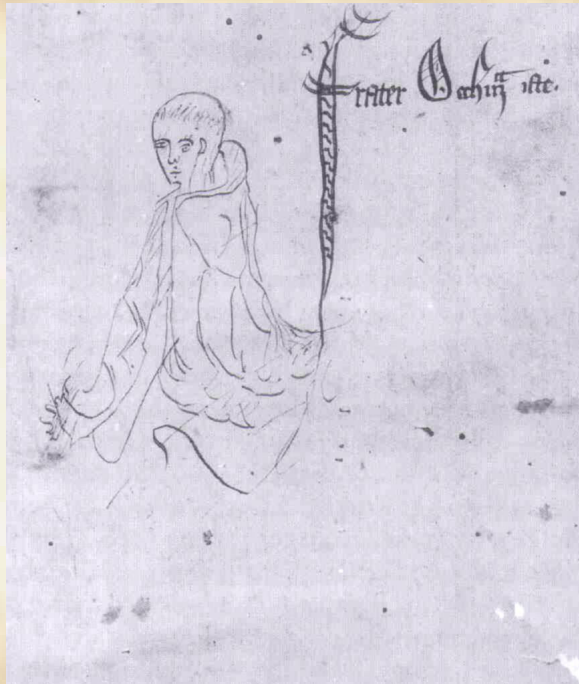


Philosophy 302

Mediaeval Philosophy

Lecture 9



William of Ockham

Does God have DETERMINATE and NECESSARY knowledge of FUTURE CONTINGENTS?

CONTRA:

[1] God does NOT have DETERMINATE knowledge of future contingents.

Because what is not determinately true cannot be determinately known.

[2] God does NOT have NECESSARY knowledge of future contingents

Because what is necessary cannot be contingent.

PRO:

[1] God does have DETERMINATE knowledge of future contingents

Because Scripture says so.

[2] God does have NECESSARY knowledge of future contingents

There is no distinction in God's knowledge

Therefore He knows necessary and contingent things with the same knowledge

But God's knowledge of what is necessary is necessary

Therefore God's knowledge of contingents is necessary

Scotus' Theory:

1. We cannot prove that there are future contingents.
2. We accept that there are future contingents:
3. The source of contingency must lie in God.
4. So either in the divine intellect or the divine will.
5. Not in the divine intellect since understanding is a natural operation.
6. So the source of contingency must be the divine will.

7. To understand the contingency of the divine will we must understand:

(A) how the human will is free.

and

(B) how contingency follows from this.

[A]

8. Human will is free in that it can(a) in opposed acts will or not will for (b) opposed objects of willing and (c) these acts may produce opposed effects.
9. But (a) is not complete, or perfect, freedom since different acts are required and this requires change and nothing which can change is perfect.
10. Freedom in respect (b) is complete, or perfect, since there is no limitation on what can be an object of will.

[B]

- (11) Freedom of type (a) involves an evident capacity for opposite acts - the capacity that is actualised in willing something at one time and not willing it at a later time.
- (12) In addition there must be an non-evident capacity of the will for opposites. That is, a capacity which is not actualised in time - it does not involve the temporal succession of willing something at one time and then not willing it at a later time.
- (13) The proof of this is that it is possible for God to create a free will which exists only for an instant of time.

(14) So there must be a power in the will for opposites which does not involve any (temporal) succession.

(15) This non-evident potentiality is naturally prior to its actualisation as a particular act of will. But the potentiality and the actuality exist simultaneously at the same instant of time.

(16) Alternatively we may say that the potentiality as cause is naturally prior to the act of will as effect but they exist together at the same instant of time.

(17) Apply all this to the divine will.

The divine will does not change in time and is only a single act of will.

But it may will or not will without any temporal succession.

(18) The divine will is free with respect to everything which is not part of the divine nature.

The divine will is naturally prior to all of the effects which it freely causes.

In terms of instants of nature, the divine will at a prior instant of nature may freely will each of two opposed objects of will, whichever it does will is actual at the posterior instant of nature.

(19) Divine knowledge is certain because it sees the contingent determination of the divine will to will one state-of-affairs rather than another, to will one history for the world rather than another.

(20) Putting it another way the divine understanding possesses concepts of everything.

Certain combinations of concepts produce necessary truths and these are known independently of the action of the divine will in a prior instant of nature.

The divine will then chooses all the other combinations of simple concepts which will be true propositions and these are known to be true in a posterior instant of nature.

(21) This guarantees that God has infallible knowledge of future contingents.

4.1 Ockham Against Scotus:

(a) There is no 'non-evident' capacity in the will for opposites.

Because if there were contradictories would be true at the same time.

Which is impossible.

(b) The only capacity in the will for opposites is evident and is actualised in time.

(c) The will causes contingently only in the sense that it can freely act at one time and then cease to act at a later time

(d) Causation by the will is free while natural causation is necessary.

(e) There are no such things as instants of nature.

This is an application of ‘Ockham’s Razor’:

**Don’t postulate the existence of what is not needed
in the explanation of a phenomenon**

**(f) THERE IS NO CAPACITY FOR THE REALISATION OF OPPOSITES
WITHOUT TEMPORAL SUCCESSION.**

Further Problems:

- (a) Scotus' account cannot guarantee divine certainty.
- (b) On Scotus' account either there is no contingency or there is no certainty.
- (c) On Scotus' account human freedom conflicts with divine certainty.
- (d) Scotus' account requires a succession in God - which is impossible.

5. Ockham's Solution:

God has determinate knowledge of future contingents but it is impossible for to understand how in our present life.

5.1. Aristotle's theory entails that God does not have determinate knowledge of future contingents.

5.2. Against this God does have determinate knowledge of future contingents. He has it through knowing his own essence.

God's knowledge of the future is contingent

It could be otherwise without any succession

**SO IN THE DIVINE WILL THERE *IS* A CAPACITY FOR OPPOSITES
WITHOUT SUCCESSION.**

6. The Original Questions:

- 1. God's knowledge of future contingents is determinate.**

But is not necessary since it might be otherwise without any succession.

Ockham's Logic of Future Contingents

Claims about the past which include contingent claims about the future are contingent.

Example 'It was true yesterday that Socrates will sit tomorrow'

is contingent since

'Socrates will sit tomorrow' is contingent

2. The necessity of the divine nature is compatible with future contingency

Since the necessity of the divine nature is compatible with the capacity or opposites without succession.