

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

Zita Veronika Tóth

Do things in the world exercise causal powers? Are the manifestations of these powers necessary? What if one also wants to maintain that there is an omnipotent agent (God) who created and maintains this world? In my dissertation I present various solutions to this cluster of problems as they appeared in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, centered around three debates. I show that the focus of the question itself, as well as the related notions changed considerably in the period: while in the thirteenth century, the main concern was the metaphysical one to avoid mere conservatism and occasionalism, by the early fifteenth century it became the more epistemological one about the demonstrability of genuine causal relations. These three debates represent the three most important aspects of the medieval problem of divine concurrence, which is a significant problem both in the medieval metaphysics of causal powers, and in contemporary theories of divine action — since neither mere conservatism nor occasionalism is compatible with theism classically understood.

After motivating the problem by reviewing the Latin medieval reception of Arabic occasionalism (Chapter 1), the first debate I present concerned whether God is immediately active in every action of a creature, and if yes, what this divine concurring action amounts to (Chapter 2). Most thirteenth-century thinkers thought that the answer to the first question was affirmative. They disagreed, however, on how to understand God's concurring action, and, consequently, on the response to their mere conservationist contemporaries. Apart from their specific concern, their arguments also shed some light on how to understand the necessary connection between cause and effect in the medieval framework.

The second debate focused on divine concurrence as present in human actions (Chapter 3). Although human actions present special problems, interestingly, most arguments against the claim that we need divine concurrence in the production of every volition apply to created causes in general. In this debate, the focus expanded to questions about divine foreknowledge, but the main aim remained the same: to account for concurrentism that can avoid falling into occasionalism or mere conservatism.

Occasionalism and the indemonstrability of the causal relation became a central problem in the third debate (Chapter 4). I show that although some fourteenth-century thinkers have been regarded as occasionalists, most of them preserve a clear distinction between genuine, *sine qua non*, and occasional causes. Gabriel Biel, the pre-reformation theologian seems to be the first one to explicitly argue that God is the only genuine causal agent in the world, but even his evaluation is more complicated than it is usually assumed.

In summary, I show that although the focus of the debate and the employed conceptual apparatus shifted, concurrentists remained occupied with avoiding both occasionalism and mere conservatism. Different versions of concurrentism entail different sorts of metaphysical commitments about actions, substances, and powers, and thus whether one thinks any of the concurrentist attempts are successful will turn on whether one thinks these commitments are plausible ones.