

Reading 7

William of Ockham, *Commentary of the Sentences (Ordinatio) I*, Distinction 38*

Scotus' Theory Cannot Solve the Problem.

Regarding the thirty-eighth distinction I ask whether God has determinate and necessary knowledge of all future contingents.

[1] [It seems] that He does not. For that which is not determinately true in itself is determinately true for no one, but a future contingent is not determinately true in itself; therefore [a future contingent is determinately true for no one]. Consequently it is not determinately true for God. Then I argue as follows.

That which is not determinately true is not known by God with determinate knowledge, but a future contingent is of that sort, as has been shown; therefore [a future contingent is not known by God with determinate knowledge]. It seems, moreover, that He does not have necessary knowledge of all future contingents. Or, if He has necessary knowledge of some future contingent, then I argue as follows: God has necessary knowledge; therefore [what is known] is necessary. Further, therefore, 'A is true' is necessary. But if 'A is true' is necessary, what is known is not contingent. Consequently, A is not a future contingent, which is counter to the hypothesis.

[2] On the contrary, "all things are naked and open to His eyes"; therefore, all things are known by God. But nothing is known except with determinate knowledge. Therefore God has determinate knowledge of all things. Again, it seems that He has necessary knowledge. For there is one single knowledge in God; therefore God's knowledge of necessities and of contingents is one and the same. But God's knowledge

* M. Adams & N. Kretzmann (trans.), *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1969, pp. 71-92.

of necessities is necessary; therefore God's knowledge of future contingents is necessary. Consequently God has necessary knowledge of contingents.

[3] Regarding the question it is said that although it cannot be proved *a priori*, it must nevertheless be maintained that there are future contingents. On this supposition [viz., that there are future contingents], it is said that contingency in things can be preserved only if the first cause, which acts through the [divine] intellect and will, causes contingently - and this while perfect causality is posited in the first [cause], as Catholics posit it. Thus this contingency must be sought either in the divine intellect or in the divine will. But not in the divine intellect, because whatever the intellect understands it understands merely naturally. Consequently it must be sought in the divine will. He [Scotus] says that in order to understand this one must see, first, in relation to what things our will is free, and second, in what way possibility or contingency follows from that freedom. As to the first point, it is said that the will, insofar as it is first actuality, is free as regards opposite acts; and by means of those opposite acts it is free as regards opposite objects, which it intends: and further, [it is free] as regards opposite effects, which it produces. The first freedom necessarily has a certain imperfection associated with it - viz., the passive potentiality and mutability of the will. The second freedom however, is without any imperfection, even if the will cannot have the third freedom.

Regarding the second point, it is said that an evident capacity for opposites accompanies that [first] freedom. For although there is no capacity for willing and not willing at one and the same time (for that is nothing at all), nevertheless there is in [the will] a capacity for willing after not willing, or for a succession of opposite acts. In [connection with] these [opposite acts], however, there is another [capacity], not evident in this way, [and] without any succession. For if we suppose that there is a created will that exists at only one instant, and that at that instant it has this or that volition, then it does not necessarily have it at first. For if at that instant it had the volition necessarily (since it is a cause only at that instant when it caused the volition), then, absolutely, the will, when it caused the volition, would cause it necessarily. For it is not now a contingent cause because it preexisted before the instant at which it causes and preexisting then could either cause or not cause. For just as this or that being,

when it is, is then either necessary or contingent, so a cause, when it causes, causes then either necessarily or contingently. Therefore, whatever this willing causes at that instant, and causes not necessarily, it causes contingently. Therefore, this capacity to cause the opposite of that which it does cause is without succession. And this real capacity is a naturally prior capacity (as of first actuality) for opposites - [opposites] that are naturally posterior (as of second actuality). For first actuality, considered at that instant at which it is, is naturally prior to second actuality. Thus [first actuality] contingently posits [second actuality] in reality as its effect, so that as naturally prior it could equally posit the opposite in reality.

On the basis of these remarks some things are said about the divine will. First, what its freedom is. And it is said that the divine will is not free as regards the distinct acts of willing and not-willing.¹ But because of the limitlessness of volition [the divine will] is free as regards opposite objects, and that is [its] first [freedom]. In addition to that there is a freedom as regards opposite effects, and the divine will is free [in that respect] insofar as it is operative, not insofar as it is productive or receptive of its volition.

Second, in relation to what things the divine will is free. And it is said that it relates necessarily to no object but its own essence. Therefore it relates contingently to anything else, so that it can be [related] to the opposite - and this considering it as it is prior in potential and naturally inclining to its object. And not only is it as will naturally prior to its act but also as willing its act. For our will, as naturally prior to its act, elicits that act in such a way that it could at one and the same instant elicit its opposite. In the same way the divine will, insofar as volition itself alone is naturally prior to such an intention, intends the object contingently in such a way that at the same instant [of nature] it could intend the opposite object. And this [is] as much by virtue of a logical capacity - i.e., the compatibility of the terms (as he said earlier regarding our will) - as by virtue of the real capacity - i.e., [the will's being] naturally prior to its act.

But how is the certainty of the divine knowledge consistent with such contingency?

¹ The Latin words here are 'volens' (willing) and 'nolens' (not-willing). Note that there is a distinction to be made between not-willing for X and willing for not-X because in the first case I might not be willing for anything at all but in the second I must be willing for something other than X. These two Latin words give us the English expression 'Willy Nilly' as a translation of the Latin 'volens nolens'.

It is said that this can be posited in two ways. In one way by this means, that the divine intellect seeing the determination of the divine will sees that *x* will be at *t*, since the will determines that it will be at *t*; for [the divine intellect] knows that the will is immutable and unimpedable. He [Scotus] says that it can be posited in another way. For the divine intellect either presents [to itself] simples, the union of which is contingent in reality; or if it presents to itself complexity, it presents it as neutral with respect to itself, and the will choosing one part - viz., a conjunction of these [simples] for something [that is] now in reality - makes "*x* will be at *t*" determinately true. Insofar as this exists determinately [in the divine] essence, however, it is for the divine intellect a basis for understanding that truth - and this naturally, insofar as [this understanding] is based upon the [divine] essence. [The divine intellect] understands all necessary principles naturally, as if before the act of the divine will (since their truth does not depend upon that act and they would be understood even if, *per impossibile*, [the divine will] were not willing). Thus, the divine essence is the basis for [the divine intellect's] cognizing these things at that prior [instant], since they are true then. Not, indeed, that those truths move the divine intellect, nor [are] their terms even [required] for the apprehending of such truth. But the divine essence is the basis for cognizing such complexes as well as simples.

But then [at that prior instant those complexes] are not true contingents, since there is nothing in virtue of which they have determinate truth then. Once the determination of the divine will has been posited, however, they are already true, and at that second instant the [divine] essence will be the basis for cognizing them.

The following sort of example is offered. Suppose that one act, always actualized in my visual capacity, is the basis for my seeing an object, and that, as a result of another [act of presenting], now this colour is present, now that. [In that case] my eye will see now this, now that, but by means of one and the same [act of] vision. The only difference will be in the priority of seeing, because of an object's having been presented earlier or later; and if one colour were present naturally and another freely, there would be no formal difference in my vision. For its part, indeed, the eye would see both naturally and yet would see one contingently and the other necessarily, insofar as the one is present contingently and the other necessarily.

If it is posited that the divine intellect cognizes the existence of things in both those ways, it is clear that in both ways there is a determination of the divine intellect with respect to the existent thing in relation to which the divine will is determined. And [there is] the certainty of infallibility, since the will cannot be determined without the intellect determinately apprehending that which the will determines. And [the divine intellect cognizes] immutably, since the intellect and the will are immutable. And the contingency of the cognized object is consistent with these [claims], since the will, willing something determinately, wills it contingently.

[4] One can argue against this view:

[4.1] First, against the claim that a nonevident capacity for opposites - i.e., for opposites without succession - accompanies the first freedom, for this does not seem true. The reason is that a capacity that can be actualized by no capacity, not even by an infinite [capacity], is not to be posited. But this nonevident capacity can be actualized by no capacity, since if it were actualized the will would will something at *t* and not will it at *t*, and so contradictories would evidently be true at one and the same time.

Suppose it is said that if it is actualized, 'the will willed *x* at *t*' is no longer true, nor even 'the will wills *x* at *t*', since from the very fact that the will does not will *x* at *t* it follows that 'the will wills *x* at *t*' is not true.

On the contrary, it is generally conceded by philosophers and theologians that God cannot make what is past not to be past without its afterwards always being true to, say that it was past. Therefore, since by hypothesis 'the will wills *x* at *t*' is now determinately true and consequently ['the will willed *x* at *t*'] will always be true afterwards and 'the will does not will *x* at *t*' never was true, after *t* 'the will did not will *x* at *t*', always is impossible. Furthermore, now afterwards it is true to say that 'the will does not will *x* at *t*' could not have been true at the instant at which its opposite was true, even though it was true earlier, since frequently a true proposition becomes impossible.

Suppose it is said that that [nonevident] capacity could be actualized, since [the will] can cease to will *x* at *t*.

I answer that this does not hold good, since this capacity for opposites is evident and with succession. For at one instant 'the will wills x at t' will be true, and at another instant 'the will does not will x at t' will be true. But that both are true at the same instant as a result of any capacity whatever is absolutely impossible. In the same way it is impossible that 'a created will wills x at t' is true at first and that 'a [created] will never willed x at t' is true afterwards. And so with respect to creatures it is universally true that there never is a capacity for opposite objects without succession any more than for opposite acts. Indeed, by one and the same argument it can be "proved" that there is a capacity of a created will for opposite acts without succession and for opposite objects. But his argument does not come to a successful conclusion, and yet it must be conceded that the will, when it causes, causes contingently.

But there can be two causes of this truth. It is said to cause contingently either (a) because it is possible that at one and the same instant it is true to say that [the will] does not cause (and this is impossible, because having posited that it is causing at some instant it is impossible that it is not causing at that same instant), or (b) because it can cease from the act at another instant, freely, without any variation occurring in itself or another, and not as a result of the cessation of another cause, so that at another instant it is not causing, not that at that same instant it is not causing. And the will does cause contingently in that way.

[Causing] in that way it is not a natural cause, however, for a cause acting naturally always acts, unless it is changed or something new happens to it, either because some cause ceases to cause or in some other way. Even if none of these is the case, the will can cease from the act in virtue of its freedom alone.

As to the form of the argument, I maintain that at the instant at which [the will] causes it causes contingently and not necessarily. But it does not follow from this that this capacity of a cause for the opposite of what it causes is [a capacity] for its opposite without succession. For it is impossible that [such a capacity] should be actualized by any capacity whatever. But there is a capacity for its opposite, a capacity that can be actualized in succession. For I take [as an example] heat heating wood. That heat can not heat, and this capacity [for not heating] can be actualized by the destruction of

the agent of the heat, or by the removal of the patient, or by the interposition of an impediment, or by the withdrawal of a coacting cause (suppose that God does not will to coact with it),² or by the full actualization of the end product (since fully actualized heat is produced in such a way that a more fully actualized [heat] cannot be produced by that same heat). Besides these ways [in which a natural cause can cease from causing an act], there is one additional way in which a created will can cease from causing an act - viz., all by itself - even though none of the aforementioned things is lacking but all are posited, and this and nothing else is the will causing contingently.

From this it is clear that it is inconsistent to say that the divine will as naturally prior posits its effect in reality at *t* in such a way that it can not posit it in reality at the same instant. For there are no such instants of nature as he [Scotus] imagines, nor is there in the first instant of nature such an indifference as regards positing and not positing. Rather, if at some instant it posits its effect in reality, it is impossible by means of any capacity whatever that both the instant occurs and [the effect] does not occur at that instant, just as it is impossible by means of any capacity whatever that contradictories are true at one and the same time.

I maintain, therefore, that in general there is never a capacity by means of which opposites are verified without succession. Indeed, it is impossible that God should have an object in view and not have it in view, unless either there is at least some succession in actuality or it coexists (and in that case there would be a change in everything else).

[4.2] [One can argue,] moreover, against what he says about the determination of the divine will: first, that the principal conclusion is not true. For when something is determined contingently, so that it is possible that it never was determined, one cannot have certain and infallible evidence as a result of such a determination. But the divine will is determined in such a way that it is still possible that it never was determined. Therefore one cannot have certain and infallible evidence as a result of such a determination, as a consequence of which (*ex quo*) it can simply never have been. And so it seems that the determination of the divine will, if it occurred, would

² Ockham holds that God is a partial immediate cause of all the effects which are not brought about by Him alone.

produce too little.

Moreover, however much the certainty of [God's] knowledge can be preserved by the determination of the [divine] will in respect of all effects produced by the will, and even in respect of all effects, of natural causes with which the divine will coacts, still it does not seem that the certainty of [God's knowledge in respect of] future acts of a created will, itself can be preserved by that determination. For if the divine will is determined in respect of all things, I ask whether or not the determination or production of a created will necessarily follows that determination. If so, then a created will acts naturally just as does any natural cause. For when the divine will exists as determined to one of [two] opposites, it is not in the power of any natural cause not to coact, and also when it is not determined a natural cause does not coact. In the same way, when the divine will exists as determined, a created will would coact, nor would it have it in its power not to coact, and consequently no act of a created will would be imputable to [that will] itself. If, however, the determination of a created will does not necessarily follow the determination of the divine will, then the determination of the divine will does not suffice for knowing whether an effect will be posited, but the determination of a created will is required, which is not yet or [at any rate] was not from eternity. Therefore God did not from eternity have certain cognition of future contingents as a result of the determination of the divine will.

Moreover, however much a created will is determined to one or the other part [of a contradiction] and however much the [divine] intellect sees that determination, nevertheless since our will can cease from that determination and not be determined, the [divine] intellect does not have certain cognition of that part. Therefore seeing the determination of a [created] will, a will that can not be determined to that part, does not suffice for certain cognition of that part.

Moreover, his claim that at the first instant the divine intellect presents simples [to itself], and that the divine will afterwards chooses one part, and that the intellect thereafter has evident cognition of that part, does not seem to be true. For there is no process or priority or contradiction in God such that the divine intellect at one instant does not have evident cognition of future contingents and at another instant does have

[such cognition of them]. For to say that the divine intellect receives any perfection from something else would be to posit an imperfection [in the divine intellect].

[5] Therefore as regards the question I say that it is to be held indubitably that God knows all future contingents certainly and evidently. But to explain this clearly and to describe the way in which He knows all future contingents is impossible for any intellect in this [present] condition.

[5.1] And I maintain that the Philosopher would say that God does not know some future contingents evidently and certainly, and for the following reason. What is not true in itself cannot be known at a time at which it is not true in itself. But a future contingent absolutely dependent on a free capacity is not true in itself, since no reason can be given in accord with [that description of] it why the one part is true rather than the other. And so either both parts are true or neither [is true], and it is not possible that both parts are true; therefore neither is true. Consequently neither is known.

This argument does not come to a successful conclusion, according to the Philosopher's way [of thinking], except as regards those [future contingents] that are in the power of a will. But it does not hold good in connection with those that are not in the power of a will but depend absolutely on natural causes - e.g., that the sun will rise, and thus also as regards others [of that sort]. This is because a natural cause is determined for one part [of a contradiction], and no natural causes can be impeded except by a free cause. Nevertheless, they can be impeded by it in respect of one determined effect though not in respect of any and every [effect].

[5.2] This argument notwithstanding, it must nevertheless be maintained that God has evident cognition of all future contingents. But I do not know how to describe the way [in which He has it]. Still, it can be said that God Himself, or the divine essence, is a single intuitive cognition as much of Himself as of all things creatable and uncreatable - [a cognition] so perfect and so clear that it is also evident cognition of all things past, future, and present. Thus just as our intellect can have evident cognition of some contingent propositions from our intuitive intellectual cognition of the extremes [of those propositions], so the divine essence itself is a cognition by which is known not only what is true (both necessary and contingent) regarding the present but also which

part of a contradiction [involving future contingents] will be true and which will be false. And perhaps this is not as a result of the determination of His will. But even if it is supposed, *per impossibile*, that the divine cognition, existing as perfect as it now is, is neither the total nor the partial efficient cause of contingent effects, there would still be the cognition by which it would be evidently known by God which part of a contradiction will be true and which will be false. And this would not be because future contingents would be present to Him to be cognized either by means of ideas or by means of reasons, but by the divine essence itself or the divine cognition, which is the cognition by which it is known what is false and what is true, what was false and what was true, what will be false and what will be true.

This conclusion, although it cannot be proved a priori by means of the natural reason available to us, nevertheless can be proved by means of the authorities of the Bible and the Saints, which are sufficiently well known. But I pass over those things at present.

In the view of certain scholars, however, it must be known that although God knows regarding all future contingents which part will be true and which false, still 'God knows that this part will be true' is not necessary. Indeed, it is contingent to such an extent that although 'God knows that this part of the contradiction will be true' is true, it is still possible that it will never have been true. And in that case there is a capacity for its opposite without any succession, since it is possible that it will never have been. But it is different in the case of a created will, since after a created will will have performed some act it is not possible that it is afterwards true to say that it never performed such an act.

Regarding *de possibili* propositions I maintain, as do others, that the proposition 'it is possible that God willing that A will be wills that it will not be' and others like it must be distinguished with respect to composition and division. In the sense of composition it is indicated that this is possible: 'God willing that A will be does not will that A will be,' and this is impossible, since it includes a contradiction. In the sense of division it is indicated that God willing that A will be can not will that A will be, and that is true.

And suppose one says "suppose that it is posited in reality (and it is not impossible

that that should happen); as a consequence 'God wills that A will be' and 'God does not will that A will be' hold good at one and the same time." In that case I maintain that when that possible [proposition] has been posited in reality an impossible [proposition] does not follow. But it must not be posited in reality in this way: 'God willing that A will be does, not will that A will be.' Rather, it must be posited in reality in this way: 'God does not will that A will be.' And when that has been posited in reality nothing impossible follows, for only this follows: 'God never willed that A will be.' And that is not impossible but contingent, just as its contradictory - 'God wills that A will be' - always was contingent.

[6] On the basis of the preceding remarks one can respond to the question [as follows]. God has determinate knowledge of future contingents because He knows determinately which part of a contradiction will be true and which false. But that He has [necessary] knowledge of future contingents can be understood in two ways; either that the knowledge by which future contingents are known is necessary, or that that knowledge is known necessarily. I maintain that God has necessary knowledge of future contingents in the first way, for there is one single cognition in God that is a cognition of complexes and of non-complexes, of necessities and of contingents, and universally of all things imaginable. And that knowledge is the divine essence itself, which is necessary and immutable. That God has necessary knowledge of future contingents is understood in the second way as follows: that God necessarily knows this future contingent. It is not to be granted that He has necessary knowledge in that way, for just as it contingently will be, so God contingently knows that it will be.

In response to the first principal [argument] [11 it can be said that one or the other part of the contradiction is determinately true, so that it is not false but is contingently true. Therefore it is true in such a way that it can be false and can never have been true.

And suppose one says that a proposition true at some time of the present has [corresponding to it] a necessary proposition about the past - e.g., if 'Socrates is seated' is true at some time, 'Socrates was seated' will be necessary ever afterwards; therefore if 'A is true' is true now (A being such a contingent proposition), 'A was true' will always be true and necessary. In that case it must be said that when such a proposition about

the present is equivalent to a proposition about the future or depends on the truth of a future [proposition], it is not required that a necessary proposition about the past correspond to the true proposition about the present. And this is the case in the matter under discussion.

In response to the second [principal argument] it is clear that 'God has necessary knowledge of X does not follow unless 'has necessary knowledge' is taken in the second way. Therefore God necessarily knows A. But when 'has necessary knowledge' is taken in the first way the consequence does not hold good.

The response to the argument in opposition is clear from the preceding remarks.

