Logic of belief: an ockhamian point of view

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to analyze, from an Ockhamian perspective, some relevant theories in the contemporary philosophy of religion. Alvin Plantinga's Ockhamism is the crucial topic in this reading. We have noted some misunderstandings in the use of Ockhamian concepts and theories about topics such as theological fatalism and God's foreknowledge. These problems show how Ockham's point of view is, to this day, the best way to conceive of a compatibilist relation between the freedom of human will and the divine foreknowledge.

Keywords: Ockhamism; compatibilism; philosophy of religion; Plantinga; Hasker; free will and grounding.

In the contemporary debate about the "theological fatalism",[1] the solution of William of Ockham (1287-1347) and the contemporary readings of his works still play a major role.[2] In the *Tractatus de Praedestinatione et de Praescientia Dei respectu futurorum contingentium,* Ockham distinguishes between past propositions *secundum vocem* and *secundum rem*.[3] Given that the truth-

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[1] With the word "fatalism" we are referring to the idea that it is not in our power to act differently from how we act; if this is supported with reference to an intelligent being (of divine nature), defined by certain essential attributes (perfection, omnipotence) and, as a consequence, by certain propositions of epistemic nature (infallibility, omniscience) that bind future states, then this type of fatalism will be called theological. Cf. Kane 2002, Fischer, Todd, Tognazzini 2009, Rice 2014. On the origins of theological fatalism in Christian theology, the main sources are Origen, *On first principles*, III, I, 13-24 e Id., *On Prayer*, VI, 3-5; Augustine, *On free choice of the will*, III, 1-4 and Id., *The city of God*, V, 8-11.

[2] Theological fatalism has been met with renewed interest after Nelson Pike's article (Pike 1965: 27-46). It is not possible to reconstruct the whole debate here; the bibliography is vast and the discussion by no means over. For a summary of the various position cf. Fischer 1983; Craig 1986 and 1991; Fischer *et al.* 2007; Migliorini 2014.

[3] "Aliquae sunt propositiones de praesenti secundum vocem et secundum rem, et in talibus est universaliter verum quod omnis propositio de praesenti vera habet aliquam de praeterito necessariam, sicut tales: ' Sortes sedet', ' Sortes ambulat', 'Sortes est iustus', et huiusmodi. Aliquae sunt propositiones de praesenti tantum secundum vocem et sunt aequivalenter de futuro, quia earum

value of every proposition is determined and unchangeable, not all past-tense propositions express an already fixed state of things. While propositions that truly refer to the past (*secundum rem*, as "Socrates was sitting") are fixed and unchangeable, the ones only referring verbally (*secundum vocem*, as "Peter was predestined") remain epistemically undetermined, because they have yet to receive their proper truth-value from a state of affairs to take place in the future.[4] Foreknowledge acts would fall under this category, and so human free will does not conflict with divine knowledge of future contingents.

Among the many contemporary Ockhamist - or "neo-Ockhamist"[5] – positions, we will focus on that proposed by Alvin Plantinga in his article *On Ockham's Way Out* (1986: 235-269). The key point of every compatibilist position inspired by Ockham, as Plantinga's one, is the concept of *necessitas per accidens* (or accidental necessity)*.* Linda Zagzebski has effectively summarized the three possible "ways out" an Ockhamist approach to the problem of compatibility between divine foreknowledge and human free will (Kane 2002: 53): i) God can have false beliefs and therefore his cognitive past acts, free from referring to real state of thing fixed in the future, do not determine future acts of free wills; ii) the past can be changed in such a way that the contingent actions of a free subject at t_2 can make God not hold a certain belief at t_1; iii) God was able to hold false beliefs in the past, therefore he was not God and it did not exist as such in the past. i) and iii) must be excluded because they make no sense in any Christian theology. Only ii) is left but not without any problems. However, Plantinga focuses on redefining accidental necessity and its constraints in order to reconstruct Ockham's position and formulate his own argument. He considers accidental necessity as the most accessible way to the problem (theoretically speaking); in the tradition of temporal logic, moreover, *necessitas per accidens* has always been part of the contingent level in which men act. Therefore, the search for a compatibilism that poses human free will at the center must take place at this level.

In the next chapters of this paper we will argue as follows: a) Plantinga narrows *necessitas per accidens* down to the propositions strictly about the past in order to safeguard the freedom of the human will; b) therefore, we do not

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veritas dependet ex veritate propositionum de futuro; et in talibus non est ista regula vera quod omnis propositio vera de praesenti habet aliquam de praeterito necessariam", G. de Ockham, *Tractatus de praedestinatione*, q. I, ll. 208-216: 515.

4   Cf. Saunders 1966, Pike 1966, Adams 1967.

5   Marilyn McCord Adams has been the first contemporary author to explicitly recall Ockham in the debate started by Pike (cf. Adams 1967). She also edited the first (and only) English translation of Ockham's work, the *Tractatus de Praedestinatione*; a peculiar case in which contemporary debate has produced a renewed interest in its historical sources, rather than the contrary.

have a "causal" but a "counterfactual" power about the past; c) this "soft" power allows Plantinga to account for the compatibility between human freedom and God's foreknowledge; moreover, d) we shall show how Plantinga's argument, as well as Hasker's recent criticism of it, are both weak due to their misunderstanding of Ockham›s theory; finally, e) we shall turn back to the Middle Ages to reconsider the solutions of some Contingentists like John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, since contemporary debates seem to move along the lines traced by their theories.

1. *Accidental necessity and power for agent*

The first step consists in clarifying the concept of *necessitas per accidens* itself. Actually, it does not look like a logical or causal necessity.[6] Plantinga proceeds to free accidental necessity from the temporal asymmetry between past and future: it is not the unchangeability of the past that fixes its necessity (Plantinga 1986: 244-245). The past is no more unchangeable than the future, if changing the past means that:

P1) The proposition P, referring to the past and true at t_1, is such that an action A done at t_1 by an individual S can make it false at t_2 following t_1.

P1 perfectly adapts to the future too, which then results unchangeable in the same way: for the future to be changeable, it should be possible for an individual S to do a certain action A at t1 such that before doing A, the proposition P regarding t_2 was true and after doing A that proposition would have become false. This means that the proposition "I will write my article tomorrow at 7 p.m." is true today at 3 p.m. and then becomes false today at 4 p.m. This is impossible; therefore, the future is unchangeable too.

Having discarded asymmetry as a criterion to define the necessity of the past, Plantinga takes again the distinction between past propositions *secundum rem* and *secundum vocem*, formulated by Ockham in the *Tractatus de Praedestinatione*. In Nelson Pike's terms, this would be the distinction between *hard facts* and *soft facts*.[7] A hard fact is a fact where no one can act at t_2 in such

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[6]   Plantinga uses the expression *to bring about*, that has an intrinsic causal value. However, Plantinga does not use it in that connotation but rather in the weaker one of counterfactual power made possible by the plurality of possible worlds. On the nature of this *bring about* and the implication it carries cf. Dummett 1964; Hasker 1989, Zagzebski 1991 and Fischer 2011. According to Plantinga (1986: 253), Ockham himself seems to consider the necessary nature of state of affairs (once they become past) as implicit and intuitive. Cf. *Ordinatio I, Prologus*, q. 6, in G. de Ockham *Ordinatio in primum librum Sententiarum.*

[7]   However, this does not make Plantinga's juxtaposition of the two distinctions of Ockham and

a way that an action A happening at a precedent time t_1 did not happen (or is modified by that action): the fixity and therefore the accidental necessity of the past closes and resolves the event (*hard fact*), so that the proposition describing it turns out to be determinedly true or false. On the other hand, propositions concerning *soft facts* are those concerning events that are apparently past and closed (i.e., "Judas was destined to damnation") but that, in reality, have a *soft* nature because they need a *relatum* with a future state of things to determine their own truth-value. Therefore, the accidental necessity of the past for soft facts does not hold anymore, opening the way to the contingency of the future.

The past as such, hence, does not itself bring along accidental necessity and its fatalistic implications: divine acts of belief in the past do not necessarily bind the future state of affairs they describe. Rather, it is the contingency of the future and the free choice of man that fix the truth-value of divine foreknowledge in a compatibilist model that Plantinga finds overall coherent (1986: 247). His move is based on relocating *necessitas per accidens* within the *power of the agent*:[8] for example, if Stephanie was born in 1969 there is nothing in my power that I could do today to act on that event and make it different or refrain it from happening. A first definition of *necessitas per accidens* measured on the parameter of the power of the agent is:

P2) p is accidentally necessary at t if and only if p is true at t and it is not possible both that p is true at t and that there exists an agent S and an action A such that (1) S has the power at t or later to perform A, and (2) if S were to perform A at t or later, then p would have been false (1986: 253).

The reformulation of P1 into P2 shows the shift from the linguistic and epistemic framework to that of the power of the agent and, consequently, to freedom.

2. *God's foreknowledge and the colony of ants*

Plantinga believes that the crucial point in P2 is the counterfactual power of action that works as a signal of a missing accidental necessity. But this is not enough. Plantinga therefore imagines a case where a future action would

Pike very coherent, because he puts together the facts to which Pike refers and the propositional-linguistic level proper to Ockham. Even if Plantinga later talks explicitly about "propositions", this does not help in clearing the confusion between the two reference levels (ontological or linguistic) of his argument and, in general, of many contemporary discussions.

[8]   Here Plantinga appears to move with nonchalance between an epistemic and metaphysical position. Relevant to this point is Fedriga 2015b (chapter 8).

be such that, were it to happen, even an authentic past proposition (*secundum rem,* in Ockham's definition) referring to a *hard fact* would be false. Let us suppose that a colony of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday; if the ants were to remain and Paul were to mow his lawn this afternoon, the colony would be destroyed. However, God intends that it be preserved. Paul will not mow his lawn this afternoon and God, who is omniscient, knew this fact in advance; but if he had foreknown instead that Paul would mow this afternoon, then he would have prevented the ants from moving in. So if Paul were to mow his lawn this afternoon, then the ants would not have moved in last Saturday. But it is within Paul's power to mow this afternoon: if Paul has this power, then there is an action (mowing the lawn this afternoon) such that if he were to perform it, the proposition "That colony of carpenter ants moved into Paul's yard last Saturday" (*E*) would have been false. But this proposition appears to describe a true *hard fact*, because it is strictly about the past. According to P2, *E* would not have *necessitas per accidens*: Plantinga concludes that not all true propositions strictly about the past (not even *hard facts*) are accidentally necessary (1986: 254).

The example of the ants can be applied to every action: every individual *S* has within his power to perform an action *A* such that, if *S* were to do it, God, having foreseen it, would have not created a certain being *Z* (i.e-, the dog Luis), or he would have not let a certain event F happen (dig a hole in the garden, chase a rabbit, etc.). Propositions *strictly about the past* (with a relation of strict implication) such as "*Z* existed" and "*F* happened" could not be accidentally necessary. But if that is so, the facts that fall under accidental necessity as expressed in P2 are so scarce that the definition itself becomes unacceptable or even irrelevant. Another weak point concerns the ethic field (presupposed by belief) of libertarianism, that is, the idea that humans have free will and that this is incompatible with any form of determinism, including the theological fatalism that is discussed here. In P2 the nature of the action *A* that the individual S can perform lacks an exact definition: Plantinga specifies that it will have to be *basic*,[9] which means that the action must be performed directly by S without him having to perform another action B in order to perform A.[10] Revised with this new information, the definition of accidental necessity becomes:

[9]   "An action A is a basic action for a person S if and only if there is an action A* that meets two conditions: first, S can directly perform A*, and secondly, S's being in normal conditions and his directly performing A* is causally sufficient for his performing A" (1986: 260).

[10]   For example, raising an arm. On the contrary (according to Plantinga) starting a World War would require a series of actions (pushing buttons, making a declaration, etc.) that put a distance between my choice and the acts stemming from it.

P4) p is accidentally necessary at t if and only if p is true at t and it is not possible both that p is true at t and that there exist agents S_1 ..., S_n and actions A_1 ...,A_n such that (I) A_k is basic for S_n, (2) S_k has the power at t or later to perform A_k, and (3) necessarily, if every S_n were to perform A_k at t or later, then p would have been false (1986: 261).[11]

This formulation appears to guarantee that contingent propositions strictly about the past are necessary *per accidens* without precluding the possibility of a "retroactive" action on the past: therefore, these propositions are temporally necessary but not fixed. According to Plantinga, all weak points would disappear by assuming this perspective and Pike's incompatibilist argument would fall apart under this "revised" Ochkamist lecture. In particular, propositions (5) and (10) of Pike's argument would lose their strength, i.e., namely: "It is not within one's power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that a person who existed at an earlier time did not exist at that earlier time" (5) and "Therefore, if God existed at T1 and if God believed at T1 that S would do X at T2, then it was not within S's power at T2 to refrain from doing X." (10). These propositions are incompatible with a libertarian position[12] and this seems to confirm two things: first, that there is a certain carelessness in moving between the ethic and the epistemic field and, secondly, that these propositions prove to be most tricky for an argument based upon a "soft" redefinition of *necessitas per accidens,* that is, a kind of necessity that brings the possibility of a certain form of *counterfactual*[13] (and not *causal*) action on the past.

Plantinga's argument proceeds in an opposite direction of Pike's. The latter moves from the past to the future because, in order to determine necessity, he finds the first one more important than the second; TNP, precisely, operates by necessitating the actions of free agents in the future and making any form of compatibilism impossible. Plantinga, by contrast, moves from the future, which is taken as a privileged field of interest for contingency and for the possibility of free choices:[14] if truth conditions are dictated by past acts of God's foreknowledge, determining the truth-value of propositions of divine foreknowledge operating in the past depends on the contingent future - without this implying the past indeterminacy of such truth-value.

John M. Fischer brilliantly described – albeit from a critique stance and moving too carelessly between credence and free actions – the way in which

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[11]   The subscripts are intended in this order: 1<j<n. In his reformulation, Plantinga also adds the possibility of multiple agents that we will not treat here because it is outside the scope of this paper.

[12]   Cf. De Florio, Frigerio 2014.

[13]   Who acts in this way is not Ockham but rather John Duns Scotus who is able to save a counterfactual position only by abandoning the diachronic necessity for contingent events. Cf. Mugnai 2013: 101-10.

[14]   Plantinga's position here appears faithful to Ockham's.

an Ockhamist can intend the notion of explicative dependence between *soft facts* in the past and future contingents. Such a relation has to be considered not by the (past) fact that it was true at t_1 that Jones would have written an article at t_{10} but rather by Jones' free choice, at t_{10}, of writing it; in the same way, "God's credence at t_1 that Jones would have written the article at t_{10} has Jones's free choice as its explicative fundament" (Fischer, Todd, Tognazzini 2008: 256). The decisions of free agents explain why God had, in the past, the belief that they would have committed those actions: in Pike's words, the Ockhamist sees divine beliefs as *soft facts*[15] based on the idea of a God who believes (and therefore knows) events and future state of things as a factual realization of a series of open possibilities; he then produces their truth as an act of credence. Since this act is produced by a divine being, it will be necessarily certain and infallible, even if this infallibility can be considered *a posteriori*. Thus, if the God of Ockham enters temporality (meaning that he embraces temporally determined events as part of his cognitive act), this does not mean that he shares the same ways of relation with time that humans do: God knows future contingents by bringing the future "close to himself" and seeing "before" what humans perceive as "after", disturbing the temporal order of the events that are lived and learned by creatures. However, his different capacity of moving through time does not change the rules of time itself, according to which necessity takes over only after a state of affairs occurred, while the future remains open. In other words, while the space of contingency is exclusively constituted by the future (on the creatural level), God moves, in epistemic terms, through past, present and future as he would do inside future state of affairs that only show a difference of perspective to him in relation to their modality (necessary or contingent). This does not imply the disappearance of divine foreknowledge and does not lead to deterministic consequences at the level of human acting.

3. *Possible worlds and logica fidei*

The possibility of different implications between propositions in the past and future actions is based, according to Plantinga, on a plurality of logical worlds that all exist, even if in different forms (as "possible" or "actual"). In the world W, the proposition X at t_1 (Paul will mow his lawn next Saturday) indicates the happening of E at t_2 (Paul mows the lawn Saturday); in the world

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[15]   The *soft* nature of divine beliefs has long been (and still is) object of discussion: Fischer himself believes that even *soft facts* can have a *hard-core* that fixes them according to accidental necessity (Fischer 1986). Also related Craig 1985 and 1986, Widerker 1990.

W*, the proposition *Y* (Paul will not mow his lawn next Saturday) states the happening of non-*E* at t_2 (Paul does not mow his lawn Saturday).

Let us now move from the epistemic to the libertarian level. Once we have established the principle that an individual *S* has the effective possibility to act without his actions being already determined, the free act *E* and the free act non-E determine which relation is brought about by the implication/capacity: the one with proposition *Y* or the one with proposition *X*. In this way, the incompatibility between the free action of human will and the necessitating foreknowledge of God is resolved by moving them both into different worlds, in a sort of chiasmus that crosses the divine act of knowledge with the corresponding factual event; this chiasmus does not constitute a simple logical possibility (that is, a state of things not actually existing), but rather a state of things factually existing even if in the mode of possibility. Relying on a logic that needs to hook linguistic statements to the things of the world through reference (*suppositio*),[16] Plantinga shows that he is moving on a different level than the *Venerabilis Inceptor.* Firstly, because Ockham's solution presupposes the unicity of the order of the world (*ordinatio*): compatibilism must be found within a world that remains unique, between temporally different *relata* located at different temporal and epistemic levels (human and divine). This allowed Ockham to work on propositions (like future contingents or prophecies) which, resting on future state of affairs that are not closed yet, are neither true nor false as far as the reference is concerned. However, they are determinately true according to a truth-value that rests on the premises confirmed by the principles of *logica fidei* and not on the accidental necessity of the past.

4. *Hasker's critique*

The redefinition of *necessitas per accidens* in terms of power over the past by free agents seems to have two consequences: on one hand, it weakens temporal necessity; on the other, it strengthens divine necessity, moving along a direction that appears quite distant from Plantinga's aim and, in certain respects, from Ockham's too. Resuming Nelson Pike's distinction, Plantinga's God appears as the only possible *hard fact*, because he fixes with his omniscience (in every possible world, so even beyond the restrictions of the actual *ordinatio*) the facts of the world; to the divine intellect, they are totally and absolutely *hard* objects. This *hardness*, nonetheless, is not a product of the accidental necessity of mundane temporality but rather of the divine act that grasps them.

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[16] Cf. Brower Toland 2007, Panaccio 2010 and 2014, Karger 2006.

The rigour of necessity does not seem to be *post eventum*, as the example of the ant colony would show. On the other hand, a strong epistemic necessity, based on the nature of God's cognitive act, emerges from Plantinga's argument. As Plantinga himself underlines, without that necessity the Ockhamist model, whose original purpose was to reconcile the contingency of the world with the divine attributes of simplicity and omnipotence, would fail.[17]

Provided that he does not seem to notice the substantial incompatibility between belief and libertarianism, William Hasker has drawn attention to a weakness in Plantinga's argument (2001: 97-114). Incidentally, a feature shared by Hasker's criticisms is that they fail to appreciate the gap that separates him from Plantinga and from the medieval theologians. Contemporary solutions have a single goal: salvaging free will. However, they are not interested in saving the freedom of will and the capacity of committing free actions from an epistemic point of view. Coming back to the debate between Hasker and Plantinga, the latter declares that S has the power to act freely at t_2 even if God declared that he will act in a certain way at t_1; S will be free because he has the power to act in such a way that the declaration of God at t_1 would have been false, which amounts to saying that it is not true by accidental necessity of the past. However, continues Hasker, if the problem is showing that divine foreknowledge does not have deterministic effects on human free will (understood as a capacity of acting without any restrain on one's will, in the libertarian way), then free will becomes the *demonstrandum* and cannot function as premise of the argument. If it were, the argument would more or less sound like this: action A of S at t_2 is free because it has the power to modify the divine belief at t_1 in such a way that action A is free. The argument commits here the fallacy of petitio principii, as it assumes as a premise what needs to be demonstrated.[18] Such criticism hits the target when aimed at a particular type of Ockhamism (for example, Plantinga's one) that strives to demonstrate the freedom of human will as opposed to the "God of the ants"; however, it is not effective at all when opposed to Ockham himself. In fact, according to the *Venerabilis Inceptor,* human freedom is not the *demonstrandum*, but the premise (together with the necessity of divine foreknowledge) of the argument. The broader scope is demonstrating the compatibility, considering a world-order that places divine

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[17]   A god that is not "essentially" omniscient would make possible a counterfactual and retroactive action on the past such to determine the falsehood of his past predictions and therefore eliminate the accidental necessity. This would dissolve a free will compatible necessity, as long as we consider the latter an *a posteriori* agent rather than a deterministically *a priori* one.

[18]   "How can Cuthbert have the power to cause *Cuthbert will purchase an iguana* at t_3 to be false, when its truth is immutably fixed and guaranteed by the truth of *God believes at t_1 that Cuthbert will purchase an iguana at t_3*?" Hasker 2001: 103.

necessity on one side and contingency of the actual world on the other. While Ockham's position rests on a shared ontological and theological basis, the contemporary debate of philosophy of religion divides into negotiations between different conceptions of God and therefore does not share the same ground.

Hasker's solution to the problem of compatibility, which he considers unsolved notwithstanding the many attempts to resolution throughout history, involves a re-examination of God's nature. In line with the theses of *Open Theism*,[19] Hasker "seeks a thorough revision of the conception of God and of God's relationship with the world" (2001: 110): the emerging notion is one of an "open" God, who, freed from the analyticity of all its attribute and therefore not submitted to the Transfer of Necessity Principle, does not determine in a strictly causal way the events and the laws that govern the worldly order (*ordinatio*). He opens, as it were, the possibility for a pragmatic negotiation with his own creatures, and "brings about the conditions", if not for the events themselves, for a space of co-responsibility, based on the belief in mutual testimony – of the Revelation on the one hand and of faith on the other. In William Hasker's own words, a God that is "as majestic yet intimate, as powerful yet gentle and responsive, as holy and loving and caring, as desiring for humans to decide freely for or against his will for them, yet endlessly resourceful in achieving his ultimate purposes'" (Pinnock *et al.* 1994: 154).

Such a "softening" of the divine scope and therefore of the epistemological constraints on foreknowledge it may imply, the fatalist conundrum would be avoided since God's behaviour, "as powerful yet gentle and responsive", might be pragmatically adapted to the contingency of man's acts of free will. Though Hasker criticizes Plantinga for not providing a foundation to free will, his solution too moves along one single plane that is both theological and ontological, and operates on one pole of the relationship, i.e., God, to found and justify the other pole, i.e., human free will.

Plantinga's interpretation operates on the notion of "bringing about", that is, on the degree of entailment that features in the relationship between foreknowledge and free will; Hasker, on the other hand, operates on what seems to him the strongest constraint, i.e., the analyticity of the divine attributes. Both thinkers, however, lack a clear distinction between facts and propositions, which is pivotal to Ockham's position. Ockham's approach to compatibilism involved a distinction between the plane of *voces* and the plane of *res*, which made it possible to locate divine foreknowledge on the former thus avoiding to deterministically force the latter.

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[19]   Cf. Pinnock *et al.* 1994. See also Hasker 2001: 113-114, note n. 36 for further bibliographical references.

The effectiveness of Okham's razor, in other words, comes to the fore once more, for, starting from the assumption that divine nature is, above all, most simple, the multiplication of the planes of belief or of reality *praeter necessitatem* proves entirely useless.

But there is more. The position expressed by Hasker and by the theorists of Open Theism suggests a consideration that we can but enunciate in the present context. Hasker's approach to the foreknowledge conundrum moves along the same lines as that of the German theologian of Jewish origin Hans Jonas. While operating within a completely different, and theologically radical, context, Jonas seems to adopt a solution that is not wholly incompatible with that offered by Hasker. Faced with the impossibility of reconciling the unthinkable horror of the Shoah with the omnipotent and infinitely good nature of God, Jonas, who is a pupil of Husserl and Bultmann, chooses to renounce divine omnipotence, in the name of a "weaker" God, now judged according to the same ethical principles that are applied to human affairs.

In his book *The Concept of God after Auschwitz*, Jonas starts from the "fact" of the genocide of the Jews to reconsider the nature of God: "God would be incomprehensible if, in addition to absolute goodness, he were ascribed also omnipotence. After Auschwitz we can and must assert with full strength that an omnipotent deity must be either deprived of goodness or wholly incomprehensible. […] The concept of omnipotence is, in any case, in itself problematic, hence it is the divine attribute that must be left behind" (1968: It. tr. 34-35).

God renounced his own all-powerfulness in the very moment he granted freedom to human beings. More radically still, it is the very creation of the world *ex nihilo* that constitutes the self-limitation act by which God, since the very beginning, renounced his own absolute authority (1968: It. tr. 37). What is common to Hasker and Jonas is thus the underlying tendency to draw the divine plane closer to the human plane, by reformulating the relationship between the two in terms of a negotiation that, taking place within a more open horizon, justifies the notion of "bringing about", rather than in the form of a causal implication.

Jonas extends the responsibility principle to divine will and gives up the analytic attribute of omnipotence; Hasker, on the other hand, while submitting divine attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience to a similarly radical criticism, focuses on redefining their hierarchy and placing at its top love and charity, i.e. those attributes that are closer to a human and contingent dimension. We are confronted once more with a dichotomy that Ockham would have solved through a notion of religious belief founded on divine simplicity and the logic of faith, that are corresponding, on the mundane plane, to the franciscan values of evangelic charity and poverty.

Such suggestions certainly require further historiographical investigation; what matters for our purposes, however, is that theological fatalism has proved to be a valuable test to show both the possibility and the efficacy of a dialogue with a philosopher and theologian of the past – notwithstanding some tendencies to over-interpretation which our analysis has brought to light.

5. *Back to the Middle Ages*

Assuming a Ockhamist position means, according to Plantinga, renegotiating the concept of accidental necessity. There is no doubt that temporal necessity plays a major role in the Ockham's compatibilistic solution: the theology of the *Venerabilis Inceptor,* which locates God in time, poses the necessity of divine foreknowledge in the form of past propositions that bound future acts. Plantinga's move, as we have seen, consists in weakening the temporal necessity of the past by showing how it only concerns strictly past facts and how a certain way of counterfactual action on past events (especially God's cognitive acts) is possible. Hasker effectively summed up Plantinga's position in these terms: "The solution denies that we can *cause* God to have had a different belief than he did have. But […] we do have the power to act in such a way that, were we to act that way, God would have had a different belief. We do not have *causal power* over the past, but we do have *counterfactual power* over the past. And because of this, God's foreknowledge does not compromise human freedom" (2001: 103).

We are therefore justified in resorting to the views of some medieval theologians and to the range of solutions to theological fatalism that, far from being exhausted by Ockham, can be extended to include the "conversational community" that, between the end of the 13th century and the 14th, concerns itself with discussions on contingency. We shall talk, therefore, not only of neo-Ockhamism, but of Contingentism and of neo-Contingentism, and in particular we shall make reference to John Duns Scotus, in addition to William of Ockham.[20] For the views advanced by Ockham, Scotus and the Contingentists of the 14th century[21] are not merely theses that must be appropriated or absolute parameters by which we may judge the validity of modern theories; rather, they are tools that allow a correct reading and understanding of the strategies at work. There seem to be two viable ways out to the deterministic implications of theological fatalism. One is the epistemic solution

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[20]   Cf. Fedriga 2015b: 59-157.
[21]   Theologians like Henry of Ghent, Peter John Olivi, Peter Auriol, Gregory of Rimini, Thomas Buckingham, Robert Holkot and Thomas Bradwardine.

proposed by Ockham, that is, a soft interpretation (i.e., in terms of "bringing about") of the relationship between statements of divine foreknowledge and future events, which is granted by the possibility of shifting from the ontological plane (to which human contingency belongs) to the epistemological plane (where the necessity of divine knowledge is grounded), according to different degrees of entailment. Necessity is thus guaranteed by the foundation provided by the *suppositiones*, on which the logic of religious belief rests. Ockham's solution envisages the two planes as cooperating: namely, the epistemological plane, which allows the contingency of world events, is sustained though not predetermined (in the mode of the "bringing about") by the ontological plane.

The other solution is that proposed by Scotus. In this account, the contingency of human will's acts is founded on a grounding of mere logical possibilities, which constitute a sort of logical and ontological purification of accidental necessity. Such grounding is thus based on the principle of non-repugnance of terms, which Scotus defines as logical potency (*potentia logica*), and not on temporal necessity.[22]

For the accidental necessity of temporality would constitute a causal implication, which is precisely the kind of constraint that Scotus wants to reject. He thus decides to work with the notion of temporal instants in which various natural instants coexist: in the single temporal instant t_1, the agent *a* is faced both with the possibility of *P* and with the possibility of *not-P*, and only at a later stage does he choose between the two (Mugnai 2013: 105-108). Breaking with the Aristotelian tradition, Scotus claims that the present, much like the future, is not necessary but open to the contingency of the acts of human free will. In this framework, the acts of divine foreknowledge are performed on the plane of logical potency, outside of time, and can be necessary (as they are founded on God's inquiry into his very own acts), without thereby deterministically binding those events that are located on the temporal plane of *ordinatio* that God has decided to realise among the innumerable other counterfactual co-possibilities (Fedriga 2015a: 27-45).

Both approaches involve trans-temporal movements that manage to free themselves from the strict implication of temporal accidental necessity. They allow entering a logical-ontological space (logical potency for Scotus, the lin-

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22   Cf. Iohannes Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, lec. I, d. 7, *quaestio unica*. See also Iohannes Duns Scotus, *Lectura*, I, dist. 39, qq. 1-5: "Logical potency occurs only when the extremes are possible, in such a way that they are not repugnant to one another but can be joined. […] Such a logical possibility does not occur when will performs its acts successively, but when it actuates them in the same instant". For an interpretation of necessitas per accidens based on the concept of ground, see also Andrea Bottani and Riccardo Fedriga *Ockham, Plantinga and the Row of the Ants*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, forthcoming.

guistic-propositional level of *logica fidei* for Ockham) on which the plane of human contingency can rest, without thereby implying that the events and free decisions that belong to that plane are deterministically necessitated.

The contemporary debate, at least in the form it has been examined here, seems to be moving along similar lines. A comparable strategy based on softening the relation of causal implication appears to be at work on both sides of the discussion: on the one hand, Plantinga frees the notion of accidental necessity from the time constraint by turning the causal nexus into a milder relationship of "bringing about"; on the other, Hasker chooses to redefine the divine attributes, again with a view to softening the necessity constraints that derive from the traditional conception of an omnipotent God.

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