

Philosophy 302

Mediaeval Philosophy

Lecture 6



Statue of Duns Scotus at Duns in Scotland

Three Attributes of God:

(A) OMNISCIENCE: 'A' is true if and only if God knows that A.

(A) INFALLIBILITY: It is not possible for God to believe that 'A' is true if 'A' is false.

(C) IMUTABILITY It is not possible for God to know that 'A' is true at one time and not to know that it is true at some other time.

A Semantical Thesis:

(D) REALISM: Every claim about the world, past, present, or future is either true or else false.

From (A), (B) and (D): Everything about the world can be known and God knows it.

Scotus' Questions, And His Answers:

(Q1) Does God DETERMINATELY know everything? — YES!

(Q2) Is God's knowledge INFALLIBLE? — YES!

(Q3) Is God's knowledge IMMUTABLE? — YES!

(Q4) Does God NECESSARILY know what he knows? — NO!

**(Q5) Is God's knowledge compatible with CONTINGENCY in creatures?
— YES!**

Arguments which Scotus must REFUTE to prove his position:

2.1 Arguments that God does NOT have DETERMINATE knowledge of the future.

2.1.1 Aristotle's argument in *de Int.*, 9 - there is no truth about the future for God to know.

2.1.2 God is OMNIPOTENT so cannot be bound to know one thing rather than the opposite.

2.2 Arguments that God does NOT have INFALLIBLE knowledge of the future.

2.2.1 (The CONSEQUENCE Argument):

God believes that X will occur,

X will not occur;

therefore God is deceived

is VALID; therefore so is:

God believes that X will occur,

it is POSSIBLE that X will not occur;

therefore it is POSSIBLE that God is deceived

2.3 Arguments that God does NOT have IMMUTABLE knowledge of the future.

If God knows that A but might not know that A , then God's knowledge might change.

But if ' A ' will be true but might not be true, then God knows that ' A ' will be true but might not know that ' A ' will be true,

and so God's knowledge is not immutable.

2.4. Arguments to show that if God is IMMUTABLE, then his knowledge
IS NECESSARILY the way it is

Whatever is IMMUTABLE is NECESSARILY the way that it is;

therefore God's knowledge is NECESSARILY the way that it is.

God's knowledge is the same as God,

whatever is the same as God is necessarily the way that it is;

therefore God's knowledge is NECESSARILY the way that it is.

Briefly: God's knowledge is IMMUTABLE, so it is NECESSARY.

2.5. Arguments to show that Gods' knowledge IS INCOMPATIBLE with CONTINGENCY

God's knowledge is necessary;

therefore what God knows is necessarily the way it is

Therefore there is no CONTINGENCY

Against All These Arguments

- (1) The authority of Scripture.**
- (2) Truths about the future are not necessarily true.**
- (3) Knowledge is compatible with contingency.**

Some other Theories of Divine Knowledge

(1) The Divine Idea Theory

Simply in virtue of possessing the concept, of Socrates and the concept of sitting God knows which of 'Socrates will be sitting at t ' and 'Socrates will not be sitting at t ' is true.

Scotus' Response

God can only know that ' S is P ' is true simply in virtue of possessing the concepts signified by ' S ' and ' P ' if ' P ' is included in the meaning of ' S '.

'Sitting at t ' is not part of the meaning of 'Socrates'.

Some other Theories of Divine Knowledge

(2) Aquinas' Theory of God's Knowledge of the Future.

All times are equally present to God in ETERNITY just as God is present at all places at any time.

Scotus' Response

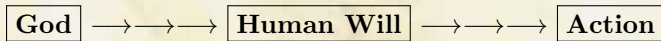
(1) The analogy between space and time is not correct.

God is not present at places which do not exist but would be there if they did.

(2) If 'future' things were present to God in this way at any and every time, they would already be actual and so could not become actual at a later time.

(3) Aquinas' Reconciliation of Divine Knowledge with Contingency.

The contingency of the PROXIMATE cause is compatible with the necessity of the REMOTE cause.



Remote Cause

Proximate Cause

Effect

(Acts Necessarily) (Acts Contingently)

Scotus' Response.

The remote cause is the cause of both the proximate cause and the effect.

The relation of the proximate cause to the effect cannot determine whether it is contingent or not.

If the remote cause causes the proximate cause to cause, and the remote cause causes necessarily, then the proximate cause causes necessarily.

The remote cause can cause the effect without the proximate cause without any other difference in the effect; therefore if the effect is contingent it would be contingent of caused directly by the remote cause.

Many things are produced by God directly and contingently.

In passing Scotus' introduces the idea of:

An Instant Of Nature

The remote cause and the proximate cause cause the effect at the same instant of time.



Fresco of Duns Scotus, c. 1350

Scotus' Problems

- [1] How can anything be contingent?
- [2] How is the certainty and immutability of divine knowledge compatible with contingency in the world?

[5.1] An Argument for the Existence of a Necessary Being

- (1) Non-Provable Truth: Everything is either necessary or contingent**
- (2) Necessary being is more perfect than contingent being.**
- (3) Therefore; if there are contingent beings, there is a necessary being**
- (4) Evident Truth: There are contingent beings.**

If someone denies (4) torture him until he
agrees that his being tortured
is contingent.

[5.2]-[5.4] The Source of Contingency

(1) All contingency is due to the FIRST CAUSE

(2) So, either to the divine INTELLECT or to the divine WILL

(3) THE DIVINE INTELLECT DOES NOT CAUSE CONTINGENTLY

SO, ALL CONTINGENCY IS DUE TO THE DIVINE WILL

How is divine will contingent?

Consider the human will. It is FREE with respect to:

- (1) [Its Acts] – We can choose to will for X or not to will for X
- (2) [Its Objects] – We can choose to will for X or to will for not- X
- (3) [Its Effects] – By willing we may (immediately) cause X or
not (immediately) cause X

EXAMPLE

- (1) [Acts] – We can will for something good or not will for something good
- (2) [Objects] – We can will for some one good *A* or will for some other good *B*
- (3) [Effects] – We can will to bring about a good immediately or will to bring it about mediately

Scotus associates **CONTINGENCY** with (2).

For successively not willing and then willing

This succession may **EVIDENTLY** take place in time

Scotus argues that there is an **NON-EVIDENT** potential for
NON-TEMPORAL succession

A Crucial Thought Experiment

THE INSTANTANEOUS WILL

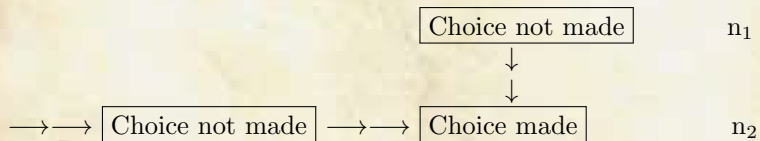
Suppose a will existed only for only a a temporal instant.

How could it be free?

Scotus' Answer: INSTANTS OF NATURE and REAL POSSIBILITY

At a given time there are 'prior' and 'posterior' INSTANT OF NATURE

Instants of Nature:



Instants of Time: t_1

t_2

A NEW CONCEPTION OF POSSIBILITY

A will W willing X at t is able to will not- X

Before Scotus, means:

(0) W wills X at t and it is possible that W wills not- X at a later time t^*

Scotus' New Interpretation:

(1) W wills X at t and it is possible that W wills not- X at a later time t^*

and

(2) W wills X at t and it is possible at t that W wills not- X at t itself

(b) THE DIVINE WILL

[1] The divine will wills for all the objects which it wills all at once with a single act of will.

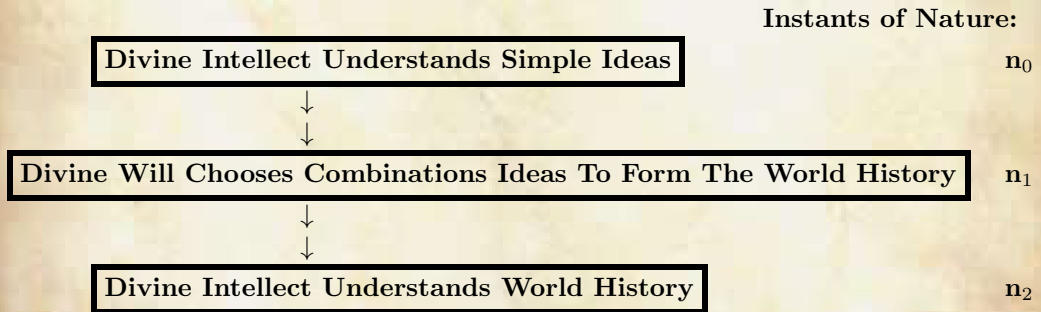
[Not like humans whose acts of will follow one another in time]

So God wills the whole history of the world all at once.

[2] God is able to will for the opposite of anything that he wills, apart from his own nature.

So God can will for any alternative possible world-history to the one he wills.

(b) DIVINE CERTAINTY AND CONTINGENCY



**GOD KNOWS THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE WORLD THROUGH ITS
REPRESENTATION IN HIS ESSENCE**

**THE PAST AND FUTURE DO NOT ACTUALLY EXIST - BUT RATHER
ONLY THE PRESENT**

ONLY THE PRESENT IS ACTUALLY PRESENT TO GOD