God as worthy of His grace.[52] "It is not more contradictory for a meritorious act to come from men's own powers, if God so wills it, than for them to commit a bad act unaided. Moreover . . . an act is only meritorious if it is

voluntary and of our own accord; and for this to be possible our wills must so direct us. Our wills, therefore, rather than any habits, are the principal cause of merit because they act freely. A habit of itself is neither good nor bad, but indifferent: only God makes it good, and for this reason He can dispense with it entirely."[53]

Ockham's use of the concept of God's _potentia absoluta_, then, allowed man a vast amount of control over his own destiny. The very fact that God was completely free to reward a man for freely performed acts meant that man held the possibility of meriting eternal salvation within his own unaided grasp. Since God's _potentia absoluta_ could dispense with supernatural habits, " . . . the Holy Spirit can accept the natural act of a created will and so actions of hope and faith themselves can be natural and yet gain supernatural reward."[54]

For Ockham, the possibility that unaided man could merit God's reward was not confined to the realm of God's _potentia absoluta_. This possibility also existed within the established order of the real world: the world of God's _potentia ordinata_, which operated according to the laws of revelation. Within the context of God's ordained law, medieval theologians distinguished between two types of merit: merit _de condigno_ ("full merit") and merit _de congruo_ ("half merit"). The distinction between them may be explained as follows:

Merit de condigno . . . was distinguished from merit de
congruo as being the product of sanctifying grace; it was
supernatural in origin and not subject to human actions. It
was the effect of grace, not its cause, and therefore beyond
the reach of man. As such, the traditional teachings on grace
and free will were expressed in merit de condigno: it was the
reward which could come only from grace. . . . Merit de
condigno followed justification and justification could only
come from sanctifying grace, its principle.
    Merit de congruo, on the other hand, did not depend upon
a state of habitual grace; but only upon an actual, external
grace. Thus a man not in a state of grace could, say, hear a
sermon (an external grace) which would help him to regret his
sins; if he did so and repented, he merited de congruo; and
this could then lead to his receiving a supernatural habit.
This made merit de congruo not absolute in itself, but
dependent upon God's liberality in accepting a disposition to
good from one not in grace.[55]

As we have seen, Ockham had made free will, and not grace, the

antecedent to reward; in other words, he had denied the

traditional operation of merit de condigno, in which, it was held,

a state of grace necessarily preceded an individual's performance

of the meritorious acts that would lead him to his salvation. At

the same time, Ockham argued that according to God's own decree from

His potentia ordinata, He had promised, and thus had bound Himself,

to reward acts of merit de congruo. By elevating the importance

of merit de congruo, Ockham was able both to preserve the idea

that a man's good use of free will constituted the first step

toward his salvation; and to accept the traditional belief that,

de potentia ordinata, only God's supernatural gift of grace could

ultimately bring one to glory. The following passage indicates

how Ockham shows that a person can progress from being one who

performs meritorious acts of will, even while in a state of sin,

to being a possible recipient of sanctifying grace:

> /Ockham attacked/ the Augustinian-Scotistic position
> according to which God is the sole cause of the fruits of
> predestination such as grace and eternal life. He /reminded/
> his readers that de potentia ordinata, nothing in the sinner
> can be designated as such a fruit of predestination.
> According to the Fathers and the Doctors, however, good works
> performed in a state of sin are meritorious de congruo, not
> earning eternal life but providing a disposition which God is
> graciously willing to reward with infusion. Thus . . . the
> sinner can work his way into the operational sphere of
> predestination where he becomes a recipient of grace. In the
> context of the decrees of God, therefore, it can be shown
> that God is not the sole cause of all fruits of predestination.[56]

Ockham thus establishes that grace and ultimate salvation can

follow from the unaided natural acts of man's free will—from

merit de congruo—even within the context of God's potentia

ordinata. Free will, he declares,

> prevents any man from being beyond salvation. If one loves
> God above all else, God can, from His ordained power, infuse
> grace into him. Similarly, an adult, who has the use of his
> free will, can only have his sins remitted by contrition.
> The act of hating sin alone suffices for its expulsion and the
> infusion of grace, because, from God's ordained power, it is
> worthy of merit de congruo; God, by His ordained power,
> cannot refuse to reward such an act with His grace. . . . Nor
> . . . does grace already have to inform the act before God
> can reward it, for, by His ordained power, grace is conferred
> simultaneously with the good act and not before it in time.
> Because acts such as these are uninformed by grace, they
> cannot merit de condigno but only de congruo; /hence the
> conclusion that many more acts of merit are de congruo than
> de condigno/.[57]

Although Ockham considered the vast majority of people to be

unpredestined, he did distinguish between unpredestined mankind

and a group who were considered the elect. This group was

composed of the saints, who presumably had been preordained to glory from eternity and had been supernaturally prevented from sinning.[58] As far as the unpredestined masses were concerned, though, for Ockham, as we have seen, their fates rested upon the essential freedoms he considered inherent in man and God. On the one hand, by his freely willed good works man could probably merit grace and salvation; on the other, God, in His absolute power, was completely free to ultimately grant or refuse salvation as He wished.[59]

It should now be clear how Ockham's thought provided the two main ingredients for fourteenth century skepticism. First, it refused to accept, except by faith, the validity of statements that did not proceed directly from actual experience: thus the theological verities, along with abstract propositions of any kind, were held to be no more than probably true. Second, in its use of God's potentia absoluta, Ockham's system made even the truths of faith uncertain, since it regarded them, no less than the rest of creation, as having no independent future reality apart from God's will. We can, then, identify two main types of issues which Ockham's system engendered and which became the central issues of later fourteenth century thought. These involved, first of all, epistemological issues: questions relating to the relative validity of different sources of knowledge, both natural and supernatural; and secondly, issues pertaining to future

contingents in relation to the theological questions of free will, predestination, grace, and merit.

Various contemporaries and followers of Ockham devoted themselves to different aspects of these problems. Three important English theologians who carried Ockham's doctrines to even further radical extremes were Robert Holcot (c. 1290-1349), Thomas Buckingham (c. 1290-1351), and Adam of Woodham (d. 1357). These three thinkers agreed with Ockham that God's absolute power precluded any necessary relation between grace and salvation or between sin and damnation, and that human actions unaided by grace could be worthy of meriting God's reward.[60] Holcot, even more than Ockham, emphasized the fortuitous nature of salvation and damnation; for him, God could dispense with free will as an intermediary between man and salvation as easily as He could do away with the supernatural habit of grace. God, for instance, could bestow the greatest rewards on those who loved Him the least, or He could even refuse to reward a person for obeying His express commands.[61] Buckingham argued that, because of God's _potentia absoluta_, grace and sin in man did not have to be mutually exclusive: "if . . . privation of grace . . . were to involve sin, and a man could not be in both states at once, this would reflect upon God's power and His will could be impeded."[62] Adam of Woodham also asserted that God could accept or reject a person regardless of whether or not that person were in a state of grace;[63] no

constant relation could be said to exist between cause and effect, for that would limit God's freedom.[64] For Ockham and his followers, the traditionally stable God became the greatest source of uncertainty in the universe.

On the question of future contingents Buckingham and Adam both insist that since God's knowledge of the future is contingent, it is possible that the future as revealed in God's word may never actually happen.[65] They are thus led to the conclusion that God could deceive Christ, who in turn could deceive mankind.[66] Holcot argued for the necessity rather than contingency of revelation, but his argument proceeded from faith, not reason, and from the seeming desire to avoid considering that God had been misled. Assuming God's revealed word to be true, Holcot argued that God must then have only limited knowledge of the future and that this knowledge must be necessary rather than contingent, since if it were contingent, then the revealed future either would happen or it would not happen: if it did happen, it would have been necessary; if it did not, it would have been false, and God would have been deceived.[67] While Holcot's argument limits God's foreknowledge, it still preserves His absolute power, since it makes God the one who has determined the necessity of revelation rather than making the fact of revelation necessarily determine God's future actions based on His knowledge.

Two important contemporaries of Ockham who dealt with epistemological questions were John of Mirecourt and Nicholas of Autrecourt. They both carried to extremes certain aspects of Ockham's theory of knowledge. John, for instance, maintained that since God could make illusions seem real, He could create hatred of Himself in the human will.[68] Nicholas emphasized Ockham's principle that certainty could only be based on experience: if one had certain knowledge only of individual things, then one could not be certain of any inference drawn from one thing to another. Nicholas argued further that since only individual things could be accurately apprehended, then all accurate knowledge of the world ultimately reverted to sense knowledge, and thus to appearances. Nicholas, like Ockham, helped to advance the cause of empiricism.[69]

Ockhamist thought, which liberated both man and God from traditional conceptual restraints, underwent a series of condemnations. At Avignon in 1326, fifty-one articles drawn from Ockham's writings were censured by a body of theologians commissioned by Pope John XXII to examine Ockham's works. The most serious charge brought against Ockham was the charge of Pelagianism.[70] This term derived from Pelagius, against whose doctrines St. Augustine had battled in the fifth century. The original Pelagians had denied that all mankind participated in Adam's fall, and that redemption was possible through Christ's

incarnation. They held that each individual alone was responsible for his future destiny; they considered grace to be the reward of merit, not its cause. Pelagianism, in maintaining that man could come to God independently and on the basis of his own merits, undermined the authority of the Church, whose power rested on the assumption that without its sacraments man could not reach God because his natural powers were too inadequate. In his fight against Pelagianism St. Augustine emphasized God's complete supremacy—manifested by His predetermining the salvation and damnation of His creatures, and by either providing them or not, beforehand, with the grace they needed in order to merit reward. Eventually, a modified form of Pelagianism, or semi-Pelagianism, developed in response to St. Augustine's strict doctrines on grace and predestination. Semi-Pelagianism, as developed by John Cassian in the fifth century, held that man provided the initial impulse to do good works, which God then rewarded with His grace. In 529, however, the Council of Orange approved St. Augustine's teachings on grace. His doctrine that grace preceded all merit and was the freely given gift of God and not a reward prevailed until the fourteenth century.[71]

Perhaps the most outspoken and influential contemporary critic of Ockham's thought was Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1290-1349), who referred to Ockhamism as "modern Pelagianism."[72] In his De causa Dei Bradwardine sought to restore to God the power

that the Ockhamists seemingly had transferred to man's will.
Their Pelagianism resulted from their inversion of the traditional
view of grace and merit: the Ockhamists, as we have seen,
dispensed with grace and made man's free will a strong determining
factor in his salvation or damnation. Although Ockham and his
followers had continually stressed that God's omnipotence was the
basis for their doctrines, the result, as far as Bradwardine was
concerned, was that man had tried to usurp what was only in God's
power to give. Bradwardine reflects the thinking of his time in
that he, too, sees an unbridgeable gulf between the realms of faith
and reason. Instead of allowing man a sphere in which he may
operate to some extent independent of God, however, Bradwardine
subjugates every detail of man's life to the immediate will of God.
God's will, rather than being contingent, is, for Bradwardine,
predetermined; thus God, as well as man, is bound by His eternal
decrees.

The focus of Bradwardine's opposition to the modern Pelagians
is the question of free will and merit vs. grace and predestination.
For Bradwardine, as for St. Augustine, grace must precede any good
act on man's part. The human will, in its naturally weak moral
state, is incapable of performing worthy acts without supernatural
aid. Thus Bradwardine completely rejected the concept of merit
de congruo, since this "half-merit" depended on actions performed
while not in a state of grace. Similarly, the idea of merit de

congruo implied that God could be influenced by man's actions—an idea which Bradwardine found extremely presumptuous.[73] For man to follow his own free will was to turn away from God rather than toward Him, according to Bradwardine: in this he followed the Augustinian concept that man's will unaided by grace was in a state of sin and able only to do evil. Bradwardine's position, then, which was the exact opposite of Ockham's, completely denied man's natural ability to perform worthy actions of any kind.[74]

Just as without grace man's will was powerless to act meritoriously, the infusion of grace meant release from sin, whether or not meritorious actions were performed. Far from being an accidental attribute that could coexist with sin as the Ockhamists had proclaimed it to be, grace, for Bradwardine, necessarily eliminated sin and was the unconditional prerequisite for salvation. For Bradwardine, too, the sacraments of the Church were of lesser inherent importance than they were for the Ockhamists; although acts of confession, contrition, and repentance, for example, had their necessary places, without the presence of grace within the person performing them, they were ineffectual.[75]

While the Ockhamists had made God's potentia absoluta and merit the determining factors in a person's destiny, Bradwardine made God's arbitrary decision to bestow or not to bestow grace on an individual the deciding factor in his fate. However, for

Bradwardine, man was predestined to either glory or damnation; his fate was decided from eternity rather than being a matter for future decision.[76]

In dealing with the problem of necessity and future contingents Bradwardine argued that only God was completely free to choose between alternatives, but that once He had chosen, His choice became immutable. With this argument Bradwardine defended the necessity of revelation against the Ockhamists' doubts. He asserted that "as contingency comes from God's will, He could logically have willed a course different from that which he has willed. But once He has decided, His decision remains eternal, for He is willing it eternally; it becomes through His infinite freedom of choice, *ipso facto*, necessary. In the same way, whatever He has not willed, He rejects eternally. God, therefore, having made His choice, wants equally to maintain it, that His will be done; it is in this sense that He cannot not will what He has already willed. To do so would involve Him in contradiction, rendering Him mutable and impairing His omnipotence."[77]

As far as man's will was concerned, Bradwardine held that it was directed by God within the relationship between God and man, but that man's will was free from necessity with regard to the natural world. Thus Bradwardine rejected "all necessity, either astral coercion, natural compulsion, or the psychological enticement from other creatures, as moving man. /Man's/ freedom

of will comes from his primacy over all other creatures and blind forces. In all natural affairs he can act or not act: nothing created can force him to do good or to sin."[78]

We can see that by similar routes Bradwardine and Ockham arrived at different conclusions. Both thinkers saw an unbridgeable gulf separating the realms of faith and reason, and both of them stressed God's transcendental freedom. But, whereas for the Ockhamists God's freedom meant a corresponding freedom in man and in the operations of the created world, for Bradwardine and his followers the created order was immutably fixed--the expression of God's unchangeable will.

This chapter has traced the development of the two major opposing philosophical outlooks of fourteenth century England. It is evident, from even a superficial reading of the major literary works of the time, that interest in the issues generated by the conflict between the systems of Ockham and Bradwardine was not confined to the realm of theological disputation. In the next chapter we shall look at the numerous explicit references to these issues that abound in the works of Langland and Chaucer.

[1] Gordon Leff, Medieval Thought: St Augustine to Ockham
(1958; rpt. Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), pp. 258-59.

[2] The following discussion of St. Augustine is based on Leff,
Medieval Thought, pp. 34-45, and Frederick Copleston, S. J., A
History of Philosophy (1950-53; rpt. Garden City, N. Y.:
Doubleday, 1962-63), II, Pt. 1, 66-95.

[3] The following discussion of St. Thomas is based on Leff,
Medieval Thought, pp. 211-23, and Copleston, II, Pt. 2, 43-65.

[4] Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 171-72.

[5] Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 227-28.

[6] Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 229.

[7] Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 230-34.

[8] Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 262.

[9] John Duns Scotus, Opus Oxoniense (hereafter referred to as
Ox.), 1, 8, 3, nos. 4 ff.; Prol. 3, nos. 28, 29, cited in
Copleston, II, Pt. 2, 224-25; 218.

[10] Scotus, Quaestiones subtillissimae super libros
Metaphysicorum, 2, 1, no. 2; Scotus, Ox., 1, 3, 4, nos. 2-4, both
cited in Copleston, II, Pt. 2, 219-20.

[11] Scotus, Ox., 1, 3, 2, no. 5, in Duns Scotus, Philosophical
Writings, ed. and trans. Allan Wolter, O. F. M. (Edinburgh:
Nelson, 1962), p. 20.

[12] Scotus, Ox., 1, 38, no. 5, cited in Copleston, II, Pt. 2,
253.

[13] Scotus, Ox., 2, 6, 2, no. 11; 1, 17, 3, no. 5; 2, 25, no.
16, cited in Copleston, II, Pt. 2, 262; Scotus, Ox., 4, 49,
quaestio ex latere, nos. 17, 21; Scotus, Reportata Parisiensia
(hereafter referred to as Rep.), 4, 49, 3, no. 7; Scotus, Ox., 4,
49, 3, nos. 5 ff., cited in Copleston, II, Pt. 2, 264.

[14] Scotus, Rep., 2, 41, no. 2, cited in Copleston, II, Pt. 2, 269.

[15] Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 288-90.

[16] Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 62-63.

[17] William Ockham, Summa totius logicae, 1, 14, in William Ockham, Philosophical Writings, ed. and trans. Philotheus Boehner, O. F. M. (1957; rpt. Edinburgh: Nelson, 1962), p. 33.

[18] Ockham, Summa totius logicae, 1, 14, in Boehner, p. 33.

[19] Ockham, Summa totius logicae, 1, 15, in Boehner, p. 35.

[20] Ockham, 1 Sent., 2, 4, D, cited in Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 68.

[21] Ockham, Summa totius logicae, 1, 15, in Boehner, pp. 36-37.

[22] Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 281.

[23] Ockham, Prologue Sent., 1, N ff., in Boehner, p. 23.

[24] Ockham, Prologue Sent., 1, N ff., in Boehner, p. 21.

[25] Ockham, Prologue Sent., 1, N ff., in Boehner, pp. 23-24.

[26] Ockham, Prologue Sent., i, N ff., in Boehner, p. 24.

[27] Ockham, Quodlibet, 6, 6, in Boehner, pp. 25-27.

[28] See Ockham, Summa totius logicae, 1, 1, in Boehner, pp. 47-49.

[29] Ockham, 2 Sent., 26, N ff., in Boehner, pp. 139-41.

[30] Ockham, 1 Sent., 30, 1 E, in Boehner, p. xx; Quodlibet, 5, 1, in Boehner, p. 97.

[31] Ockham, 1 Sent., 2, 9, P ff., in Boehner, p. 103.

[32] Ockham, Quodlibet, 5, 1, in Boehner, p. 100; see also Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 89-100.

[33] Ockham, 1 Sent., 2, 9, P ff., in Boehner, p. 105.

[34] See Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 93; 99.

[35] Ockham, 1 Sent., 35, 5, E, trans, and quoted in Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 101.

[36] See Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 101-2.

[37] Ockham, 1 Sent., 38, unica, in Boehner, p. 133.

[38] Ockham, Tractatus de praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei et de futuris contingentibus, in William Ockham, Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents, trans. Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Appleton, 1969), pp. 48-51.

[39] Gordon Leff, Bradwardine and the Pelagians (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 143-46. That man was predestined and, at the same time, able to act freely, "was part of the mystery of the supernatural and could never be subjected to a full-fledged rational explanation" (p. 161).

[40] Ockham, Tractatus de praedestinatione, /ques. I/, in Adams and Kretzmann, pp. 34-44.

[41] Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 194-96.

[42] Ockham, 3 Sent., 5 E and H, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 193; 195.

[43] Ockham, 3 Sent., 8 A and C, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, p. 193.

[44] Ockham, Quodlibet, 1, 16, trans, and quoted in Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 113.

[45] Ockham, 3 Sent., 10, D; 13 u, in Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 114-15.

[46] Ockham, 2 Sent., 5, H, trans. and quoted in Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 115.

[47] Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 115-16.

[48] Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 116-17.

[49] Ockham, 4 Sent., 9, E and F, trans. and quoted in Copleston, III, Pt. 1, 116.

[50] Ockham, Quodlibet, 3, 13, in Boehner, pp. 145-47.

[51] Ockham, Quodlibet, 3, 13, in Boehner, p. 145.

[52] Article one of the fifty one articles of William Ockham censured in Avignon in 1326, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, p. 189.

[53] Article one, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, p. 189.

[54] Ockham, 3 Sent., 8 C; 1 Sent., 17, 2 C, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, p. 203.

[55] Leff, Bradwardine, p. 157.

[56] Ockham, 1 Sent., 41 C, cited in Heiko Augustinus Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 207-8.

[57] Ockham, 4 Sent., 8 and 9, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 204-5.

[58] Ockham, 1 Sent., 41, 1 B, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, p. 207.

[59] Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 207-8.

[60] Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 292-93.

[61] Robert Holcot, 1 Sent., 4, 3 F; 1, 6, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 219-20.

[62] Thomas Buckingham, 1 Sent., 6, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, p. 232.

[63] Adam Woodham, 1 Sent., 17, 1, cited in Leff, Bradwardine, p. 243.

[64] Leff, Bradwardine, p. 244.

[65] Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 292-93.

[66] Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 239-40; 251-52.

[67] Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 224-26.

[68] Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 293.

[69] Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 294.

[70] See Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>, p. 189.

[71] Leff, <u>Medieval</u> <u>Thought</u>, pp. 52-54.

[72] The following discussion of Thomas Bradwardine is based on Leff, <u>Medieval</u> <u>Thought</u>, pp. 296-99; Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>; and Heiko Augustinus Oberman, <u>Forerunners</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Reformation</u> (New York: Holt, 1966), pp. 135-36; 151-62.

[73] Thomas Bradwardine, <u>De</u> <u>Causa</u> <u>Dei</u>, cited in Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>, p. 75.

[74] Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>, p. 76.

[75] Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>, p. 84.

[76] Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>, p. 85.

[77] Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>, p. 108.

[78] Leff, <u>Bradwardine</u>, p. 93.

II. FOURTEENTH CENTURY ISSUES AS SUBJECT MATTER IN THE POETRY OF LANGLAND AND CHAUCER

Chapter I was devoted to identifying and tracing the main lines of development of the most important theological and philosophical issues of controversy that dominated fourteenth century thought. In Chapter II we will look at these controversial issues with regard to Langland's and Chaucer's explicit handling of them in their poetic works. That both authors were well aware of the main points at issue is evident from even a superficial examination of their poetry.[1] For example, when from a fourteenth century viewpoint one considers Langland's fictitious narrator Will as the main "character" in search of truth, one recalls that the human will (as opposed to intellect) was considered the principal governing agent in man's search for divine truth in real life. Furthermore, one notices that in Piers Plowman the truth that Will seeks is defined for him almost immediately (Passus I),[2] and that his quest primarily involves determining the relative capacities of different modes of knowledge to lead him to this truth; here, too, the poem's subject matter reflects a contemporary preoccupation: that of clarifying the proper functions of different kinds of knowledge.

Similarly, Chaucer's specific reference to "Bishop Brad-

wardine" in the Nun's Priest's Tale (NPT.VII.3242),[3] indicates
his familiarity with the main theological controversy engendered
by Ockhamist thought: the controversy over questions of pre-
destination and free will. And, an instance of Chaucer's in-
terest in contemporary epistemological questions may be found in
his Proem to Book I of The House of Fame, in which he carries on
a theoretical discussion of the causes of dreams and their relia-
bility as sources of knowledge (HF.I.2-56).

The above examples give only a hint of the extent to which
Langland and Chaucer weave the subject matter of fourteenth
century skepticism into the texture of their poetry. We shall
now look at their works more closely and in terms of the two
broad subdivisions of the subject matter of skepticism which were
made in Chapter I, with one subdivision including issues relating
to both natural and supernatural knowledge, and the other in-
cluding issues relating to questions of predestination and free
will.

Turning to Piers Plowman we see that the human search for
divine truth is the first organizing theme of the poem. The work
begins with the dreamer's vision of the real world, whose signifi-
cance is its middle position between heaven and hell. It is here
that souls are to be tested and their ultimate fates determined
according to how faithfully they followed truth. First, then,
truth must be defined.

Truth initially is defined for the dreamer by Lady Holy

Church, whom he meets in Passus I. Truth, she explains,

> . . . is a kynde knowyng,' . . . 'that kenneth in thine
> horte
> For to louye thi lorde · leuer than thi-selue;
> No dedly synne to do · dey thou3 thow sholdest:
>
> (I.141-43)

The dreamer, or Will, will be hearing essentially the same defi-

nition of truth throughout the poem, from a number of different

types of people and personifications who come from different

realms of knowledge and experience. The friars whom Will meets at

the beginning of his quest for truth tell him that divine love, or

charity, is man's

> . . . chief help a3ein synne;
> For he strengtheth man to stonde · and stereth mannes soule,
> And thowgh thi body bow · as bote doth in the water,
> Ay is thi soule sauf . . .
>
> (VIII.46-49)

Similarly, Dame Study tells Will that truth is love and that only

where love is practiced can grace be found. She instructs Will to

" . . . loke thow louye · as longe as thow durest, / For is no

science vnder sonne · so souereyne for the soule." (X.205-06).

Then Will learns from Lady Scripture

> That who-so wolde and wylneth · with Cryste to aryse,
> . . . .
> He shulde louye and leue · and the lawe fulfille.
> That is — "loue thi lorde god · leuest aboue alle,
> And after, alle Crystene creatures · in commune, eche man other:"
> And thus bilongeth to louye · that leueth to be saued.
> And but we do thus in dede · ar the daye of dome,
> It shal bisitten vs ful soure . . .
>
> (X.355-61)

Imaginatif in Passus XII also teaches Will that men are saved
most quickly by practicing charity (XII. 32), as does Clergy
(XIII. 123-29), and Patience (XIII. 136-43;171). Later, Anima,
too, preaches the importance of charity for man's salvation:

> For-thi I conseille alle Cristene · to confoumen hem to
>   charite;
> For charite with-oute chalengynge · vnchargeth the soule,
> And many a prisone fram purgatorie · thorw his preyeres he
>   delyueroth.
>   (XV.337-39)

And the personification of Christ whom Will meets also explains
that only those who sincerely love God and man will be saved:
"Leue I neure that owre lorde will loue · that charite lakketh
. . . " (XVII. 291).

In addition to these explicit statements about the meaning of
truth, the dreamer also is given many examples and illustrations of
truth in practice. In Passus V he learns the value of repentence
in overcoming the seven deadly sins, and he hears a detailed ac-
count of how to live the charitable life from Piers, whom he sees
for the first time. Later, he hears Hunger explaining to Piers
that victims of misfortune should be sought out and comforted

> . . . for Crystes loue of heuene,
> Loue hem and lene hem · so lawe of god techeth:—
> . . . .
> And alle maner of men · that thow my3te asspye,
> That nedy ben, and nau3ty · helpe hem with thi godis,
> Loue hem and lakke hem nou3te · late god take the veniaunce;
> . . . .
> And if thow wilt be graciouse to god · do as the gospel techeth,
> And biloue the amonges low men · so shaltow lacche grace,
>   (VI.223-30)

From Witte he learns that

> Dowel, . . . is · to don as lawe techeth,
> To loue thi frende and thi foo · leue me, that is Dobet.
> To ȝiuen and to ȝemen · bothe ȝonge and olde,
> To helen and to helpen · is Dobest of alle.
>
> (IX.199-202)

In Passus XIII Will sees the true humility of Patience con-

trasted to the arrogance of a worldly Master of Divinity, and then,

in Passus XIV, he learns again that contrition and patient poverty

are prerequisites for salvation as he witnesses Haukyn's repen-

tence.

Anima teaches Will that

> 'Charite,' . . . 'ne·chaffareth nouȝte · ne chalengeth,
>   ne craueth.
> As proude of a peny · as of a pounde of golde,
> And is as gladde of a goune · of gray russet
> As of a tunicle of tarse · or of trye scarlet.
> He is gladde with alle gladde · and good tyl alle wykked,
> And leueth and loueth alle · that owre lorde made.
>
> (XV.160-65)

And the importance of love is illustrated by the Samaritan, who

warns that the person who does not love his fellow man denies him-

self the chance to receive God's grace (XVII. 203-63).

In the final Passus Will is a witness to the battle between

the forces of good and the forces of evil. Nature tells him that

he can save himself only by learning to love and giving up every-

thing except a complete trust in God (XX. 207-10). Eventually the

evil forces win out, but the poem leaves no doubt as to the nature

of the one truth that can conquer evil.

This constant reiteration of the correct meaning of truth is

significant when one views it in the light of fourteenth century uncertainty regarding truth's definition. Equally significant is the fact that even though the truth may be agreed upon, there still remains considerable ambiguity as to how one achieves a proper understanding of it. Thus we see personifications who represent every important aspect of man's knowledge and experience all taking up and discussing the question of truth's meaning. As stated earlier, it is not only truth's definition, but the clarification of the proper methods of discovering truth that comprises so much of the poem's subject matter.

As we have seen, Holy Church is the first personification to explain truth to the dreamer. In Passus II the dreamer hears Theology denouncing Lady Meed's wedding to Fraud as an outrage against truth (II. 114-16). The dreamer hears Reason, in Passus V, preaching the truth and leading the seven deadly sins to repentence, and he hears the essentials of truth expounded by the supernatural figure of Piers. In Passus VI we also find Hunger preaching charity, as noted earlier.

As Will begins his quest, the first people he asks about truth are two friars. Next, he goes from Thought to Witte, Lady Study, Clergy (Learning), and Lady Scripture in search of the answer to the question of how one discovers truth. His instruction by Lady Scripture is interrupted by a dream within a dream, in which Will sees himself following Fortune and a life of world-

liness; from this experience, which ends with his being deserted
by his worldly friends and the friars, Will returns to the
teachings of Lowte (Good Faith) and Lady Scripture (VIII-XI. 310).

He next encounters Nature, who tries to kindle Will's love
for God by showing him the wonders of God's creation (XI. 312-17).
When Will sees the orderliness of the natural world, he challenges
Reason to explain why he protects every creature but man
(XI. 360-66). After Reason's rebuke Will turns to Imaginatif, the
next source of knowledge which appears to him (XII).

In Passus XIII and XIV Will observes Patience and Conscience
in actual practice. He watches as Haukyn, a symbol of sinful man-
kind, is led to contrition. After this glimpse of the external
world of action Will meets another purely internal source of know-
ledge -- the soul, or Anima (XV). From his contemplation of
Anima's words, Will is led to a new and more spiritual vision of
Piers; this vision, in turn, resolves ultimately into a dream in
which Will witnesses an allegorical representation of Christ's life,
death, and resurrection (XVII;XVIII).

Will has now, in Passus XIX, arrived at the Church, the point
from which his quest had begun. But while attending Mass he falls
asleep and questions Conscience about the significance of Christ
Himself. After tracing Christ's life through the stages of Dowel,
Dobet, and Dobest, Conscience then clarifies for Will the nature
of the relationship that Christ has established between Himself and

man. First, he has given the Church the power to pardon all sin except failure to make restitution (XIX. 178-85), and second, he has sent Grace to help people in all spheres of life to live in charity (XIX. 207-45).

In Passus XIX Will learns through Grace how the under-pinnings of the Christian faith fit together to make a unified whole. Under Grace, the Church is the direct link between God and man. To help the Church to reach man, Grace has provided it with Scripture, the writings of the Fathers, and the ability to infuse the basic moral virtues into mankind. Christian unity, or the Church, is an edifice built out of the inseparable mixture of Christ's sacrifice with the Holy Writings, and is held together by Grace. Will learns, too, that the Church holds within it the seeds out of which all of Christendom will develop. After his establishment of the Church, Grace

> . . . deuised
> A carte, hy3te Christendome . to carye Pieres sheues;
> And gaf hym caples to his carte · Contricioun and Confessioun,
> And made Presthode haywarde · the while hym-self went
> As wyde as the worlde is · with Pieres to tulye treuthe.
>   (XIX.326-30)

Will's instruction in truth is now complete, and we see that in the course of his pilgrimage to truth, Will has been exposed to five different modes of knowledge: intellectual, experiential, authoritative, natural, and spiritual.

Not only does the subject matter of fourteenth century thought

show up in <u>Piers Plowman</u> as a quest for the means of learning

divine truth, but it also is evident in some of the specific

questions pertaining to knowledge which are raised during Will's

travels from one mode to another. One important point that Lang-

land takes up is the question of how much reason is able to know

of supernatural truth. Langland's personifications consistently

assert that it is not reason's place to attempt to understand

God's mysteries. Lady Study vehemently denounces those who would

substitute philosophical debate for simple faith.

> I haue yherde hiegh men · etyng atte table,
> Carpen as thei clerkes were · of Cryste and of his miȝtes,
> And leyden fautes vppon the fader · that fourmed vs alle,
> And carpen aȝeine clerkes · crabbed wordes;—
> "Whi wolde owre saueoure suffre · such a worme in his blisse,
> That bigyled the womman · and the man after,
> Thorw whiche wyles and wordes · thei wenten to helle,
> And al her sede for here synne · the same deth suffred?
> Here lyeth ȝowre lore" · thise lordes gynneth dispute,
> "Of that ȝe clerkes vs kenneth · of Cryst by the gospel;
>   <u>Filius</u> <u>non</u> <u>portabit</u> <u>iniquitatem</u> <u>patris</u>, &c.
> Whi shulde we that now ben · for the werkes of Adam
> Roten and to-rende? · resoun wolde it neuere;
>   (X.101-12)

Study maintains that arguments like this encourage false beliefs.

She insists angrily that people should

> Wilneth neuere to wite · whi that god wolde
> Suffre Sathan · his sede to bigyle,
> Ac bileue lelly · in the lore of holicherche,
> And prey hym of pardoun · and penaunce in thi lyue,
> And for his moche mercye · to amende ȝow here.
> For alle that wilneth to wyte · the weyes of god almiȝty,
> I wolde his eye were in his ers · and his fynger after,
> ·
> Al was as thow wolde · lorde, yworschiped be thow,
> And al worth as thow wolte · what so we dispute!
>   (X.117-28)

Will goes from Lady Study to Clergy, who also touches on the issue of faith and reason. Clergy argues that in order to Dowel, people must not try to understand, rationally, doctrines which must be taken on faith. Clergy tells Will that Jesus' equation of Himself with God cannot be rationally explained.

Alle the clerkes vnder Cryst · ne couthe this assoille,
But thus it bilongeth to bileue · to lewed that willen Dowel.
For had neuere freke fyne wytte · the feyth to dispute,
Ne man had no merite · my3te it ben yproued:
(X.245-48)

Later, Will is sharply rebuked by Reason and Imaginatif for attempting to pry into the reasons for God's actions. Will asks Reason, as we noted earlier, to explain why he does not protect mankind as he does the lower creatures. Reason answers: " . . . 'recche the neuere, / Whi I suffre or nou3t suffre · thi-self hast nou3t to done;" (XI. 367-68). God, he says, " . . . mi3te amende in a minute-while · al that mys standeth, / Ac he suffreth for somme mannes good · and so is owre bettre." (XI. 372-73). Imaginatif then scolds Will for questioning Reason, telling him that because he had concerned himself with knowledge that was none of his business, Will had cut himself off from the knowledge he really needed. While Adam kept silent, says Imaginatif, he

. . . had paradys at wille,
Ac whan he mamoled aboute mete · and entermeted to knowe
The wisdom and the witte of god · he was put fram blisse;
And ri3t so ferde Resoun bi the; · thow with rude speche
Lakkedest, and losedest thinge · that longed nou3t to be done;
Tho hadde he no lykynge · forto lere the more.
(XI.407-12)

In Passus XII Imaginatif elaborates further on the subject of
man's inadequate reason and the will of God to do as He pleases.

> And why that one thef on the crosse · creaunt hym ȝelt
> Rather than that other thef · though thow wolde appose,
> Alle the clerkes vnder Cryst · ne couthe the skil assoille;
>   Quare placuit, quia voluit.
> <div align="right">(XII.214-16)</div>

Similarly, the reason why beasts are able to guide themselves is
known only to Nature: "Clergye ne kynde witte · ne knewe neuere
the cause, / Ac Kynde knoweth the cause hym-selue · and no creature
elles." (XII. 225-26). And, as to the vital question of whether
or not the righteous heathen may be saved, Imaginatif maintains
that "the sothe wote no clergye, " and that "no scripture can
telle." (XII. 268-69).

In Passus XV Will is again berated for seeking a knowledge of
God's ways. Anima accuses him of being "one of Prydes knyȝtes":

> For such a luste and lykynge · Lucifer fel fram heuene:
> ·
> It were aȝeynes kynde,' [says Anima] 'and alkynnes resoun,
> That any creature shulde kunne al · excepte Cryste one.
> <div align="right">(XV.50-53)</div>

Anima warns that

> . . . riȝte as hony is yuel to defye · and engleymeth the mawe,
> Riȝte so that thorw resoun · wolde the rote knowe
> Of god and of his grete myȝtes · his graces it letteth.
> ·
> Freres and fele other maistres · that to the lewed men prechen,
> Ȝe moeuen materes inmesurables · to tellen of the trinite,
> That ofte tymes the lewed peple · of hir bileue douten.
> <div align="right">(XV.63-70)</div>

Thus we see in Piers Plowman a concern for separating

reason's knowledge from the knowledge of faith. In addition, we find an interest in clarifying the proper functions of different modes of knowledge. Imaginatif does this for Will in Passus XII.

First he distinguishes between supernatural and natural knowledge. From faith and grace arise a knowledge based on belief, or knowledge pertaining to the supernatural, whereas the sensible observations of many people form the basis of natural knowledge. Although grace is necessary for salvation, Imaginatif makes it clear that learning, combined with man's natural intelligence, can play an important part in helping to bring him to God.

> . . . riȝt as syȝte serueth a man · to se the heighe strete,
> Riȝt so ledeth letterure · lewed men to resoun.
> And as a blynde man in bataille · bereth wepne to fiȝte,
> And hath none happ with his axe · his enemye to hitte,
> Namore can a kynde-witted man · but clerkes hym teche,
> Come for al his kynde witte · to Crystendome and be saued;
> (XII.105-10)

Here Imaginatif also affirms the importance of authoritative books which have been divinely inspired. He explains: "Although men made bokes · god was the maistre, / And seynt spirit the saumplarye · and seide what men sholde write." (XII. 103-04).

When it comes to natural intelligence applied to things of the physical world, however, Imaginatif again makes it clear that knowledge based on sense data can never lead to knowledge of God. Through the science of observation

> . . . was neuere no soule ysaued,
> Ne brouȝte by her bokes · to blisse ne to ioye;
> For alle her kynde knowynges · come but of dyuerse sightes.

Patriarkes and prophetes · repreued her science,
And seiden, her wordes ne hor wisdomes · was but a folye;
As to the clergye of Cryst · counted it but a trufle;
<div align="right">(XII.135-40)</div>

Material knowledge, even when kept within its own domain,

is regarded with distrust in Piers Plowman. Lady Study warns Will

against the natural sciences, whose purpose is to deceive man and

seduce him away from his proper goal, which is God.

. . . astronomye is an harde thynge · and yuel forto knowe,
Geometrie and goomesye · is ginful of speche;
Who-so thenketh werche tho two · thryueth ful late.
For sorcerye is the souereyne boke · that to the science longeth.
зet ar there fybicches in forceres · of fele mennes makynge,
Experimentz of alkenamye · the poeple to deceyue,
If thow thinke to Dowel · dele ther-with neuere.
<div align="right">(X.207-13)</div>

Similarly, in Passus XV Will learns how dependent man's knowledge

of the physical world is on his relationship with God. Because

men have rejected charity in their hearts, they find that not

even their sense knowledge of the world can be trusted any

longer. Charity tells Will:

. . . so it fareth by some folke now · thei han a faire speche,
Croune and Crystendome · the kynges merke of heuene,
Ac the metal, that is mannes soule · with synne is foule alayed;
Both lettred and lewede · beth allayed now with synne,
That no lyf loueth other · ne owre lorde, as it semeth.
For thorw werre and wykked werkes · and wederes vnresonable,
Wederwise shipmen · and witti clerkes also
Han no belieue to the lifte · ne to the lore of philosofres.
    Astrymyanes alday · in her arte faillen,
That whilum warned bifore · what shulde falle after.
Shipmen and shepherdes · that with shipp and shepe wenten,
Wisten by the walkene · what shulde bityde;
As of wederes and wyndes · thei warned men ofte.
Tilieres that tiled the erthe · tolden her maistres,
By the sede that thei sewe · what thei selle miзte,

And what to lene and what to lyue by · the londe was so trewe.
Now failleth the folke of the flode · and of the londe bothe,
Shepherdes and shipmen · and so do this tilieres;
Noither thei kunneth ne knoweth · one cours bi-for another.
Astrymyanes also · aren at her wittes ende;
Of that was calculed of the element · the contrarie thei fynde.
(XV.344-64)

The idea that only grace can improve man's deficient senses and
reason appears in Passus XIX, where Will sees Grace distributing
to the people the intellectual and physical talents they need to
properly perform their assigned earthly duties, as well as the
sacred information they need to protect their souls (11.224-68).

As far as knowledge is concerned, then, Piers Plowman deals
explicitly with all of its major aspects. The poem preaches the
separation of faith's knowledge from that of reason, and shows how
reason and the senses, although dependent on faith and grace for
both natural and supernatural understanding, are able to partici-
pate in an understanding of the divine will by means of the infor-
mation provided by learning. Reason, in fact, can only know of
God through learning; the Holy Writings and the Church are the
essential links between reason and supernatural truth. At the
same time, the poem does not hold that divine truth is completely
illogical or irrelevant to reason's method of understanding truth;
revelation, though beyond man's understanding, can nevertheless be
made to seem "reasonable" through analogy. The Samaritan, or
Christ figure, explains to Will in Passus XVII how the Trinity is
like a hand, with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as fist, fingers,

and palm respectively, being

> . . . thre sondry si3tes · in one shewynge.
> The paume, for he putteth forth fyngres · and the fust bothe,
> Ri3t so redily · reson it sheweth,
> How he that is holygoste · sire and son proueth.
> And as the hande halt harde · and al thynge fast
> Thorw foure fyngres and a thombe · forthe with the pame,
> Ri3te so the fader and the sone · and seynt spirit the thridde
> Halt al the wyde worlde · with-in hem thre,
>
> (XVII.152-59)

Finally, Langland touches upon the question of whether dreams can describe or predict real events. At the end of the Visio the dreamer, after awakening, continues to ponder the meaning of his dream of Piers' pardon, "And how the prest impugned it · with two propre wordes." (VII. 147). Although the dreamer does not explicitly answer the question of whether in fact his dream represents the truth, he implies that it might by associating his dream with the prophetic dreams related in the Bible (VII. 143-72).

Turning now to the issues of predestination and free will explicitly dealt with in Piers Plowman, we see that they, too, account for much of the poem's subject matter. Several aspects of these issues are considered: first, there is the question of whether the inclination of a person's will or his actual works are more important for his ultimate salvation. The Samaritan tells Will that without inner charity, works are meaningless:

> So in the holy gost god · and grace with-outen mercy
> To alle vnkynde creatures · Cryst hym-self witnesseth, . . .

Be vnkynde to thin euene-cristene · and al that thow
                                    canst bidden,
Delen and do penaunce · day and ny3te euere,
And purchace al the pardoun · of Pampiloun and Rome,
And indulgences ynowe · and be <u>ingratus</u> to thi kynde,
The holy goste hereth the nou3t · ne helpe may the . . .
· ·
     Ac 3ut in many mo maneres · men offenden the holy gost;
Ac this is the worst wyse · that any wi3te my3te
Synnen a3ein the seynt spirit · assenten to destuye,
For coueityse of any kynnes thinge · that Cryst dere bou3te.
How my3te he axe mercy · or any mercy hym helpe,
That wykkedlich and willefullich · wolde mercy anynte?   ·
                                    (XVII.248-85)

Witte, also, stresses the primary importance of the will. Charity,

or Dobest, which arises from Dowel and Dobet,

     . . . bryngeth adoun the mody,
And that is wikked Wille · that many werke shendeth,
And dryueth away Dowel · thorugh dedliche synnes.'
                                    (IX.204-06)

Patience explains to Haukyn that salvation can only be achieved if

one has a humble will. Man's reprieve, bought with Christ's sacri-

fice, only protects those whose hearts and wills are true, regard-

less of what works they may perform (XIV. 188-98). And earlier,

when Patience had set out on his pilgrimage, Conscience had ac-

companied him because his will had been moved to do so (XIII.190-93).

     Anima, in Passus XVI, explains the relation of will to

charity. Charity

     . . . groweth in a gardyne,' . . . 'that god made hym-
                                    seluen,
Amyddes mannes body · the more is of that stokke;
Herte hatte the herber · that it in groweth,
And <u>Liberum-Arbitrium</u> · hath the londe to ferme,
Vnder Piers the Plowman · to pyken it and to weden it.'
                                    (XVI.13-17)

Then Piers explains how free will is responsible for fending off the Devil's attacks on the soul. If the will does not back down in its fight against the Devil, then the grace of the Holy Ghost will prevail against sin (XVI. 40-52).

Man's will, then, is free to move toward or away from God, and one of the most important ways in which the will shows its movement toward God is by causing man to feel contrition for his sins. A major contrast between Lady Meed's confession and the confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins, for instance, has to do with the issue of contrition.[4] Meed's confession is worthless because she goes through the form without truly repenting (III. 43-46), whereas the Seven Deadly Sins do repent, and consequently, the chance for salvation becomes possible (Passus V). Piers tells how before a person may arrive at truth he must truly repent his misdeeds and make proper restitution:

> Grace hatte the gateward · a gode man for sothe,
> Hys man hatte Amende-зow · for many man him knoweth;
> Telleth hym this tokene · that Treuthe wite the sothe;
> 'I parfourned the penaunce · the preest me enioyned,
> And am ful sori for my synnes · and so I shal euere,
> Whan I thinke there-on · theighe I were a pope.'
>   (V.604-09)

Imaginatif, in teaching Will the importance of Scriptural learning, takes it for granted that willed contrition is a necessary prerequisite for a healthy soul.

> . . . he that knoweth clergye · can sonner aryse
> Out of synne and be sauf · though he sin ofte,
> If hym lyketh and lest · than any lewed lelly.

> For if the clerke be konnynge · he knoweth what is synne,
> And how contricioun with-oute confessioun · conforteth the soule,
> As thow seest in the sauter . . .
> How contricioun is commended · for it caccheth awey synne;
>
> (XII.172-78)

Similarly, Conscience tells Haukyn he will teach him contrition
so that Haukyn may be cleansed of sin (XIV. 16-21), after which
Patience explains how contrition alone is enough to drive away
mortal sin (XIV. 82-89). And, in Passus XVII, the Samaritan
assures Will that

> . . . the fader for3if · folke of mylde hertes
> That reufulliche repenten · and restitucioun make.
> In as moche as thei mowen · amenden and payen.
>
> (XVII.234-36)

In the foregoing illustrations we can see a pattern emerging.
In its concern with the question of how salvation is attained,
<u>Piers Plowman</u> places considerable emphasis on the idea that man's
will has unlimited freedom. Although Langland stops short of
preaching that man's will can fully determine his ultimate fate,
he does seem to elevate the power of the will almost to such a
point. When we view Langland's apparent attitude toward the will
in terms of fourteenth century theological controversy, we see
that he is attempting to define the nature of the relationship
between grace and merit — a definition which has a vital bearing
on the question of predestination and free will. While Langland
never denies the necessity for grace, he virtually always intro-
duces the idea of grace as if grace followed from man's actions
rather than as if it had caused them.

Thus in Passus V Sloth is told to repent his sins, beat his breast, and beg for grace (ll. 453-54). After all the Seven Deadly Sins have repented and confessed, Repentance takes pity on them, and while they kneel he beseeches God for mercy and the grace which will help them to do better (V. 485-87). Again, it is after their repentance that the people in the Visio cry out for grace to accompany them on their pilgrimage to truth (V. 517-19). And Piers, describing the way to truth, begins with the state of the will, which should be meekness; he continues by outlining the proper beliefs and behaviors needed, and ends with the pilgrim's arrival at truth's gate, which is presided over by grace, and which grace will open to the pilgrim if he has earned the right to enter (V. 568-617).

At the end of the Visio the dreamer debates whether an individual's actions or the Church's pardons are more likely to help a person achieve salvation. The dreamer puts his faith in what he considers to be the greater efficacy of Dowel, and advises all Christians to pray to God for the grace to carry out His commandments (VII. 167-200). Here again, it is man's prior action of praying that is seen as providing the impetus for God's dispensation of grace.

In Passus XVI we see Piers showing Will how charity is defended against the World, the flesh, and the Devil. As we noted earlier, free will is shown here to precede the grace of the Holy

Ghost in fighting the Devil; thus the will is being placed practi-
cally on a par with the power to combat sin that God commands, for
God and Christ are said by Piers to be the other defenders of
truth against the World and the flesh.

In Passus XVII, as we have seen, the Samaritan explains to
Will the importance of charity. With regard to the relationship
between charity and grace, the Samaritan asserts that just as
workmen on winter nights are not cheered by glowing embers as they
are by a full blaze,

> Namore doth sire ne sone · ne seynt spirit togyderes,
> Graunteth no grace · ne for3ifnesse of synnes,
> Til the hóli goste gynne · to glowe and to blase.
> So that the holygoste · gloweth but as a glede,
> Tyl that lele loue · ligge on hym and blowe,
> And thanne flaumbeth he as fyre · on fader and on filius
> And melteth her my3te in-to mercy . . .
>
> (XVII.220-26)

When grace actually does come to earth in the poem, it is
after Will has reached the end of his pilgrimage, as far as his
pursuit of the knowledge of truth is concerned; and at the poem's
end when Conscience calls for grace, he is calling for the grace
to help him find Piers, whom he already knows represents the
truth (XX. 378-84).

As long as man is allowed so much power of self-determination
in Piers Plowman, it is not surprising to find several instances
in which grace seems to be bypassed altogether, and man is shown
appealing his case directly to God, seemingly legitimately ex-

pecting to be rewarded for his patience in the face of earthly
misery, or for his charitable behavior. When Haukyn asks Patience
whether a man whose riches have been won and spent rightfully is
less pleasing to God than one who has lived in patient poverty,
Patience answers:

> Though men rede of richchesse · ri₃t to the worldes ende,
> I wiste neuere renke that riche was · that whan he rekne sholde,
> Whan it drow to his deth-day · that he ne dred hym sore,'
> And that atte rekenynge in arrerage fel · rather than oute of
> dette.
> There the pore dar plede · and preue by pure resoun,
> To haue allowaunce of his lorde · by the lawe he it cleymeth,
> Ioye that neuere Ioye hadde · of ri₃tful Iugge he axeth,
> (XIV.104-10)

Patience shows, too, how charitable behavior can earn any man a
place in heaven:

> Ac if ye riche haue reuthe · and rewarde wel the pore,
> And lyuen as lawe techeth · done leute to alle,
> Criste of his curteysie · shal conforte ₃ow atte laste,
> And rewarde alle dowble ricchesse · that reuful hertes habbeth.
> And as an hyne that hadde his hyre · ar he bygonne,
> And whan he hath done his deuor wel · men doth hym other bounte,
> ₃yueth hym a cote aboue his couenaunte · ri₃te so Cryst ₃iueth
> heuene
> Bothe to riche and to nou₃te riche · that rewfullich lybbeth;
> And alle that done her deuor wel · han dowble hyre for her
> trauaille,
> Here for₃yuenesse of her synnes · and heuene blisse after.
> (XIV.145-54)

Again, Patience emphasizes the idea that salvation can be earned
when he says that the patient poor " . . . may claymen and asken /
after her endynge · here heuene-riche blisse." (XIV. 259-60). An
even greater right to heaven, though, has the man

> . . . that here my₃te haue his wille

In londe and in lordship · and likynge of bodye,
And for goddis loue leueth al · and lyueth as a beggere;

(XIV.261-63)

In considering the question of predestination Piers Plowman
stresses arguments that are consistent with the attitudes toward
free will and merit that have already been noted. Will concludes
in Passus XI that all Christians are, at least theoretically,
among the elect (XI. 109-34). This conclusion is reinforced in
Passus XVIII during the Harrowing of Hell episode. Lucifer in-
sists that he is entitled to keep the soulś of all mankind because
of Adam's sin, but the Devil argues that the Old Law has been
overruled by Christ, who has already succeeded in rescuing some
people on earth from damnation (XVIII. 270-303). The possibility
of salvation is then extended to include all people: there is al-
ways the chance that the righteous heathen, as well as the
Christian, can be saved. As Christ bursts into Hell, he claims
the souls of all those who love Him:

And tho that owre lorde loued · in-to his liȝte he lauȝte,
And seyde to Sathan, 'lo! here · my soule to amendes
For alle synneful soules · to saue tho that ben worthy.
Myne thei be and of me · I may the bette hem clayme.
Al-though resoun recorde · and riȝt of my-self,
That if thei ete the apple · alle shulde deye,
I bihyȝte hem nouȝt here · helle for euere.

(XVIII.324-30)

Although the poem reiterates the point that salvation depends,
ultimately, on God's will alone, it consistently portrays God's will
as merciful. The main condition for receiving the grace of salva-

tion is merit, which in turn is based on charity. A truly chari-

table Christian will never be turned away by God (XVII. 280-92).

And the chance for salvation is never lost up to the time of death.

If at death a person repents but has not accumulated sufficient

merit to be saved without further help from God, God's mercy will

save him. In Passus XVII Will asks the Samaritan:

> 'I pose I hadde synned so · and shulde now deye,
> And now am sory, that so · the seint spirit agulte,
> Confesse me, and crye his grace · god, that al made,
> And myldliche his mercy axe · my3te I nou3te be saued?'
>
> (XVII.293-96)

The Samaritan answers that although usually proper restitution

must be made before a sinner can be saved, yet God's mercy is such

that "sorwe is satisfaccioun · for hym that may nou3t paye."

(XVII. 297-314).

Scripture affirms in Passus XI that

> . . . 'may no synne lette
> Mercy alle to amende · and mekenesse hir folwe,
> For they beth as owre bokes telleth · aboue goddes werkes,
>
> (XI.132-34)

And in Passus XIX God is praised for suffering the sinful to con-

tinue living so that they will have more time in which to repent

(ll. 437-38). Furthermore, that God's will and His mercy transcend

any previous "agreements" is brought out in Passus XVIII, where

Christ makes it clear that His mercy can save condemned souls, if

He so wishes (XVIII. 382-91).

In the final analysis, then, God can invoke His _potentia_

absoluta in order to save souls. The question of salvation in

Piers Plowman is tied to the concept that God not only has un-
limited freedom of will, but that He actually is expected to use
this freedom to counteract what otherwise would have been the or-
dinary course of events. In Passus X we see an instance of God's
alteration of normal procedure:

On Gode Fridaye I fynde · a feloun was ysaued,
That had lyued al his lyf · with lesynges and with thefte;
And for he biknewe on the crosse · and to Cryste schrof hym,
He was sonnere saued · than seynt Iohan the baptiste,
And or Adam or Ysaye · or eny of the prophetes,
That hadde yleine with Lucyfer · many longe 3eres.
A robbere was yraunceouned · rather than thei alle,
With-outen any penaunce of purgatorie · to perpetual blisse.
(X.414-21)

Although God's alteration of the normal order may occur in a
case such as the thief's, it usually is presumed to operate, as far
as Piers Plowman is concerned, in the cases of pre- or non-
Christian individuals, who, according to God's ordinary law,
should remain damned. Thus there is a discussion in Passus XI of
the case of Trajan, the pagan emperor who was released from hell
(ll. 135-67). Later, in Passus XII, Imaginatif tells Will:

And where /Aristotle/ be sauf or nou3t sauf · the sothe wot no
clergye,
Ne of Sortes ne of Salamon · no scripture can telle.
Ac god is so good, I hope · that sitth he gaf hem wittes
To wissen vs weyes there-with · (that wissen vs to be saued,
And the better for her bokes) · to bidden we ben holden,
That god for his grace · gyue her soules reste;
(XII.268-73)

And in Passus XV we find Anima preaching that possibly many Jews
and Saracens who believe in God will be saved before Christians

who do not live up to their faith (ll. 378-88).

Finally, in Passus XV, we see an illustration of the idea that not only particular aspects of God's already established order could be superseded by His _potentia absoluta_, but that all of revealed truth would have been different if God had willed it differently. Anima explains to Will that

> . . . god suffred for vs . . .
> In ensample we shulde do so · and take no veniaunce
> Of owre foes that doth vs falsenesse · that is owre fadres wille.
> For wel may euery man wite · if god hadde wolde hymselue,
> Sholde neuere Iudas ne Iuwe · haue Iesu don on rode,
> Ne han martired Peter ne Poule · ne in prisoun holden.
> Ac he suffred in ensample · that we shulde suffre also,
> And seide to suche that suffre wolde · that pacientes vincunt.
> (XV.255-62)

We see, then, that much of the subject matter of _Piers Plowman_ is also the subject matter of fourteenth century skepticism, and that Langland's preoccupation with questions pertaining to knowledge, salvation, and will may be said to reflect the general fourteenth century concern with these questions. More specifically, it appears that _Piers Plowman_ is basically Ockhamist in its theological orientation. Both the divine will and man's will are portrayed as having continuous and unlimited freedom. Thus, whether or not an individual achieves salvation is dependent on man's will to perform meritorious actions and on God's will to find his actions acceptable. For Langland, as for Ockham, it is the will, rather than a preceding supernatural habit, that moves man toward God; and it is God's will at the time He makes His de-

cision, rather than a predetermined order, that determines man's
ultimate fate. God's _potentia absoluta_ is the final arbiter.

But, while _Piers Plowman_ is concerned with establishing the
theoretical freedom of God and man, its primary concern seems to
be with the practical aspects of salvation, for given that man and
God are so free, then guidelines need to be set up to keep man from
despairing of ever reaching God. In other words, the poem reacts
to contemporary thought first by adopting the basic assumptions of
Ockhamism, and then by exploring the controversial issues engen-
dered by Ockham's position — for the purpose of rebuilding a co-
herent and unified theological framework and code for behavior.
Thus, when it comes to the "real world" of _Piers Plowman_, we find
the practical emphasis to be on order and certainty rather than on
potential disorder and uncertainty. The world depicted in the
poem is the world under God's _potentia ordinata_, in which true
faith and charity are certain to be rewarded with grace and sal-
vation.

Turning now to Chaucer's works, we find that he, too, touches
continually on controversial issues pertaining to knowledge, pre-
destination, and free will. Taking first his use of subject matter
relating to knowledge, we see that Chaucer discusses a variety of
aspects of the subject. As noted earlier, his _Proem_ to Book I of
The House of Fame discusses the possible causes and meanings of
dreams as sources of knowledge:

> For hyt is wonder, be the roode,
> To my wyt, what causeth swevenes
> Eyther on morwes or on evenes;
> And why th'effect folweth of somme,
> And of somme hit shal never come;
> Why that is an avisioun
> And this a revelacioun,
>
> . . . .
>
> Why this a fantome, why these oracles,
> I not; but whoso of these miracles
> The causes knoweth bet then I,
> Devyne he; for I certeinly
> Ne kan hem noght, ne never thinke
> To besily my wyt to swinke,
> To knowe of hir significaunce
> The gendres, neyther the distaunce
> Of tymes of hem, ne the causes,
> Or why this more then that cause is;
>
> (HF.I.2-20)

After going on to enumerate the various possible natural causes

(ll. 21-40), the narrator turns to a consideration of supernatural

ones:

> Or yf that spirites have the myght
> To make folk to dreme a-nyght;
> Or yf the soule, of propre kynde,
> Be so parfit, as men fynde,
> That yt forwot that ys to come,
> And that hyt warneth alle and some
> Of everych of her aventures
> Be avisions, or be figures,
> But that oure flessh ne hath no myght
> To understonde hyt aryght,
> For hyt is warned to derkly; —
>
> (HF.I.41-51)

While Chaucer goes to great lengths here to present all the

most important contemporary theories regarding the causes and

meanings of dreams,[5] he refuses to commit his narrator to a

definite opinion as to which one is correct: indeed, Chaucer has

his narrator admit that he is totally unable to cope with the com-

plexities of the problem which he himself has raised. In addition

to lines 2-3 and 12-17, already quoted, the narrator says:

> But why the cause is, noght wot I.
> Wel worthe, of this thyng, grete clerkys,
> That trete of this and other werkes;
> For I of noon opinion
> Nyl as now make mensyon,
> But oonly that the holy roode
> Turne us every drem to goode!
>
> (HF.I.52-58)

Here Chaucer introduces questions pertaining to the relation of

dreams to natural and supernatural knowledge as issues to be pon-

dered, but not resolved; this technique serves to focus the

reader's attention on the problem of epistemological uncertainty.

Chaucer deals with questions pertaining to dream knowledge in

other works, also. In The Parliament of Fowls, before launching

into a description of his dream of the elder Africanus, Chaucer's

narrator makes the comment that he cannot say whether or not his

dream occurred because he had just been reading about Scipio's

similar dream (PF.106-08). In Troilus and Criseyde and the Nun's

Priest's Tale respectively, the power of dreams to predict the

future is the subject of debate between Troilus and Pandarus and

between Chauntecleer and Pertelote. Even before Criseyde deserts

him, Troilus despairs and is afraid that he will die. He tells

Pandarus of his dreams, which he feels confirm his fears:

> For wele I fele, by my maladie,
> And by my dremes now and yore ago,
> Al certeynly that I mot nedes dye.
>
> (TC.V.316-18)

Pandarus, however, denies that dreams can foretell the future.

> "Thy swevenes ek and al swich fantasie
> Drif out, and lat hem foren to meschaunce;
> For they procede of thi malencolie,
> That doth the fele in slep al this penaunce.
> A straw for alle swevenes significaunce!
> God helpe me so, I counte hem nought a bene!
> Ther woot no man aright what dremes mene.
>   (TC.V.358-64)

Later, Troilus dreams of Criseyde, whom he sees with a boar

(TC.V.1238-41). He interprets this dream to mean that Criseyde

has betrayed him, but Pandarus still is skeptical. He argues:

> . . . Have I nat seyd er this,
> That dremes many a maner man bigile?
> And whi? For folk expounden hem amys.
> How darstow seyn that fals thy lady ys,
> For any drem, right for thyn owene drede?
> Lat be this thought; thow kanst no dremes rede.
>   (TC.V.1276-81)

This debate is concerned with a broader question than that of

whether dreams can foretell the future, or whether they are ac-

curate sources of knowledge about present reality. It also raises

a question concerning the criteria one uses in resolving such an

issue. We see that Pandarus maintains his antagonism to dream in-

terpretation until Troilus' interpretation has, in fact, been

shown to be true. Once the interpretation has passed the test of

experience, Pandarus is willing to accept it (TC.V.1723-25).

In the Nun's Priest's Tale we find a similar debate. Chaunte-

cleer and Pertelote have a long argument about dream interpretation

after Chauntecleer dreams that he has been caught by "daun Russell,"

the fox. Pertelote disparages his fear and refuses to take his

dream seriously.   She says:

> Allas! and konne ye been agast of swevenys?
> Nothyng, God woot, but vanitee in sweven is.
> Swevenes engendren of replecciouns,
> And ofte of fume and of complecciouns,
> Whan humours been to habundant in a wight.
> <div align="right">(NPT.VII.2921-25)</div>

Besides giving a number of natural explanations and remedies

for dreams and discounting their supernatural significance, Per-

telote turns to authority for support.   She quotes Cato as saying

"'Ne do no fors of dremes'" (NPT.VII.2941).   But Chauntecleer

counters with men of "moore auctorite" who claim that "dremes

been significaciouns / As wel of joye as of tribulaciouns" and who

base their claims, ultimately, on experience (NPT.VII.2974-80).

Here again, Chaucer is dealing not only with dream knowledge itself,

but with the different kinds of arguments that may be used to

support a point of view.

In The House of Fame Chaucer concentrates particularly on

natural modes of knowledge and criteria for judging their relia-

bility.   After his discussion of dreams the narrator takes up the

question of appearances; Book I is largely a recounting of the

downfalls of people who had been taken in by appearances.   Begin-

ning with the destruction of Troy (HF.151-56), the narrator con-

tinues with the story of Dido and Aeneas, commenting after Dido's

betrayal:

> Allas! what harm doth apparence,
> Whan hit is fals in existence!

> For he to hir a traytour was;
> Wherefore she slow hirself, allas!
> Loo, how a woman doth amys
> To love him that unknowen ys!
> For, be Cryste, lo, thus yt fareth:
> "Hyt is not al gold that glareth."
>   (HF.I.265-72)

He goes on to warn against trusting in appearance without
experience, and cites the proverb "'he that fully knoweth th'erbe /
May saufly leye hyt to his ye'" (HF.I.276-91). Book I ends with
the narrator's sighting of the eagle, with whom he then flies off
to learn at first hand of the "tydynges" which, before, he could
only have known from books.

During their flight, in Book II, the eagle offers to prove
"by experience" that speech, being sound, has a similar "kyndely
enclyning upward toward the House of Fame. Here we see raised the
issue of empiricism vs. rational argument. The eagle is anxious
to prove his case

> . . . symply,
> Withoute any subtilite
> Of speche, or gret prolixite
> Of termes of philosophie,
> Of figures of poetrie,
> Or colours of rethorike . . .
>   (HF.II.854-58)

"Geffrey," however, although impressed by what the eagle shows him
of the natural universe, ultimately prefers the wisdom of his an-
cient authorities, who had known, seemingly without empirical or
philosophical proof, that the universe actually was as he now is see-
ing it. He does not seem convinced that what his senses now perceive.

is truly significant, even though it is spectacular (HF.II.979-1017). At the end of Book II "Geffrey" is left alone at the House of Fame to continue his search for information.

In Book III Chaucer approaches the subject of knowledge from a different angle, dwelling on the possible unreliability of all information which has not stood the test of time; and even here he leaves room for doubt by having the narrator comment that among the bearers of Troy's fame there is "a litil envye" toward Homer. One bearer

> . . . seyde that Omer made lyes,
> Feynynge in hys poetries,
> And was to Grekes favorable;
> Therefor held he hyt but fable.
> (HF.III.1477-80)

Chaucer casts a similar doubt upon the reliability of traditional authority when, in the Monk's Tale, he has the monk gratuitously question the accuracy of the stories describing Caesar's death:

> . . . false Brutus and /Caesar's/ othere foon,
> . . . stiked /Caesar/ with boydekyns anoon
> With many a wounde, and thus they lete hym lye;
> But nevere gronte he at no strook but oon,
> Or elles at two, but if his storie lye.
> (MkT.VII.2706-10)

Turning now to the Wife of Bath's Prologue, we find discussed the question of knowledge and its relation to proper moral and social behavior. The Wife plunges immediately into the point at issue: experience vs. authority; and how one interprets the lessons taught by each. The opening part of her Prologue forms a justification for her desire for a sixth husband, and, by her own

interpretations of the Bible passages which she quotes, the Wife
is able to show that nowhere prohibits more than five marriages, and
that marriage itself is the best possible state for some people
(WBP.III.1-115). The Wife also raises and resolves a question in
which religious authority and natural experience seemingly con-
flict. She takes up the question of the purpose of human re-
productive organs:

> Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and doun,
> That they were maked for purgacioun
> Of uryne, and oure both thynges smale
> Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,
> And for noon oother cause,—say ye no?
> The experience woot wel it is noght so.
> So the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,
> I sey this, that they maked ben for bothe,
> This is to seye, for office, and for ese
> Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese.
>   (WBP.III.119-28)

Later, the Wife begins an exposition of her theory of marriage
with a statement about her own qualifications. Her own experience
gives her the authority to speak to the others about the subject,
although as a way of convincing her audience that experience is
important, she quotes an authority — Ptolemy — who, she says,
warned that "'whoso that nyl be war by othere men, / By hym shul
othere men corrected be.'" (WBP.III.180-81).

It is interesting to note that before their reconciliation,
the Wife's last husband had reproached her constantly: not neces-
sarily for her own behavior, but for what various authorities had
written about other women's faults. Jankyn had made a practice of

ferreting out information on wicked wives from religious, classical,
and mythological sources; and this practice, combined with his
constant use of anti-feminist proverbs, had infuriated the Wife.
When she finally rebelled against Jankyn's treatment, it was his
book of authorities that she attacked first, and it was this book
that she finally made him burn (WBP.III.628-816).

Although Chaucer has the Wife of Bath admit that her state-
ments about marriage should not be taken completely seriously
(WBP.III.189-92), the issues which she raises regarding criteria
for judging sources of knowledge are still important ones. In
particular, we see experience presented here as a possible alterna-
tive to authority, even in doctrinal matters.

In the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women the issue of
physical proof of supernatural phenomena is raised, as well as the
question of the authority of books. Text F begins:

> A thousand tymes have I herd men telle
> That ther ys joy in hevene and peyne in helle,
> And I acorde wel that it ys so;
> But, natheles, yet wot I wel also
> That ther nis noon dwellyng in this contree,
> That eyther hath in hevene or helle ybe,
> Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen,
> But as he hath herd seyd, or founde it writen;
> For by assay ther may no man it preve.
> But God forbede but men shulde leve
> Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!
> Men shal not wenen everything a lye
> But yf himself yt seeth, or elles dooth;
> For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth,
> Thogh every wight ne may it nat ysee.
> . . . .
> Than mote we to bokes that we fynde,
> Thurgh whiche that olde thinges ben in mynde,

> And to the doctrine of these olde wyse,
> Yeve credence, in every skylful wise,
> That tellen of these olde appreved stories
> Of holynesse, of regnes, of victories,
> Of love, of hate, of other sondry thynges,
> . . . .
> Wel ought us thanne honouren and beleve
> These bokes, there we han noon other preve.
> (LGW.F.1-28)

Similarly, the question of what constitutes proof of supernatural

truth is raised in the Second Nun's Tale. Valerian learns that in

matters of faith, physical proof must follow from belief rather than

the other way around (SecNT.162-234).

Just as several of Chaucer's works reflect his interest in

epistemological questions, so also do they reflect his interest in

questions pertaining to predestination and free will. Chaucer

takes up various facets of this issue: one of these is the

problem of evil. If God is both omniscient and omnipotent, then

how can evil be explained?

Dorigen, in the Franklin's Tale, asks why God allows evil

to exist:

> "Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
> Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
> In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make.
> But, Lord, these grisly feendly rokkes blake,
> That semen rather a foul confusion
> Of werke than any fair creacion
> Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
> Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?
> For by this werk, south, north, ne west, ne eest,
> Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest;
> It dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth.
> Se ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?
> An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde

> Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat be in mynde,
> Which mankynde is so fair part of thy werk
> That thou it madest lyk to thyn owene merk.
> Thanne semed it ye hadde a greet chiertee
> Toward mankynde; but how thanne may it bee
> That he swiche meenes make it to destroyen,
> Which meenes do no good, but evere anoyen?
> (FranklT.V.865-84)

Similarly, Palamon, in the Knight's Tale, questions why the gods allow innocent men to suffer, and why man, who must submit his will to God's, may still be punished eternally, whereas beasts, who are not bound to follow God's will, feel no pain after death (KnT.I.1303-21).

After finishing his tale of Griselda, who remained patient in the face of adversity, the clerk concludes that God sends misfortunes to people for their own betterment. God, he says,

> . . . suffereth us, as for oure exercise,
> With sharp scourges of adversitee
> Ful ofte to be bete in sondry wise;
> Nat for to knowe oure wyl, for certes he,
> Er we were born, knew al our freletee;
> And for oure beste is al his governaunce.
> Lat us thanne lyve in vertuous suffraunce.
> (ClT.IV.1156-62)

Here, as in the following lines, which begin the Legend of Philomela in The Legend of Good Women, Chaucer raises the question of reconciling God's foreknowledge with the existence of evil:

> Thow yevere of the formes, that hast wrought
> This fayre world, and bar it in thy thought
> Eternaly, er thow thy werk begyn,
> Why madest thow, unto the slaunder of man,
> Or, al be that it was nat thy doing,
> As for that fyn, to make swich a thyng,
> Whi sufferest thow that Tereus was bore,

That is in love so fals and so forswore,
That fro this world up to the first hevene
Corrumpeth, whan that folk his name nevene?
(LGW.2228-37)

In Chaucer's poetry, as well as in Langland's, we find reference made to the problem of the righteous heathen. In the Knight's Tale the Knight remarks that he cannot be sure where Arcite's soul went after he died; and that he leaves the resolution of the question up to the theologians (KnT.I.2809-14).

In several instances, Chaucer's subject matter concerns the question of reconciling God's foreknowledge and supreme power with man's free will. This question often is raised in conneetion with the ability of astrology to determine or predict events.[6]

The Man of Law comments, in his tale, that the Sultan's death, which resulted from his love for Custance, was written in the stars from the time of his birth, and that

. . . in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
Is writen, God woot, whoso koude it rede,
The deeth of every man, withouten drede.
(MLT.II.194-96)

The Man of Law also blames the position of the stars at the outset of Custance's voyage for the tragedy that follows; and he questions whether the tragedy could have been averted if an astrologer had been consulted before the trip.

Imprudent Emperour of Rome, allas!
Was ther no philosophre in al thy toun?
Is no tyme bet than oother in swich cas?
Of viage is ther noon eleccioun,
Namely to folk of heigh condicioun?

Noght whan a roote is of a burthe yknowe?
Allas, we been to lewed or to slowe!
                              (MLT.II.309-15)

The Wife of Bath claims that her lusty temperament is deter-
mined by the stars, and that she is powerless to counter their
influence:

    For certes, I am al Venerien
    In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
    Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
    And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
    Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
    Allas! allas! that evere love was synne!
    I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
    By vertu of my constellacioun;
                              (WBP.III.609-16)

In Troilus and Criseyde the influence of astrology is ever-
present, as it also is in the Knight's Tale. Pandarus makes use of
astrology to bring Troilus and Criseyde together. The first time
he visits Criseyde for the purpose of telling her about Troilus,
Pandarus makes certain, in advance, that the astrological conditions
are favorable for his visit (TC.II.74-76). Later, when Criseyde
sees Troilus ride by her window and begins to fall in love with him,
the narrator explains Troilus' good fortune in astrological terms:
Venus, in her "seventh hous of hevene" is "disposed wel" toward
Troilus (TC.II.680-82). The day was predestined to be a lucky one
for him (TC.II.621-23). In Book III Pandarus very carefully uses
astrology to determine the most auspicious time for the lovers to
meet at his house (TC.III.519-25); in Book IV, after being told that
she must leave Troy, Criseyde is convinced that her miserable state

results from her having been born "in corsed constellacioun"
(TC.IV.745).

We also see Calchas' accurate predictions of the destruction
of Troy, which he arrives at by means of "astronomye" and "augurye"
(TC.IV.113-19). And, the determinism that pervades Troilus and
Criseyde becomes, itself, the subject of debate in Troilus' long
soliloquy on predestination and free will in Book IV, in which he
considers the question in fourteenth century terms:

> "But natheles, allas! whom shal I leeve?
> For ther ben grete clerkes many oon,
> That destyne thorugh argumentes preve;
> And som men seyn that, nedely, ther is noon,
> But that fre chois is yeven us everychon.
> O, welaway! so sleighe arn clerkes olde,
> That I not whos opynyoun I may holde.
>   (TC.IV.967-73)

In the Nun's Priest's Tale we find the Nun's Priest referring
directly to "Bisshop Bradwardyn" in his discussion of free will
and predestination. Was Chauntecleer predestined to be caught by
the fox, or could he have prevented his capture by acting on the
warning of his dream? The Priest exclaims:

> O Chauntecleer, accursed be that morwe
> That thou into that yerd flaugh fro the bemes!
> Thou were ful wel ywarned by thy dremes
> That thilke day was perilous to thee;
> But what that God forwoot moot nedes bee,
> After the opinioun of certein clerkis.
> Witnesse on hym that any parfit clerk is,
> That in scole is greet altercacioun
> In this mateere, and greet disputisoun,
> And hath been of an hundred thousand men.
> But I ne kan nat bulte it to the bren
> As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn,

> Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn,
> Wheither that Goddes worthy forwityng
> Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thyng,---
> "Nedely" clepe I symple necessitee;
> Or elles, if free choys be graunted me
> To do that same thyng, or do it noght,
> Though God forwoot it er that it was wroght;
> Or if his wityng streyneth never a deel
> But by necessitee condicioneel.
>
> (NPT.VII.3230-50)

Ultimately, for Chaucer as well as for Langland, the questions raised regarding the reasons for God's willing one thing over another must remain unanswered. Thus in the Man of Law's Tale we are told that man cannot know God's reasons -- he can only trust in God's will. Custance, saved from the slaughter at the wicked Sultaness' feast, sets out alone in a "steereless" ship. The Man of Law comments:

> Men myghten asken why she was nat slayn
> Eek at the feeste? who myghte hir body save?
> And I answere to that demande agayn,
> Who saved Danyel in the horrible cave
> Ther every wight save he, maister and knave,
> Was with the leon frete er he asterte?
> No wight but God, that he bar in his herte.
>
> (MLT.II.470-76)

Dorigen, although not willing to accept without protest the presence of the rocks which have caused so many deaths, nevertheless admits that no one can explain why God lets them exist; and she prays to God to keep her husband safe from them:

> I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
> By argumentz, that al is for the beste,
> Though I ne kan the 'causes nat yknowe.
> But thilke God that made wynd to blowe
> As kepe my lord! this is my conclusion.

To clerkes lete I al disputison.

(FranklT.V.885-90)

In the Knight's Tale Palamon ends his questioning of God's ways by leaving the problem in the hands of the "dyvynys" (KnT.I.1323-24). And, toward the end of Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator voices his belief that all that man may ask of God is the ability to accept his fate graciously (TC.V.1749-50).

Although Chaucer's poetry contains fewer explicit references to the issues of fourteenth century skepticism than does Langland's, as well as little apparent attempt at their resolution, Chaucer's interest in these issues is evident in the many references to them that he does make. Indeed, it is significant that in Chaucer's poetry there are as many references to contemporary philosophical and theological issues as in fact there are, for Chaucer, unlike Langland, did not claim to be writing theological poetry.[7] The next two chapters will explore the ways in which both of these authors use structural devices to implicitly support and reflect their explicit reactions to the issues of fourteenth century skepticism which they raise in their poetry.

NOTES

[1] A recent study of contemporary theological issues in Langland and Chaucer, especially with regard to grace and merit, is John McNamara, "Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the Pearl-poet, Langland, and Chaucer," Diss. Louisiana State Univ., 1968. Two other writers who deal generally with these issues in Langland and Chaucer are, respectively, Greta Hort, Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, n. d.) and Mary Edith Thomas, Medieval Skepticism and Chaucer (New York: Frederick, 1950).

[2] William Langland, The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, ed. Walter W. Skeat (1886; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), II. All references to and quotations from Piers Plowman will be based upon the B text of this edition.

[3] Geoffrey Chaucer, the Nun's Priest's Tale, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1957). All references and quotations from Chaucer's works will be based upon this edition.

[4] See Hort, pp. 142-47. Hort contrasts the confessions of Meed and The Seven Deadly Sins as "bad" vs. "model" confessions.

[5] See Robinson's note on Chaucer's use of contemporary dream theory in Chaucer, p. 779.

[6] One might note here Thomas Bradwardine's opinion of astrological determinism: "Bradwardine rejects out of hand all necessity, either astral coercion, natural compulsion, or the psychological enticement from other creatures, as moving man. /Man's/ freedom of will comes from his primacy over all other creatures and blind forces. In all natural affairs he can act or not act: nothing created can force him to do good or to sin. . . . It is alone in man's relations with God that he is in any way directed." (De Causa Dei, pp. 449, 454, 527; cited in Gordon Leff, Bradwardine and the Pelagians (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1957), p. 93.

[7] See Piers Plowman, XII. 16-29.

III. INFLUENCES OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY SKEPTICISM
ON STRUCTURE: PIERS PLOWMAN

Underlying the skepticism engendered by Ockhamist thought
was, as we have seen, the principle of uncertainty: theological
uncertainty due to the unknown and unknowable nature of God's
potentia absoluta; and epistemological uncertainty resulting from
Ockham's dissolution of all necessary connecting links between
cause and effect in the created world as well as in the world
known only by faith. As Chapter II has sought to point out, there
is a close correspondence between the explicit theological and
epistemological issues stemming from this uncertainty and the
issues which both Langland and Chaucer made the subject matter of
much of their poetry. In fact, in the case of Piers Plowman, the
subject of this chapter, it may be said that the poem's primary
thematic concern is with resolving theological, epistemological,
and moral uncertainties, and with re-establishing a basis for order
and unity in these major areas of man's life.[1]

Once an overt parallel between the conceptual world of the
poem and an important aspect of the actual conceptual world of its
time has been established, one may reasonably view the fictional
world in terms of how it implicitly, as well as explicitly, reflects

the actual conceptual realm which it parallels. And, just as the explicit treatment of contemporary issues in _Piers Plowman_ reflects implicit assumptions regarding the nature of reality, so also does the explicit commentary in the poem gain support from underlying structural or organizational devices, which themselves reflect an implicit point of view, and which are designed to add validity to the ideas the poem is advocating. This chapter will take up two aspects of the relation between structure and contemporary skepticism in _Piers Plowman_: first, it will discuss the ways in which the poem's structure is influenced by contemporary epistemological and theological uncertainty, and second, it will deal with the ways in which structural devices are used to reinforce the poem's explicit message of unity and order.

One of the major organizing principles of the poem is Will's quest for truth, which largely involves clarifying the proper functions of different sources of knowledge. For, although truth is defined for Will by the personification Holy Church as early in the poem as Passus I (11. 140-47), Will must hear the same definition from personifications representing all modes of knowledge before he can be said to comprehend truth's meaning. The form of the quest, then, constitutes the structural basis for Will's instruction in the meaning of truth; and it reflects contemporary epistemological uncertainty in two senses: first, the form of the quest implies that there are major questions about

the nature of theological truth which need re-examination and
resolution, and second, it implies that there needs to be a
re-evaluation of what constitutes the proper authorities on truth;
in other words, it reflects the question: how does one determine
which modes of knowledge can be trusted?

In these two senses, then, the quest as a structural device
reflects the epistemological uncertainty with which the poem is
concerned. Langland, however, not only raises questions in Piers
Plowman, he also answers them; and the resolutions which the poem
explicitly puts forth can also be seen reflected in the structure
of the quest.

As Chapter II has suggested (pp.72-73), Piers Plowman deals
explicitly with two important levels of contemporary thought: the
theoretical and the practical. On the theoretical level the
poem's theological orientation appears to reflect an Ockhamist
point of view: heavy emphasis is placed on the transcendental
freedom of God's will and on the idea that along with God's will,
man's free will is the most important factor determining his future
salvation. Grace, although shown to be important under God's
potentia ordinata, is still portrayed as following from merit
rather than as necessarily preceding it. This basically Ockhamist
resolution to the theological issues which the poem raises can
also be seen reflected in the idea of the quest; for underlying
Will's pursuit of truth is the assumption that in reaching out to

God voluntarily, and in searching for accurate knowledge of His will, the individual is influencing his own future destiny. The quest as a structural device acts implicitly to support the poem's explicit rejection of the Bradwardinian view that the unaided will cannot initiate meritorious actions, and that salvation depends not on the knowledge or practice of truth, but solely on God's arbitrary bestowal of His grace.

When we look at the practical level, which is the level the poem focuses on most directly and urgently, however, we are faced with what seems to be a contradiction. For, although the theoretical basis of the poem's resolutions of contemporary issues is decidedly Ockhamist in orientation—which would imply epistemological uncertainty and disorder—the nature of the practical conceptual world portrayed in the poem is absolutely certain and highly ordered. The poem affirms throughout that truth has one meaning—charity—which in practice means to love God and one's fellow man; it also explicitly clarifies the exact functions of the major vehicles by which natural and supernatural truth may be known, as well as where each of them fits within the total range of knowledge available to man. Furthermore, since the poem establishes that man can have reliable knowledge of supernatural truth, then other consistent interrelationships, such as the interrelations between cause and effect or, actions and rewards, are also shown to exist within its conceptual scheme.

Here, too, we see another implicit function of the quest: as a frame for Will's pursuit of truth, the quest reflects the assumption that a search for truth which explores a variety of modes of knowledge and realms of experience is a viable approach to the problem of resolving theological uncertainty: this underlying assumption supports the highly ordered and unified conceptual world which the poem propounds explicitly as a viable ideal, yet it appears to contradict Ockhamist principles rather than reflect them.

The distinction between the theoretical and practical levels is important, however, because it may be said to represent the distinction between the roles of God and man within the total divine scheme. Both God and man may be essentially free, but man has an obligation to God which God does not have toward man. Thus, Piers Plowman, which is intended for man's edification, is more concerned with dispelling uncertainties and clearing the path to God than it is with stressing God's unapproachability. It is also possible that the poem is trying to mediate between the two extremes of radical Ockhamism and conservative neo-Augustinianism, both of which were in full force by the 1370's, when Langland presumably wrote Piers Plowman.[2] If this were the case, it would not be inconsistent for Langland to stress, as he does, both the complete certainty of the truths of revelation under God's potentia ordinata and man's freedom from any predetermination of his fate.

While leaving room in his conceptual system for the unhampered operation of God's _potentia absoluta_, then, Langland creates a fictional world in _Piers Plowman_ which represents the "ideal" conceptual real world under God's _potentia ordinata_, and, as such, it represents a perfectly unified and consistent conceptual order.

The unity and consistency of the poem's conceptual order are complementary and, as it is conjectured here, reflect a contemporary need to combat epistemological uncertainty by reaffirming the objective as well as subjective truth of Christian revelation: this involves reasserting the traditional roles of Scripture and Church, and including man's reason in the search for truth. Although the claim is never made in the poem that man can, with his unaided reason comprehend supernatural truth, the poem asserts, both explicitly and implicitly, as we shall see, that man's reason has a part to play in helping him to reach God's will as it is manifested through His revelation _de potentia ordinata_. In other words, reason has an important part to play, but only in so far as it is used to discover God's word—the only aspect of God that man can know. The use of reason in this sense is far removed from the Thomistic use of reason, in which reason was seen as being capable of directly grasping a glimmer of God's essence (see Chapter I, pp. 7-10). In _Piers Plowman_ reason is totally subservient to faith; yet Langland heightens the sense of unity, consistency, and objectivity which he wishes to convey by making a

point of showing how reason and faith work together in order to help man better obey God's will.

When we look at the ways in which the poem's explicit order is supported by underlying structural devices, we see that Langland implicitly reinforces the idea that there is one central truth and that to varying degrees all modes of knowledge incline man toward that truth by having Will meet personifications drawn from all realms of knowledge and experience, all of whom preach the same essential truth while recognizing, at the same time, the limitations or boundaries of the modes which they personify.

Thus, as we noted earlier, the personification Holy Church is the first instructor Will meets, and she is the first of several to explain to him that the truth he seeks is divine love, or charity, which grows naturally in the human heart and is the key to grace and salvation. At the same time, she provides an implicit clarification of the relationship between the two authorities, the Scripture and the Church. She appeals to the authority of the Scripture in her first definition of truth, and, in so doing, indicates that she is ultimately dependent on the Scripture for her own knowledge of truth:

> 'Whan alle tresores aren tried,' . . . 'trewthe is the best;
> I do it on _deus caritas_ . to deme the sothe;
> It is as derworth a drewery . as dere god hym-seluen.
>   Who-so is trew of his tonge . and telleth none other,
> And doth the werkis ther-with . and wilneth no man ille,
> He is a god bi the gospel . agrounde and aloft,
> And ylike to owre lord . bi soynte Lukes wordes.
> <div align="right">(I.85-91)</div>

Next, by revealing her own limitations, she clarifies the role

that free will plays in bringing man to glory. She warns that the

Church cannot automatically save someone who does not choose to

practice charity:

> For thou₃ ₃e be trewe of ₃owre tonge • and trewliche wynne,
> And as chaste as a childe • that in cherche wepeth,
> But if ₃e louen lelliche • and lene the poure,
> Such good as god ₃ow sent • godelich parteth,
> ₃e ne haue na more meryte • in masse ne in houres,
> Than Malkyn of hire maydenhode • that no man desireth.
>
> (I.177-82)

In Passus I, then, we are given an implicit definition of the

role of the Church. She is presented as being important for the

interpretation of truth, since she is the first-personification

chosen by Langland to explain the truth to Will and to inform him

of his own natural inclination toward it. In fact, it must be

Will's natural inclination which brings on his vision of Lady Holy

Church at the beginning of Passus I, for he sees and talks with

her in his dream without knowing at first who she is. Though not

the original source of truth, then, the Church is still a necessary

authority, for, as we see in Passus I, Will's "natural inclination"

needs to be guided by the Church's counsel. Furthermore, in

proclaiming her own limitations, Lady Holy Church is revealing the

implicit assumption that there is a larger conceptual scheme which

cannot be encompassed by any one aspect of it: a system composed

of interlocking parts, all of which are necessary for bringing man

to truth.

As Will pursues his quest, the other instructors he meets seem also, like Lady Holy Church, to speak from a double perspective. They all have the same understanding of the overall meaning of truth, but each one also represents a particular way of viewing the truth that is limited and of greater or lesser importance within the total epistemological scheme. Thus, the two friars who speak with Will at the beginning of Passus VIII tell him that only charity can keep man from mortal sin (11. 27-56), but their insistence on the idea that truth can coexist with venial sin shows that they are speaking from the practical perspective of human fallibility. Thought and Witte, whom Will meets next in Passus VIII and IX respectively, do little more than give as many definitions of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest as they can think of; yet their definitions are entirely compatible with what is shown, throughout the poem, to be charitable behavior. Witte ends Passus IX, for instance, with the definitions:

> Dowel . . . is . to don as lawe techeth,
> To loue thi frende and thi foo . leue me, that is Dobet.
> To ziuen and to zemen · both zonge and olde,
> To helen and helpen·is to Dobest of alle.
> And Dowel is to drede god · and Dobet to suffre,
> And so cometh Dobest of bothe . and bryngeth adoun the mody,
> And that is wikked Wille · that many worke shendeth,
> And Dryueth away Dowel · thorugh dedliche synnes.'
> (IX.199-206)

Witte also implicitly assumes the authority of the Bible, and uses it both to back up his own pronouncements and as a source of knowledge. Thus, in one of his definitions of Dobest, Witte states:

He doth best, that with-draweth hym . by day and by ny3te
To spille any speche . or any space of tyme;
    Qui offendit in vno, in omnibus est reus.
                                (IX.96-97)

And, in explaining to Will God's creation of man, he speaks on

Biblical authority:

Ri3te as a lorde make lettres . and hym lakked parchemyn,
Though he couth write neuere so wel . 3if he had no penne,
The lettres for al the lordship . I leue, were neuere ymaked.
  And so it semeth bi hym . as the bible telleth,
    .There he seyde, dixit et facta sunt,
He moste worche with his worde . and his witte shewe.
                              (IX.38-42)

Lady Study, the next personification Will encounters,

denounces the misdirected uses to which study has been put (see

Chapter II, _p. 56); and she admits that although she originated

all the other branches of study, she cannot master theology. But,

she concludes, even theology is useless without love; only the

practice of charity can heal the soul (X. 168-206). Dame Study,

too, makes a plea for more attention to be paid to the Holy writings;

and she denounces the lack of charity among the people, supporting

her statements with Biblical quotations:

Iob the gentel . in his gestes witnesseth,
That wikked men, thei welden . the welthe of this worlde,
And that thei ben lordes of eche a londe . that out of lawe
                                  libbeth;
    Quare impij viuunt? bene est omnibus, qui preuaricantur
                                et inioue agunt?
The sauter seyth the same . bi suche that don ille,
    Ecce ipsi peccatores habuntantes; in seculo optinuerunt
                                  diuicias.
"Lo!" seith holy letturure . "whiche lordes beth this shrewes!"
Thilke that god moste gyueth . leste good thei deleth,
And moste vnkynde to the commune . that moste catel weldeth;

> Que perfecisti, destruxerunt; iustus autem quid fecit?
> Harlotes for her harlotrye • may haue of her godis,
> And Iaperes and Iogeloures • and Iangelers of gestes.
>   Ac he that hath holy writte • ay in his mouth,
> And can telle of Tobye • and of the twelue apostles,
> Or prechen of the penaunce • that Pilat wrou3t
> To Iesu the gentil . . .
> Litel is he loued • that suche a lessoun scheweth,
> Or daunted or drawe forth • I do it on god hym-self!
> <div align="right">(X.23-37)</div>

Next, Clergy unquestioningly refers to the Bible as the direct

source of God's word. Discussing the Trinity, he says:

> Austyn the olde • here-of he made bokes,
> And hym-self ordeyned • to sadde vs in bileue.
> Who was his autour? • alle the foure euangelistes;
> And Cryst clepid hym-self so • the ewangelistes bereth witnesse:—
>   Ego in patre et pater in me est; et, qui videt me, videt
>   et Patrem meum.
> <div align="right">(X.241-44)</div>

Clergy is so incensed at the lack of charity, even in those

who are learned in the Bible, that his instructions to Will are

more concerned with faith and love than with learning. He

castigates the monks who reject the monastic life, in which learning

and love ideally go hand in hand, for the worldly life; these

monks will be punished for living selfishly rather than charitably

(X. 292-325); and he criticizes the clergy for not practicing what

they preach (X. 266-84). Dowel, he explains, comes of faith, and

not reason:

> /Dowel/ is a comune lyf,' . . . 'on holycherche to bileue,
> With alle the artikles of the feith that falleth to be knowe.
> And that is to bileue lelly • bothe lered and lewed,
> On the grete god • that gynnying had neuere,
> And on the soth faste sone • that saued mankynde
> •

Thorwgh the helpe of the holy goste . . .
. . . .
Alle the clerkes vnder Cryst · ne couthe /the doctrine of the
                                        Trinity/ assoille,
But thus it bilongeth to bileue · to lewed that willen Dowel.
For had neuere freke wytte · the feyth to dispute,
Ne man had no merite · my3te it ben yproued: . . .
                                          (X.230-48)

And, in his definition of Dobet and Dobest, Clergy emphasizes the

importance of practicing truth:

    Thanne is Dobet to suffre · for thi soules helth,
Al that the boke bit · by holycherche techyng;
And that is—"man, bi thi mi3te · for mercies sake,
Loke thow worche it in werke · that thi worde sheweth;
Suche as thow semest in sy3te · be in assay y-founde; . . .
And lat nobody be · bi thi beryng bygyled,
But be such in thi soule · as thow semest with-oute."
    Thanne is Dobest to be bolde · to blame the gylty,
Sithenes thow seest thi-self · as in soule clene;
Ac blame thow neuere body · and thow be blame-worthy: . . .
                                          (X.249-260)

Clergy's teaching, then, also embraces both the knowledge of an

absolute, transcendent truth, and an awareness of the relative

value of his own participation in this truth.

    Next, Scripture herself takes over Will's instruction. She

states that the only way to truth is by having faith, loving God

and man, and practicing charity:

    . . . who-so wolde and wylneth · with Chryste to aryse, . . .
He shulde louye and leue · and the lawe fulfill.
That is—"loue thi lorde god · leuest aboue alle,
And after, alle Crystene creatures · in commune, eche man other;"
And thus bilongeth to louye · that leueth to be saued.
And but we do thus in dede · ar the daye of dome,
It shal bisitten vs ful soure . . .
                                          (X.355-61)

Will, however, rejects Scripture's teaching, and with it, all
intellectual attempts to arrive at truth: so far, he is aware
only of their limitations. He argues first, that man's fate is
predestined (X. 375-77), and, then, that the less a man knows, the
purer is his faith, and the less he sins; thus, Will concludes,
learning is an obstacle to salvation (X. 378-474). At this point,
the scene of Will's vision shifts to the world of natural   *
experience.

In Passus XI Will experiences the uncertainty of life under
the rule of Fortune, who deserts him when he reaches old age.
After this, Scripture reappears preaching:

'Multi to a maungerye • and to the mete were sompned,
And whan the peple was plenere comen • the porter vnpynned the
                                                      ȝate,
And plukked in pauci priueliche • and lete the remenaunt go
                                                   rowme!'
(XI.107-09)

This time Will takes Scripture's words seriously, for he relates
them to his own case, fearing, for the first time, that he may not
be saved (XI. 110-12).

Up until Passus XI and his experience with Fortune, Will's
quest has taken place on an intellectual level; although
intellectually Will has learned the same truth from his various
instructors, it is not until he actually experiences the fear of
being damned for not having lived a life of charity that he begins
to be truly receptive to their teaching. The implicit assumption

here, then, is that real awareness of even supernatural truth must have as its beginning an actual experience in the empirical world; the individual needs an intuitive experience before he can form judgments regarding its meaning.

What follows Will's experience in the real world, and his subsequent response to Scripture's words, is, in fact, a reawakening of his "natural inclination," for the next personification he meets is Kynde, or Nature, who, Will says,

> . . . nempned me by my name . and bad nymen hede,
> And thorw the wondres of this worlde . wytte for to take.
> And on a mountaigne that Mydelerd hy3te . as me tho thou3te,
> I was fette forth . by ensaumples to knowe,
> Thorugh eche a creature and Kynde . my creatoure to louye.
>
> (XI.313-17)

But Will's quest becomes momentarily sidetracked when he starts reacting to Nature's wonders by questioning God's ways instead of simply accepting them. In Passus XI, after Will sees the wonders of nature, he criticizes Reason for taking care of all creatures except man. Reason replies that what he does is none of Will's business and that man is not supposed to question God's ways, but to accept them. Reason, too, takes the Bible as his authority:

> Holy writ,' . . . 'wisseth men to suffre;
> Propter deum subiecti estote omni creature.
> . . . .
> The wyse and the witty . wrote thus in the bible,
> De re que to non molestat, noli cortare.
> For be a man faire or foule . it falleth nou3te for to lakke
> The shappe ne the shafte . that god shope hym-selue;
> For al that he did was wel ydo . as holywrit witnesseth,
> Et vidit deus cuncta que fecerat, et erant valde bona;
>
> (XI.374-88)

Will, rebuked by Reason, who also knows the limitations of the
concept he represents, next becomes aware of Imaginatif.

Imaginatif, like Will's other instructors, asserts the same
unvarying truth: "Faith, hope, and charitee . . . alle ben good /
And sauen men sundry tymes · ac none so sone as charite" (XII. 31-
32). But, whereas so far Will has seen only the extent of the gap
that exists between knowledge based on faith and knowledge based
on reason, from Imaginatif's teaching he now learns how this gap
may be bridged. Imaginatif teaches him that the holy writings are
the link between reason and faith, making explicit what all along
had been implicitly evident. He explains that the divinely
inspired Scriptures provide man with the essential knowledge he
needs in order to be led to truth, which exists on earth under the
guardianship of the Church:

> Al-though men made bokes · god was the maistre,
> And seynt spirit the saumplarye · and seide what men sholde write.
> . . . .
> And as a blynde man in bataille · bereth wepne to fiȝte,
> And hath none happ with his axe · his enemye to hitte,
> Namore kan a kynde-witted man · but clerkes hym teche,
> Come for al his kynde witte · to Crystendome and be saued;
> Which is the coffre of Crystes tresor · and clerkes kepe the
>   keyes,
>   (XII.103-11)

The personifications who represent intellectual faculties are
not the only ones who rely on Scriptural authority, or who preach
that truth is charity. In Passus VI, when Piers calls on Hunger
to help him keep people under control, Hunger offers the following
advice:

> And if thow fynde any freke . that fortune hath appeyred,
> Or any maner fals men . fonde thow suche to cnowe;
> Conforte hem with thi catel . for Crystes loue of heuene,
> Loue hem and lene hem . so lawe of god techeth:—
>   <u>Alter alterius onera portate.</u>
> And alle maner of men . that thow my$_3$te asspye,
> That nedy ben, and nau$_3$ty . helpe hem with thi godis,
> Loue hem and lakke hem nou$_3$te . late god take the veniaunce;
> Theigh thei done yuel . late thow god y-worthe:—
>   <u>Michi vindictam, et ego retribaum.</u>
> And if thow wilt be graciouse to god . do as the gospel techeth,
> And biloue the amonges low men . so shaltow lacche grace,
>   <u>Facite vobis amicos de mamona iniquitatis.</u>'
>   (VI.221-30)

Similarly, at the end of the poem, as Unity is being attacked by
the forces of evil, Will encounters the personification Nature,
who advises him to

> . . . wende in-to Vnite,
> And holde the there eure . tyl I sende for the,
> . . . .
> 'Lerne to loue,' . . . 'and leue of alle othre.'
> . . . .
> And thow loue lelly,' . . . 'lakke shal the neure
> Mete ne worldly wede . whil thi lyf lasteth.'
>   (XX.203-10)

In Passus XI Lewte (Good Faith or Loyalty), who represents Will's
reawakened natural inclination after his experience with Fortune,
advises Will to speak out against the friars who have deserted him
in his old age. Lewte tacitly accepts the authority of Scripture
in his counsel:

> '$_3$e, bi Peter and bi Poule,' . . . take hem bothe to witnesse,
>   <u>Non oderis fratres secrete in corde tuo, set publice</u>
>   <u>argue illos.</u>'
> . . . .
>   'And wher-of serueth lawe,' . . . 'if no lyf vndertoke it,
> Falsenesse ne faytrye? . for sumwhat the apostle seyde,
>   <u>Non oderis fratrem.</u>

And in the sauter also · seithe Dauid the prophete,
Existimasti inique quod ero tui similis, &c.
(XI.87-91)

At the dinner which Will attends in Passus XIII we see such
different types of characters as the worldly Master of Divinity,
Conscience, Patience, and, indirectly, Piers himself, all
reiterating the same truth. Although the Master of Divinity does
not practice the truth, he nevertheless knows what it is, ideally.
Dowel, he says, is "Do non yuel to thine euenecrystene · nouȝt by
thi powere.'" (XIII. 104); and, later, he defines Dobest as:
" . . . Dobest doth hym-self so · as he seith and precheth:--Qui
facit et docuerit, magnus vocabitur in regno celorum.'" (XIII. 117).
Conscience, who admits his understanding of Dowel, Dobet, and
Dobest is limited, states that he is sure that Piers would say
nothing that did not agree with Scripture (XIII. 130-31); and
Patience asserts that to Dobest is to love one's enemies (XIII.
138-43).

In the spiritual realm Will meets Anima, or Soul, who
counsels:

. . . alle Cristene · to confourmen hem to charite;
For charite with-oute chalengynge · vnchargeth the soule,
And many a prisone fram purgatorie · thorw his preyeres he
delyuereth.
(XV.337-39)

Anima also expounds on the responsibility of priests, the keepers
of sacred knowledge, to practice charity themselves. He takes it

for granted that the Church is the guardian and teacher of the
true word of God:

> . . . of curatoures of Crystene peple • as clerkes bereth witnesse,
> I shal tellen it for treuth sake • take hede who so lyketh!
> As holynesse and honeste • out of holicherche spredeth
> Thorw lele libbying men • that goddes lawe techen,
> Riȝt so out of holicherche • alle yueles spredeth,
> There inparfyt presthod is . . .
>
> (XV.88-93)

After his meeting with Anima, Will ascends, in three stages,
toward the ultimate realization of truth which he has been seeking:
first he encounters Piers, who acts as a metaphysical bridge
between Will's spiritual understanding at that point, which is
still no more than symbolic, and the actual vision of truth,
embodied in the person of Jesus, which is emerging for him; next
Will meets with Abraham, who symbolizes Faith, Moses, who symbolizes
Hope, and the Samaritan, who symbolizes Charity or Jesus (Passus
XVI-XVII). Finally, after his vision of the actual Biblical
events of Christ's death and the Harrowing of Hell (Passus XVIII),
Will is able to understand fully Conscience's explanation of the
meaning of truth; and it is at this point that he receives a
vision of God's grace (Passus XIX), whose arrival at the end of
Will's quest implicitly indicates that Will has merited his
appearance.

Returning now to an overall look at the two aspects of
structure which we have been considering so far—the nature of
Will's instructors and the fact that despite their limitations

they all preach the same truth—we see, first of all, that Will's teachers come from all realms of life. Will has heard essentially the same definition of truth from personifications representing man's natural, intellectual, moral, and spiritual faculties; from characters such as the friars and Master of Divinity, whose own personal imperfections cannot blot out the truth they know exists outside of them; from personifications representing the natural world (Hunger, Nature); and from personifications representing the different aspects of truth itself (the Samaritan, Grace, Scripture, Holy Church). The fact, then, that every realm is represented, and that each one's teaching directs Will toward the same simple, absolute truth, results in a powerful implicit reinforcement of the poem's explicit message of theological and epistemological unity and consistency. The fact that each character is also speaking from his own point of view at the same time as he is propounding a truth that surpasses all individual points of view, implicitly serves to point up the interrelated nature of truth, for in clarifying the part that each realm plays in the search for truth, the point is made that there are stable, consistent interrelationships among the different realms.

The objective nature of truth is also shown by Imaginatif's clarification in Passus XII of the functions of the various intellectual modes. Imaginatif clarifies two important things: first, he distinguishes between purely empirical knowledge, which

in itself is powerless to lead man to God (XII. 130-40), and the knowledge that is contained in the Scripture, which is the type of knowledge that can lead man to God (XII. 99-111; 171-85); and, second, he shows that beyond all knowledge which can be grasped by reason (including Biblical knowledge), there still remains a realm which is unattainable to man except by faith (XII. 214-16; 268-89). Thus, although Imaginatif shows that faith and reason can be joined by means of the Scripture, and that the two realms operate together as a unified and interconnected epistemological system, at the same time, Imaginatif affirms that the spiritual nature of faith's knowledge, or knowledge which rests on belief, is the higher form of knowledge (XII. 284-89); and implicitly we are made aware of this by the fact that Will, even though he benefits from Imaginatif's teaching and the teachings of Scripture and Holy Church, still has to learn from the personifications representing purely spiritual, rather than rational, knowledge before he can be said to have a full understanding of truth. Thus we see that a double reinforcement has been achieved by the structural makeup of Will's quest: the acceptance of Scriptural and Church authority implicitly gives credence to the message being preached by the personifications who represent natural and rational knowledge; for their message is the same as that preached by the authorities. At the same time, the point that Scriptural and Church authority do not spring only from faith, or, in other words, only from one's

arbitrary acceptance of them, is brought out by the fact that the message preached by these authorities is corroborated by the lessons learned by Will in the natural, intellectual, and experiential realms.

As we noted earlier, one of the poem's primary concerns is with the practical consequences of knowledge. The poem is committed to establishing the reliability of the practical knowledge man needs in order to save his soul. Once the undisputed authority of Scripture and Church has been established with epistemological certainty, then any directives following from these authorities also take on authenticity; the traditional moral law is no longer in danger of being open to question. The poem, in response to contemporary epistemological and theological uncertainty, has implicitly as well as explicitly created a conceptual world which affirms the reality and certainty of the established order of Christian revelation.

[1] This is simply a general observation; specific
interpretation of the poem's thematic content is beyond the scope
of this study. For surveys of the major trends in interpretive
studies of Piers Plowman see Edward Vasta, The Spiritual Basis of
Piers Plowman (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), pp. 11-25;
Interpretations of Piers Plowman, ed. Edward Vasta (Notre Dame,
Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. ix-xix; for
discussions of narrative structure see also Piers Plowman:
Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey (London: Methuen, 1969) and
Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall, Piers Plowman (Evanston:
Northwestern Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 1-58.

[2] For discussions of the major currents of theological and
philosophical thought in the second half of the fourteenth century
in England see M. D. Knowles, "The Censured Opinions of Uthred of
Boldon, PBA, XXXVII (1950), 305-42, and J. A. Robson, Wyclif and
the Oxford Schools (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961).

IV.   INFLUENCES OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY SKEPTICISM
ON STRUCTURE: CHAUCER

Chaucer's poetry, like Langland's, reflects a concern with the issues of fourteenth century skepticism, but the kind of structure which Chaucer uses implies a different attitude than Langland's toward the question of how much of spiritual truth man can understand by using his reason, and, perhaps even more so, how worthwhile it is to even pursue this question in the first place. Whereas Langland has attempted to affirm a state of certainty and consistency in the fictional world he creates in Piers Plowman by establishing a link between the realms of faith and reason, Chaucer, in his poetry, does not attempt a reconciliation of the two realms; instead, he seems to accept allowing them their separate domains, and, consequently, to implicitly accept the idea of epistemological uncertainty in each of them.

There are several structural devices in Chaucer's works which foster this implicit point of view. First, there are the particular ways in which Chaucer handles those issues of contemporary skepticism which he introduces directly into his works: here, his characteristic, often noted attitude of "cautious reserve" and "evasive ambiguity"[1] seems especially pronounced.

Each time he directly raises a controversial epistemological or
theological question, Chaucer seems to particularly emphasize the
difficulty or impossibility of its resolution; he achieves this
emphasis in a variety of ways. One way is to have a character
bring up an issue, only to drop it again: either by claiming a
lack of interest in its complexities, by denying that anyone can
resolve it, by referring the issue to a higher authority, or simply
by refusing to mention its resolution at all. Thus in the Proem to
Book I of The House of Fame we see that while the narrator goes
into a detailed account of the various possible causes and meanings
of dreams, and while he exhibits considerable knowledge of the
subject of dreams, he stresses the fact that he does not know the
answers to the questions he has raised and denies any interest in
trying to figure them out, leaving their solution to "grete
clerkys" (HF.1-58). Similarly, in the Knight's Tale the narrator
brings up the question of where Arcite's soul has gone, and then
refuses to answer it:

> His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,
> As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.
> Therfore I stynte, I nam no divinistre;
> Of soules fynde I nat in this registre,
> Ne me ne list thilke opinions to telle
> Of hem, though that they writen wher they dwelle.
> Arcite is coold, ther Mars his soule gye!
>   (KnT.I.2809-15)

And Dorigen in the Franklin's Tale, after questioning why God
allows the deadly rocks to exist, concludes:

> I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
> By argumentz, that al is for the beste,
> Though I ne kan the causes nat yknowe.
> But thilke God that made wynd to blowe
> As kepe my lord! this my conclusion.
> To clerkes lete I al disputison.
> (FT.V.885-90)

As he begins the Legend of Phyllis in The Legend of Good

Women, Chaucer raises an epistemological question, only to drop it

almost immediately on the grounds that it is irrelevant to his main

point:

> By preve as wel as by autorite
> That wiked fruit cometh of a wiked tre,
> That may ye fynde, if that it like yow.
> But for this ende I speke this as now,
> To tellen you of false Demophon.
> In love a falser herde I nevere non,
> But if it were his fader Theseus.
> . . . .
> "God, for his grace, fro swich oon kepe us!"
> Thus may these women preyen that it here.
> Now to the effect turne I of my matere.
> (LGW.F.2394-2403)

The Merchant, in describing May's attitude toward Damian's letter

also gratuitously brings up the question of what might have caused

her receptiveness to it; but he declines to even attempt to answer

the question:

> Were it by destynee or aventure,
> Were it by influence or by nature,
> Or constellacion, that in swich estaat
> The hevene stood, that tyme fortunaat
> Was for to putte a bille of Venus werkes—
> For alle thyng hath tyme, as seyn thise clerkes—
> To any womman, for to gete hir love,
> I kan nat seye; but grete God above,
> That knoweth that noon act is causelees,
> He deme of al, for I wole holde my pees.
> (MT.IV.1967-78)

Similarly, the Nun's Priest, while expounding knowledgeably on the question of predestination and free will, claims that unlike "the hooly doctour Augustyn / Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn," he "ne kan nat bulte it to the bren" (NPT.VII.3240-42); and he ends his discourse by dropping the whole issue: "I wol nat han to do of swich mateere / My tale is of a cok, as ye may heere . . . " (NPT. VII.3251-52).

Another method Chaucer uses to emphasize the difficulty of resolving controversial contemporary issues is to present debates on important issues within humorous contexts and to treat the characters who get involved in these debates ironically, thus undermining the idea that it is fruitful to pursue such discussions; a similar technique is to raise issues which are then shown to be irrelevant to the context in which they appear.

In the Nun's Priest's Tale, for example, the debate between Chauntecleer and Pertelote on the causes and meanings of dreams takes place within a humorous context. And, while the issues themselves are no less serious for having been presented humorously, the idea that reasonable argument can resolve these issues is shown to be ludicrous because the arguers themselves demonstrate this point, both in the fact of their natures as pompous, talking animals, and also by the fact that their debate contains an essential ambiguity which would seem to preclude the possibility of resolution. This ambiguity, which is explored most

fully by Chaucer in The House of Fame, concerns the problem of
determining the proper criteria by which one judges a thing's truth
or falsity;[2] in the debate between Chauntecleer and Pertelote we
are made aware of this problem since it becomes evident that the
arguments which the two confidently use rest on equally shaky
ground and tend to cancel each other out.

Although in contradicting Pertelote's naturalistic explanation
of dreams Chauntecleer brings up the arguments of a number of
authorities, he stresses that his authorities' opinions are derived
from actual experience:

> Though /Cato/ bad no dremes for to drede,
> By God, men may in olde bookes rede
> Of many a man moore of auctorite
> Than evere Caton was, . . .
> That al the revers seyn of this sentence,
> And han wel founden by experience
> That dremes been significaciouns
> As wel of joye as of tribulaciouns
> That folk enduren in this lif present.
> Ther nedeth make of this noon argument;
> The verray preeve sheweth it in dede.
> (NPT.VII.2973-83)

He and Pertelote, then, actually are arguing from
contradictory viewpoints within the same mode of knowledge—
experience—rather than from the viewpoints of authority as opposed
to experience. A question which has been implicitly raised in this
debate is similar to the one with which The House of Fame is so
concerned—that is, the question of how reliable is authoritative
knowledge—and the seeming hopelessness of resolving this question
is pointed up by having the matter debated by two characters who

are shown to be mindless of the epistemological problem inherent in their arguments.

In The House of Fame we see the great comic figure--the eagle--anxious to discuss the relative values of logic, experience, and authority with "Geffrey," whose reserved attitude toward the eagle's instruction casts doubt on the bird's enthusiastically optimistic belief that one mode of knowledge is truly more reliable than another.[3] And in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, the Wife, as "the unknowing victim of comic satire,"[4] makes a farce out of the issue of the relative merits of authority vs. experience by using it as ammunition in her battle to justify her own "likerousnesse:" a point which Chaucer ironically underscores with the Friar's response to her speech:

> "Dame" quod he, "God yeve yow right good lyf!"
> Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
> In scole-matere greet difficultee.
> Ye han seyd muche thyng right wel, I seye;
> But, dame, heere as we ryde by the weye,
> Us nedeth nat to speken but of game,
> And lete auctoritees, on Goddes name,
> To prechyng and to scole eek of clergye.
> (FP.III.1270-77)

Finally, in The Legend of Good Women, Chaucer's presentation of serious epistemological questions within a totally light context serves to detract from the seriousness of the questions he raises. In the Prologue, as we noted in Chapter II (pp.81-82), Chaucer brings up the question of physical proof of supernatural phenomena; the question is resolved with an appeal to the authority of books.

But the serious question raised, which concerns the nature of heaven and hell, is shown to constitute no more than an introduction to the light-hearted subject of love; the context, then, militates against the issue raised being taken very seriously. Similarly, the seriousness of the opening lines of the Legend of Philomela is dispelled when one sees that the weighty issue of predestination vs. free will is being applied to a case of deception in love (LGW.2228-37).

A third way in which Chaucer plays down the idea of resolution is to introduce issues of contemporary thought not as issues to be resolved, but as indicators of the attitudes or states of mind of the characters who discuss them; here, even though important questions may be discussed at length, the focus still is on the characters' subjective opinions or reactions, or on the idea of the debate itself, rather than on any objective answers. We see this technique used in Troilus and Criseyde, where theological and epistemological questions are introduced as characterization devices: Troilus' and Pandarus' different characters are partly defined by their differing attitudes toward the question of free will and the question of what constitutes an accurate source of knowledge. Throughout the poem they exemplify opposite points of view on these issues: Troilus reacts to events fatalistically, while Pandarus advocates action, rejecting the idea that man has no control over his fate; Troilus learns about love by turning inward

to his own feelings, whereas Pandarus bases his knowledge of love

on the external, general type of information contained in proverbs

and stories of other peoples' experiences.

In their explicit discussions of dreams and predestination,

Troilus and Pandarus uphold these opposite viewpoints. As we saw

in Chapter II (p. 76), Pandarus denies that dreams provide

visions of unalterable truth. In Book V he tries to reason Troilus

out of his fatalistic belief in dreams: he plays down Troilus'

intuitions of impending doom by reminding him how, in other cases

of separation, the lovers involved either adjusted to being apart

or were reunited, as, Pandarus maintains, Troilus and Criseyde will

be in ten days:

> "But Troilus, I prey the, tel me now
> If that thow trowe, er this, that any wight
> Hath loved paramours, as wel as thow?
> Ye, God woot! and fro many a worthi knyght
> Hath his lady gon a fourtenyght,
> And he nat yet made halvendel the fare.
> What nede is the to maken al this care?
>
> "Syn day by day thow maist thiselven se
> That from his love, or ellis from his wif,
> A man mot twynnen of necessite,
> Ye, though he love hire as his owene lif;
> Yet wyl ne with hymself thus maken strif.
> For wel thow woost, my leve brother deere.
> That alwey frendes may not ben yfeere.
>
> "How don this folk that seen hire loves wedded
> By frendes myght, as it bitit ful ofte,
> And sen hem in hire spouses bed ybedded?
> God woot, they take it wisly, faire, and softe,
> Forwhi good hope halt up hire herte o-lofte.
> And, for they kan a tyme of sorwe endure,
> As tyme hem hurt, a tyme doth hem cure.

> "So sholdestow endure, and laten slide
> The tyme, and fonde to ben glad and light.
> Ten dayes nys so longe nought t'abide.
> And syn she to comen hath bihyght,
> She wyl hire heste breken for no wight.
> For dred the nat that she wyl fynden weye
> To come agein; my lif that dorste I leye.
> <div align="right">(TC.V.330-57)</div>

Later, Pandarus denounces Troilus' fatalistic interpretation of his

dream of Criseyde and the boar (TC.V.1275-88) and suggests that

instead of relying on dreams for his knowledge of Criseyde's

intentions, Troilus should simply ask Criseyde herself:

> "My red is this, syn thow kanst wel endite,
> That hastily a lettre thow hire write,
> Thorugh which thow shalt wel bryngyn it aboute,
> To knowe a soth of that thow art in doute.
> <div align="right">(TC.V.1292-95)</div>

In Book IV, when Troilus learns of Criseyde's banishment, he

isolates himself and ponders the question of predestination and free

will. He concludes that the future is predetermined and that he

must necessarily lose Criseyde:

> "For certeynly, this wot I wel," . . .
> "That forsight of divine purveyaunce
> Hath seyn alwey me to forgon Criseyde . . .
> . . . .
> . . . the bifallying
> Of thynges that ben wist bifore the tyde,
> They mowe nat ben eschued on no syde."
> <div align="right">(TC.IV.960-1078)</div>

When Pandarus finds Troilus deliberating in the temple with no plan

of action, he urges him to act, in accordance with his own belief

that the future is as yet undetermined:

> " . . . this is my wonder most of alle,
> Whi thow thus sorwest, syn thow nost it yet,

> Touchyng hire goyng, how that it shal falle,
> Ne yif she kan hireself destourben it.
> Thow hast nat yet assayed al hire wit.
> A man may al bytyme his nekke beede
> Whan it shal of, and sorwen at the nede.
>
> (TC.IV.1100-6)

It is consistent with their characters that while Troilus has been deliberating the academic question of predestination, Pandarus has been actually working on the problem of Criseyde's banishment by discussing it with her; and now, as usual, Pandarus' role is to urge Troilus to take action himself (TC.IV.1107-20).

Here, then, Chaucer uses contemporary theological and epistemological issues to help define and differentiate his characters; and again, as in the other cases in which he has explicitly incorporated contemporary issues into his poetry, Chaucer does so here in a way that does not emphasize their resolution, but only the fact of their existence. Structurally, Chaucer shifts the reader's attention away from the idea of resolution by subordinating the ideas under discussion to the action of the story and the characters themselves, whose makeups also include elements which are irrelevant to contemporary theological and philosophical disputes.

A fourth technique of Chaucer's which militates against the idea of resolution involves the ambiguous use of plot: Chaucer sometimes achieves a completely ambiguous resolution to an issue by manipulating the events in a story in such a way as to show that

both sides of an issue are, in different senses, true and false at
the same time.

Chaucer uses this technique in handling the question of
predestination and free will in Troilus and Criseyde. First of
all, when we look at Troilus, we find conflicting opinions among
the critics as to the nature of the role played by destiny in the
work. Opposing viewpoints on this question are offered by Walter
Clyde Curry and Howard R. Patch: Curry argues that Troilus is
powerless to escape his destiny, while Patch contends that not
destiny but the characters' own free choices have determined their
fates.[5]

Chaucer deals ambiguously with the question of predestination
in Troilus and Criseyde through his narrator's reporting of
Criseyde's actions. In the poem, as Charles A. Owen points out,
Chaucer has taken pains to "create an existential freedom for his
characters even though he knows the outcome in advance;"[6] this
seeming freedom is achieved, in part, by Chaucer's having the
narrator report the characters' innermost thoughts and feelings as
well as their outward behavior.[7]

It is interesting to note that whenever Troilus and Criseyde
have had decisions to make—up until the point at which Criseyde
decides to remain in Greece—Chaucer has consistently emphasized
their preoccupations with weighing the alternative courses of
action open to them: sometimes their deliberations take the form

of an internal debate, as in Book II when Criseyde debates with
herself after Pandarus has told her of Troilus' love (TC.II.694-
812); and sometimes they take the form of a dialogue, as in Book IV
when Pandarus and Troilus, and then later, Troilus and Criseyde,
debate the pros and cons of an elopement (TC.IV.526-644;1254-1631).
These deliberations, besides giving us insight into the mental
attitudes of the characters at the times that they engage in them
(which does not necessarily imply that the characters are realistic
or dramatic), also serve to focus our attention on the idea of the
debate itself—the idea that there are alternative courses of
action from which to choose. The fact that choices are made which
in turn determine future events within the poem shows that a
rational causality is operating; even though the ending is known
to us, the steps by which this ending is reached are not
arbitrarily imposed by the author, but are portrayed as being the
logical results of preceding choices. Having the characters face
alternatives and make decisions, then, is another way in which
Chaucer preserves the illusion that his characters are free agents
living in a world which allows for future contingency.

When we look at Criseyde's desertion of Troilus, however, we
find no convincing "reason," no effect following from a cause; the
question of Criseyde's "motivation" continues to occupy the
critics, most of whom have been concerned with the question of
psychological motivation.[8] But it would seem that psychological

motivation has had very little to do with any of the characters'
actions even before this point in the poem: what do we really
know of either Pandarus' or Troilus' psychological makeup outside
of the limited realm in which we have seen them operate? The
reason why their actions appear to be properly motivated is a
structural one: the narrator has let us in on the processes by
which they came to their decisions to perform particular actions.

In Book V the narrator seems to cut the connection between
cause and effect. He shows Criseyde on the eve of the tenth day
debating with herself the question of returning to Troy (TC.V.694
ff.), but just as she reaches the conclusion " . . . withouten any
wordes mo / To Troie I wole . . . " (TC.V.764-65), the narrator
tells us:

> But God it wot, er fully monthes two,
> She was ful fer fro that entencioun!
> For bothe Troilus and Troie town
> Shal knotteles thorughout hire herte slide;
> For she wol take a purpos for t'abyde.
> (TC.V.766-70)

The narrator, after abruptly jumping into the future, then comes
back to describe Diomede's visit to Criseyde on the tenth day, and
although he tells us of Criseyde's misery, he makes no mention of
her plans for leaving; in fact, the narrator has Criseyde agreeing
to see Diomede again on the following day (TC.V.841ff.): the
implication is that, despite her feelings or her resolutions, the
future has already been determined; thus there is no need even to

try to explain how the future comes about in logical, step-by-step
order. When finally the narrator does try to offer an explanation
(TC.V.1023-29), it is too late for it to be convincing, because
the structure of the narration has completely militated against
any rational explanation; and the narrator's further pseudo-innocent
attempts to be "historically accurate" are clearly intended only to
add to the confusion:

> And after this the storie telleth us
> That she hym yaf the faire baye stede,
> The which he ones wan of Troilus;
> And ek a broche—and that was litel nede—
> That Troilus was, she yaf this Diomede.
> And ek, the bet from sorwe hym to releve,
> She made hym were a pencel of hire sleve.
>
> I fynde ek in the stories elleswhere,
> Whan thorugh the body hurt was Diomede
> Of Troilus, tho wepte she many a teere,
> Whan that she saugh his wyde woundes blede;
> And that she took, to kepen hym, good hede;
> And for to helen hym of his sorwes smerte,
> Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym hire herte.
>
> (TC.V.1037-50)

By maintaining causal connections, and by setting the action
in the past, the narrator, until Book V, has avoided the
implication of fatalism, since up until then he has simply been
reporting a sequence of events which came about because of the
characters' choices: the fact that one event in the story follows
from another deterministically does not necessarily imply fatalism.
On the contrary, it is when an event occurs for no apparent logical
cause that we have the implication that an inescapable destiny is

at work behind the scenes governing the course of events; and this
implication of destiny is suggested in the method by which Chaucer's
narrator reports the circumstances of Criseyde's betrayal of
Troilus. However, this already ambiguous situation is made even
more so by the fact that despite his great sympathy for Criseyde,
the narrator still considers her responsible for her actions; thus
he tries to excuse her as best he can:

> Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
> Forther than the storye wol devyse.
> Hire name, allas! is punysshed so wide,
> That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
> And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
> For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
> Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.
>   (TC.V.1093-99)

As Patch points out, Chaucer "acknowledges /Criseyde's/ 'gilt'
when it would have been a matter of the greatest simplicity, in the
very passage in which he writes her defense, to say that she was
really the victim of circumstance."[9]

It would seem, then, that the narrative structure of Troilus
and Criseyde provides no clear answer to the question of
predestination and free will; and in the Nun's Priest's Tale,
where the question is also raised, we see a similarly ambiguous
resolution. Patch ends his article on Troilus with a reference to
the issue of predestination in the Nun's Priest's Tale: he observes
that despite the Priest's talk about "destinee that mayst nat been
eschewed" (NPT.VII.3338), " . . . the fates seem to be in conflict

once more, Fortune steps in to help /Chauntecleer/ and apparently
if a man keeps his eyes open he can take advantage of celestial
indecision."[10] We see that while Chauntecleer's dream has been
proven true up to a point, it has not been completely accurate in
its prediction, since Chauntecleer, though caught by the fox as
his dream forecasts, still manages to escape by using his wits.
Here, then, the plot both confirms and does not confirm the idea,
which is humorously debated at such length, that dreams can predict
a predetermined future.

In the Miller's Tale we see another comic use of plot both to
confirm and negate the idea that dreams have predictive powers.
Absolon, after noting the absence of Alison's husband, decides
that the time is ripe for him to visit her; he considers the night
of his visit to be particularly auspicious because of the "signs"
he has received during the past day and night:

> My mouth hath icched al this longe day;
> That is a signe of kissyng atte leeste.
> Al nyght me mette eek I was at a feeste.
> (MT.3682-84)

Unfortunately, the power of Absolon's dream to predict the future
did not extend to being able to forewarn him of the nature of the
"feeste" he would attend.

So far we have been considering the four major ways in which
Chaucer deals with the issues of fourteenth century skepticism
which he explicitly introduces into his poetry. I have tried to

show that the structural devices Chaucer uses in his poetic
treatment of these issues act implicitly to show that man's reason
cannot, with certainty, know the answers to questions which belong
to the realm of faith; and furthermore, that since man's unaided
reason is limited solely to physical knowledge, then epistemological
questions even about the real world cannot be answered with
certainty either. For, if for certain knowledge one must depend,
ultimately, on one's own experience, then almost all of man's
accumulated natural, as well as supernatural, knowledge is open to
question.

However, in addition to Chaucer's explicit treatment of
contemporary issues, to which he brings the specific structural
devices which we have been looking at so far, there is an implicit
structure in much of his poetry which also reflects the underlying
assumption of total metaphysical discontinuity between the realms
of faith and reason.

There are several ways in which this idea of discontinuity is
implied in the structure of Chaucer's works. For one thing, unlike
Langland, Chaucer carefully keeps his fictional "real world"
metaphysically separate from the world of non-physical reality.
In his two major works he uses the structural devices of setting
and plot to preserve the distinction between these two conceptual
realms. First, in <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> the narrator's insistence
that he is reporting historical fact establishes that the setting

is meant to be the natural world; this setting is consistently
maintained throughout the poem until Troilus' death. But when
Chaucer introduces the world of Troilus' afterlife, he represents
it as an entirely new and different plane of existence transcending
and negating all earthly concerns (TC.V.1807-27). Similarly, in
The Canterbury Tales Chaucer's plot structure allows him to depict,
and, at the same time, to differentiate clearly between two·
conceptual realms: first, his fictional world of physical reality—
the pilgrimage to Canterbury—which is portrayed as an actual
event in which the narrator-pilgrim physically participates; and
second, his fictional world of the imagination, which is
represented by the tales themselves. It is only within this latter
world, which clearly is labelled fiction rather than "fact," that
Chaucer freely intermixes realistic and non-realistic and/or
spiritual elements.[11]

Another evidence of the structural separation of the physical
and non-physical realms in Chaucer's works can be seen in his
implicit rejection of the idea that the order of this world can be
analogized to the order of the next. One expression of the
rejection of this type of analogy occurs in Troilus and Criseyde,
in which human love is first analogized to divine love[12] and then
sharply contrasted to it in the final stanzas, with the epilogue
showing that the two types of love have no common meeting ground
(TC.V.1835-48).

In his summary of recent _Troilus_ criticism John P. McCall
points out that "the tendency in recent years has been to show—
one way or another—that Chaucer's poem is consistent and coherent
from beginning to end."[13] What is indicated by this statement is
that most recent criticism has concentrated on finding an organic
interrelationship between the part of the poem which tells the
story of Troilus and Criseyde, and the epilogue, which denounces
human love in favor of divine love. Thus we find the critics
generally focusing their attention on the place given to human
love in the poem, with some critics stressing the importance of
human love, seeing in the poem a progression from human love to
divine love, and others playing down the importance of human love,
claiming that its rejection at the end of _Troilus_ has been implicit
in the poem all along.[14]

Perhaps it is unnecessary to try too hard to impose a modern
view of consistency on the poem's content, especially since Chaucer
himself presumably intended that the love story and the epilogue
should coexist within the same work as "self-sufficient narrative
units"[15] expressing, in a sense, irreconcilable philosophies. By
concentrating on content to such a large degree the critics have
generally overlooked the nature of the process by which the content
has been expressed: Jordan addresses himself to this point when he
says of lines 1842-48 in Book V: "the sudden evocation of the
universal Christian perspective—because it does occur so suddenly

and yet so conclusively—produces an ending whose power is that of
revelation. That it is brief in relation to the long process of
the love story does not reduce its importance; because this is the
brevity of truth."[16] In other words, the discontinuity between
the two parts of the poem, and the abruptness with which Chaucer
leaps from the world of Troilus and Criseyde to the world reflected
in the final stanzas, are, in themselves, significant: the
structure here bears out the idea that by logical reasoning one
cannot infer the message of the ending from the narrator's
presentation of the preceding story.

It is consistent with Chaucer's apparent rejection of the
idea of continuity between the realms of faith and reason that the
works of his which reflect an interest in contemporary issues
should deal either with the realm of faith or with the realm of
reason, but never with the two in viable combination. When we
look at The Canterbury Tales, for instance, we find that when
Chaucer deals with the realm of faith, the tales he chooses to
have his pilgrims relate emphatically support the view that in
faith's domain, the only tenable approach is unquestioning
submission to God's will.[17] And, in these tales, reality is
deliberately distorted and made to seem unreasonable by human
standards in order to make the gulf between the two levels of
perception—faith and reason—seem unbridgeable. The Man of Law's
reply to his own question of how Custance managed to survive

applies equally to the miraculous events that befall the heroes
and heroines of Chaucer's other tales of faith as well:

> Crist, which that is to every harm triacle,
> Be certeine meenes ofte, as knowen clerkis,
> Dooth thyng for certein ende that ful derk is
> To mannes wit, that for oure ignorance
> Ne konne noght knowe his prudent purveiance.
> (MLT.479-83)

Again, the idea is reinforced that it is fruitless for man even to
attempt an intellectual understanding of supernatural reality.

In his poetry dealing with the realm of reason, however,
Chaucer continually returns to the problem of how one establishes
criteria for judging the reliability of different modes of
knowledge. As we noted earlier, The House of Fame is largely
concerned with this question. Delaney argues "that each book of
The House of Fame presents various intellectual alternatives in
the form of juxtaposed blocs of poetic material. No clear choice
is made between these alternatives, although the manner in which
they qualify one another tends to imply a certain priority of
value. Through the technique of juxtaposition there is established
an equilibrium whose final outcome is unknown but is referred to a
higher authority."[18] These "juxtaposed blocs of poetic material"
represent different aspects of the total body of traditional
knowledge, or the knowledge of Fame, including all literary,
historical, and scientific knowledge. This body of traditional
knowledge, which, Delaney points out, is portrayed in the poem as

being internally inconsistent,[19] is pitted against "Geffrey's" own intuitive experience or self-knowledge: "I wot myself best how y stonde," is his answer to the person who asks him if he is seeking fame (HF.1878).

Characteristically, it is the problem rather than the solution which Chaucer brings out in his exploration of epistemological questions in The House of Fame; and, interestingly, he implicitly treats these questions in Troilus and Criseyde also, with the same implication that the only possibility of resolution is to move the issues to a higher perceptual plane where they no longer will be relevant.

Within the narrative of Troilus and Criseyde Chaucer differentiates three general types of approaches to understanding in the natural world; these are exemplified by the approaches to knowledge taken by Troilus, Pandarus, and Criseyde. Troilus' knowledge essentially comes from non-sensible revelation: from the time at which he is first infused with love at the temple (TC. I.204-10) until his prophetic dream of Criseyde's betrayal (TC.V. 1231-53), Troilus' characteristic method of deciding whether a thing is true or false is to examine his own thoughts and feelings rather than turn outward to the empirical world for his informatior.

Pandarus, on the other hand, consistently turns for his knowledge to the outside world; his attitude is completely

empirical. When a specific point is in doubt--for instance,
whether or not Criseyde will return to Troy--Pandarus, as we noted
earlier, urges Troilus to write to her rather than rely on his
dreams for information. We see, also, that although Pandarus and
Troilus both know Criseyde will not return, the ways by which they
know it are entirely different: Pandarus, because he knows Calchas,
infers that he will not let Criseyde return, whereas Troilus learns
of Criseyde's betrayal through his dream (TC.V.505-11;1247-51).
In addition to relying on direct empirical observation, Pandarus
relies also on abstractions which have been derived from the
empirical world; in this his approach is essentially scientific or
probabilistic, for, with his proverbs and common sense observations,
he is consistently applying the general case to the particular: a
technique which Troilus views with skepticism:

> . . . I have herd thi wordes and thi lore;
> But suffre me my meschief to bywaille,
> For thi proverbes may me naught availle.
>
> "Nor other cure kanstow non for me.
> Ek I nyl nat ben cured; I wol deye.
> What knowe I of the queene Nyobe?
> Lat be thyne olde ensaumples, I the preye."
> (TC.I.754-60)

Whereas Troilus and Pandarus reflect the diametrically
opposed approaches to knowledge of revelation and empiricism,
Criseyde exemplifies complete epistemological uncertainty: an
uncertainty which is shown to be capable of resolution only by the
assertion of an external authority. Throughout the poem Criseyde

depends for her attitudes first on Pandarus, then on Troilus, and finally, on Diomede. We see, too, that compared with Troilus' deliberations, Criseyde's internal debates reflect a much greater attitude of generalized uncertainty: whereas Troilus will debate two well defined sides of a question, as in his debate on predestination and free will in Book IV, Criseyde tends to bring up a wider range of possibilities in her deliberations. Troilus goes from being scornful of love to being in love completely; and his song, which reflects his inner state of mind, is concerned with the two contradictory emotional effects of love: happiness and misery (TC.I.400-20). When Criseyde first considers the possibility of love, however, she looks at various sides of the question: she considers Troilus' attributes, his attitude toward her, questions of her own honor and freedom, and the problems of jealousy and gossip (TC.II.701-805). Later, in Book IV, while still under the influence of Troilus' love, Criseyde clearly plans to return to Troy, just as in Book V after she has come under Diomede's influence, she is powerless to leave Greece.

On one level, then, it would seem that Troilus and Criseyde, like The House of Fame, is concerned with exploring the workings of different epistemological approaches within the realm encompassed by man's reason. Implicitly the message seems to be that certainty is impossible within this realm—symbolized in Troilus by the pagan setting—for each of the approaches presented

is shown to have essential limitations. Arbitrary authority in the face of uncertainty proves in Troilus to be as fickle in its workings as is Fame in The House of Fame; at the same time, both the subjective and empirical approaches which Troilus and Pandarus exemplify respectively only seem to work in combination with one another: neither one alone as an approach to winning Criseyde's love would have been sufficient. Again, it is only when the leap is made to a higher perceptual realm that certainty is possible; but at that point the lower realm, or the realm of reason, is no longer relevant, for the certainty of the higher realm is the certainty of faith.

This chapter has attempted to outline the major ways in which Chaucer treats the issues of fourteenth century skepticism. First, in his handling of the explicit issues which he raises, he continually emphasizes the impossibility of their resolution; and second, with his use of structure he implicitly reinforces the idea that a gulf exists between the realms of faith and reason which not even poetry should attempt to cross.

NOTES

[1] Wolfgang Clemen, Chaucer's Early Poetry, trans. C. A. M. Sym (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 18.

[2] For a detailed study of this question in The House of Fame see Sheila Delaney, "Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism," Diss. Columbia Univ., 1967.

[3] See Delaney, p. 123 and Laurence Eldredge, "Chaucer's House of Fame and the Via Moderna," NM, 71, No. 1 (1970), 105-19. Unlike Eldredge, I am not suggesting that Chaucer is rejecting an Ockhamist view of the world in The House of Fame, but rather, that he is dramatizing the epistemological uncertainty resulting from Ockhamist thought.

[4] Robert M. Jordan, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation: The Aesthetic Possibilities of Inorganic Structure (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 216.

[5] Walter Clyde Curry, "Destiny in Troilus and Criseyde," in Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences, by Walter Clyde Curry, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960); Howard R. Patch, "Troilus on Determinism," Speculum, 6 (1929), both rpt. in Chaucer Criticism, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1961), II, 34-70; 71-85.

[6] Charles A. Owen, Jr., "The Problem of Free Will in Chaucer's Narratives," PQ, 46 (1967), 444.

[7] Owen, p. 444. Owen sees this technique as Chaucer's way of developing the concept of autonomous dramatic characters who, "within the limits of their capabilities . . . change and develop in an interaction with each other and with the environment;" however, my own position is closer to that of Jordan, who maintains that "in the art of characterization as Chaucer practiced it psychological motivation was not a central concern at all but was rather a peripheral, occasional matter" (p. 100). This latter assumption underlies the discussion which follows above.

[8] Jordan, p. 99.

[9] Patch, p. 80.

[10] Patch, p. 84.

[11] Examples are the Friar's Tale, Merchant's Tale, Squire's Tale, Franklin's Tale, Pardoner's Tale, Prioress' Tale, Nun's Priest's Tale, and Second Nun's Tale.

[12] See Eugene E. Slaughter, "Love and Grace in Chaucer's Troilus," in Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1954), pp. 61-76. Slaughter's essay shows how the narrator develops a parallel between Troilus' conversion to love and the religious conversion of the Christian infused with God's grace: "The intermixing, confusing, and blending of earthly lovers' emotions, moral standards, and ecclesiastical forms with those of Christian religion produce a kind of specious reconciliation. Among the ecclesiastical forms imitated by the religion of Love in Troilus, Christian grace, with its associated concepts, not only contributes to the justification of earthly love but provides a means of motivating the internal action of Troilus, and, to a lesser extent, Criseyde" (pp.63-64). Although the epilogue condemns worldly vanity, at first "Chaucer presents earthly love as though it were reconciled to God" (p. 76); also see John McNamara, "Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the Pearl-poet, Langland, and Chaucer," Diss. Louisiana State Univ., 1968, for a discussion of this question in terms of fourteenth century theological issues.

[13] John P. McCall, "Troilus and Criseyde," in Companion to Chaucer Studies, ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 370-84.

[14] In addition to the critics on both sides of the question whom McCall discusses in his essay, see the following for variations of the former approach: Peter Heidtmann, "Sex and Salvation in Troilus and Criseyde," ChauR, 2 (1968), 246-53; Lonnie J. Durham, "Love and Death in Troilus and Criseyde," ChauR, 3 (1968), 1-11; and Anthony Farnham, "Chaucerian Irony and the Ending of the Troilus," ChauR, 1 (1967), 207-16. For variations of the latter approach see Theodore A. Stroud, "Boethius' Influence on Chaucer's Troilus," MP, 49 (1951-52); Alexander J. Denomy, C. S. B., "The Two Moralities of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 44, Ser. III, sec. 2 (June 1950), both rpt. in Schoeck and Taylor, II, 122-35; 147-59.

[15] Jordan, p. 110.

[16] Jordan, p. 106.

[17] This is the "sentence" of the Man of Law's Tale, Prioress'
Tale, Second Nun's Tale, and Clerk's Tale.

[18] Delaney, p. 19.

[19] In the Proem to Book I conflicting theories of dream lore
are contrasted to one another (p. 93); in Book I contradictory
versions of the Dido and Aeneas story are juxtaposed in "stable
equilibrium" (pp. 76-77); in Book II traditional scientific theory
vies with "poetical cosmology" (pp. 104; 111); and Book III, like
Book I, shows up the unreliability of traditional literary
knowledge by portraying the fickleness of Fame; here, too, Fame's
reliability is undermined as the reader is shown how the tradition
of Fame ultimately reverts back to unsubstantiated rumor (pp. 172;
201-02).

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Religious and philosophical thought in fourteenth century
England was profoundly affected by William of Ockham's nominalist
epistemology, which destroyed the monumental synthesis of faith
and reason that St. Thomas Aquinas had achieved less than one
hundred years earlier. In placing theological truth beyond the
power of man's reason to comprehend it and in considering
intuitive knowledge of individual things to be the only sure
knowledge possible for man to have, Ockham relegated a large part
of human knowledge--both natural and supernatural--to the gray
area of probability. Certainty in theology could only come from
the certainty of faith, while in the natural realm, empirical
knowledge gained from experience of the physical world competed
with knowledge based on tradition which had acquired authority
over the years.

At the same time, concepts about God and about man's relation
to God were radically altered. God, who traditionally of course
had been considered the ultimate stabilizing influence in the
universe, now became, because of His utter unknowability,
ultimately mysterious and potentially capricious. Since as far as
man was concerned God's free will was the only standard by which

the universe was ruled, the authority of the Bible and the Church, and, in fact, all the traditionally held tenets of Christianity were thrown into doubt, for God's will could arbitrarily nullify them if He so wished. The later fourteenth century theologians working with the problem of redefining the relation between God and man in the light of contemporary doubts and uncertainties tended to polarize into two opposing schools of thought. First, there were the followers of Ockham, who emphasized God's potentia absoluta, denying the necessity for grace or any intermediary form that would limit God's freedom to save or damn an individual. They believed that since God's future decisions were still indefinite, man could influence his own future destiny by freely choosing to love God. Thus they elevated man's free will along with God's. Second, there were the followers of Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine, who emphasized God's predetermination of every detail of the universe from the beginning of time; for them, as well as for the Ockhamists, God's will was supreme; but they considered His original choice—of revelation and human predestination—to be the immutable expression of His will. Thus, they held that man's will was powerless to act meritoriously unless it had first been infused with God's supernatural gift of grace.

Along with the epistemological uncertainty engendered by Ockhamist thought, the controversial questions of predestination, free will, grace, and merit became the burning issues of the second

half of the fourteenth century—as important to contemporary poets as they were to theologians.[1] As this study has sought to show, the influence of contemporary theological and epistemological issues can be seen in much of the poetry of Langland and Chaucer, not only on the overt level, but inherent in the underlying organization as well.

As we have seen, although both Langland and Chaucer show considerable interest in exploring the controversial issues of their day, their poetic approaches to them are quite different. Whereas Langland proceeds to answer the theological and philosophical questions he raises in Piers Plowman, Chaucer, after introducing them into his narratives, consistently leaves them unanswered. Throughout Piers Plowman Langland strives to show that the realms of faith and reason are joined together in a unified epistemological system, linked by the teachings of divinely inspired Scripture. He achieves epistemological unity in the poem by having Will learn the same religious truth from personifications representing all modes of knowledge within the realms of both faith and reason. Langland also stresses the idea of an essentially objective and consistent truth operating under God's potentia ordinata; he does this by having the personifications drawn from the realms of faith and reason all reinforce one another's teachings and by having them affirm the spiritual and moral authority of Scripture and the Church.

Chaucer, on the other hand, does not attempt in his poetry to join the two realms; in fact, he uses structural devices to emphasize the gulf between them. In addition to the point he makes of not answering the questions he raises, Chaucer tends to use either a "real life" or supernatural setting for his works, but not the two combined. When he writes about the realm of faith he does not, as Langland does implicitly, attempt to "objectify" it by letting reason try to deal with it. And, conversely, when he writes about the physical world, Chaucer shows much more interest in this world for its own sake than does Langland: Langland has none of Chaucer's preoccupation with epistemological issues that fall totally within the realm of natural reason—issues such as those which Chaucer explores in The House of Fame.

It is interesting to compare Langland and Chaucer with respect to the structural approaches they use when they portray spiritual insight in their poetry, for the difference between them on this point typifies the difference between their two approaches in general. We note, for instance, that Grace in Piers Plowman comes in Passus XIX, almost at the end of the work; his appearance is significant and authoritative in that he is depicted as the creator of the world's theological and moral organization, and we know when he appears that Will has reached a new level of spiritual understanding. Yet Grace's statements do not come as any sudden

revelation; they are simply re-statements of the same truth--the truth of charity--which Will's other instructors and visions have been teaching him all along (XIX. 194-330). The truth does not change for Will as the poem progresses; rather, it intensifies.

Compared with this way of portraying spiritual insight, Chaucer's methods are very abrupt. Earlier we noted the sudden shift in Troilus and Criseyde to a higher perceptual plane that is not simply a more intensified version of the same truth, but an altogether different kind of truth--one that bears no organic relation to the kind of truth presented in the previous part of the poem. We see a similarly abrupt shift at the end of The Canterbury Tales with the Parson's Tale. Jordan observes: "the longest of the Canterbury tales is not a tale, is not literature, is not art." It is "a spiritual apotheosis."[2] The Parson's Tale, "by showing the way to 'the fruyt of penaunce,' which is 'the endelees blisse of hevene' (1076) . . . displaces the illusion that fiction is truth."[3]

Jordan maintains that "in Chaucer we find art and belief coming together without merging."[4] This statement points up the essential difference between Langland and Chaucer as far as their poetic reactions to contemporary uncertainty and skepticism are concerned. Considering the attitudes toward epistemological uncertainty which underly their works, it would seem that Langland, like St. Augustine, felt that the imagination that believed in the

tenets of revealed truth must also know them to be true in the deepest sense; Langland, then, could feel secure that his poetic imagination was justified in dealing with the mysteries of faith from a human point of view. Chaucer, however, shows no such certainty; as Delaney suggests with regard to The House of Fame, even the dream framework "cannot certify the truth of the work" for Chaucer.[5] For him, it seems, the imagination could not transcend natural reason; thus poetry remained a rational, not an inspirational creation.

It appears, then, that Chaucer was more willing than Langland to accept and live with the epistemological ambiguity engendered by Ockhamist thought—but only, of course, because of his own firm belief in a true reality that superseded the reality of reason.

[1] For a comprehensive study of the fourteenth century debate over grace and merit as it appears in a number of important contemporary literary works, see John McNamara, "Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the Pearl-poet, Langland, and Chaucer," Diss. Louisiana State Univ., 1968.

[2] Robert M. Jordan, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation: The Aesthetic Possibilities of Inorganic Structure (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 227; 230.

[3] Jordan, p. 229.

[4] Jordan, p. 241.

[5] Sheila Delaney, "Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism," Diss. Columbia Univ., 1967, p. 96.

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