Quodlibetal Question 18: Whether the extrinsic/external/exterior act adds goodness or badness to the intrinsic/internal/interior act.

Rough Formulation of the question: Does the external act carry any moral weight? Does it add anything to the moral value of the internal act?

Internal acts: intending to steal, commit adultery, give alms, etc.
   - terminate within the agent’s will; immediately within the power of the will

External acts: stealing, committing adultery, giving alms, etc.
   - terminate outside the agent’s will; require some power external to the will though perhaps under the control of the will (bodily motions or some other agent).

Although each external act (when voluntary) is accompanied by an internal act, Scotus insists upon the following principles that play a key role in his arguments:

1) The two acts (internal and external) are distinct.
2) The goodness (or badness) of an act consists in its relation to the agent’s will: specifically, in its conformity (or not) to a ‘norm’ of right reason.
3) When one term (or foundation) of a relation is varied, the relation itself becomes different.

From these three principles, it follows that the goodness or badness of the external act is distinct from that of the internal act, even when both occur at once and even if the ‘norm’ is the same.

Scotus rejects the idea that there is a ‘highest common factor’ (HCF) to the internal and external acts that contains all that reason demands of either act, and that this highest factor is identical to what is required of the internal act. The HCF intuition underlies all of the objections that he considers.

What is the significance? Scotus’ arguments undercut a kind of ethical internalism that only cares about what goes on in the agent’s will.