

# Creation and Divine Concurrence

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According to theological doctrine, mostly settled by the time of Augustine but codified in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, God is ‘the first principle of the universe, the creator of all ... things, who by his omnipotent power brought about creation, ... from nothing, at the beginning of time.’<sup>1</sup> There are many issues that arise from this brief summary, but this chapter will focus especially on three that were of special interest to medieval Franciscan thinkers.

First, the question of the possible eternity of the world. Could the world be eternal? Could it be eternal while still created, or does being created entail having a temporal beginning? Second, the relation between creation and conservation. Is being created different from being conserved in existence? Do either or both of these acts essentially include a reference to time? Third, the question of God’s concurring activity. If God created the world, is God also immediately active in its causal happenings? If so, does this causal activity extend to everything, including less obvious cases such as the production of sinful acts of the will?

As will be seen below, Franciscan authors showcased a great variety of views regarding all of these questions. And while some trends seem to emerge, it should be kept in mind that the overview below is extremely selective: I focus primarily on authors who seem to endorse some influential or interesting positions.

## Creation and eternity

While theological doctrine entailed that (1) the world was created *ex nihilo* and (2) in the beginning of time, and consequently, no Franciscan author questioned these claims, it was less clear whether the first of them entailed the second, or whether they could be known without revelation. Additionally, (3) since Aristotle seemed to have argued for the eternity of the world,<sup>2</sup> it was often discussed what he meant exactly. Not all authors were equally interested in all these questions, and in this brief discussion, I will mostly bracket the third.

Two clarifications about terminology. First, all agreed that the world could not be eternal in the sense in which God is eternal (having the simultaneous possession of life *tota simul*, all at once<sup>3</sup>). Instead, the question was about perpetuity: an infinitely extended temporal sequence. Second, temporal creation, or the world having being *after* non-being, does not imply that there would have been a time before the beginning of the world; as Augustine had argued,<sup>4</sup> time began *with* creation. The issue was rather whether time and the world necessarily had a starting point.

### *Creation is necessarily temporal*

The earliest Franciscan discussions, such as the *Summa Halensis* and Alexander of Hales's disputed questions on eternity, agree that the world must have been created in time. As the *Summa* explains, to be created, is to come from nothing,<sup>5</sup> which denotes a kind of ordering in the sense of having being after not being. Creation, as such, does not presuppose a preexisting eternal subject.<sup>6</sup>

Alexander further clarifies the relevant concepts, distinguishing eternity proper from infinite duration (*aevum*), while accusing Aristotle of their confusion. He argues that there can be no eviternally infinite creature: what does not have a beginning does not have non-being mixed in its being.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as later arguments will reaffirm, he claims that 'having

a principle of being from something else, and a starting point of duration are the same'<sup>8</sup>; i.e., it contradicts creaturely nature to be eviternal. As Alexander claims, the only eternal production is the Trinitarian one, which does not result in a creature.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* implies that the world had a temporal beginning.

While Alexander's arguments are rather brief, some of them will become the core arguments for the position, as developed by Bonaventure, John Peckham, and Richard of Middleton, who all agree that a creature cannot be eternal. Peckham's treatment of the issue, while more detailed, is mostly an elaboration on Bonaventure's, hence I discuss them together.

When considering the possible eternity of the world,<sup>10</sup> Bonaventure admits, following Augustine,<sup>11</sup> that if matter were eternal, it would be reasonable to claim that the world itself was eternal: we could still maintain some causal dependency between God and the world, similarly to how footprints are caused in the dust.<sup>12</sup> However, he and Peckham also maintain that eternal matter is not metaphysically possible: if matter were eternal, it would be better, more powerful, and more noble than everything else, which is not the case. Because of this, and also because of God's infinite power, the world was created not from pre-existing matter but from nothing – which should not be conceived as a non-being having duration, but as a lack of pre-existing principle.<sup>13</sup>

Bonaventure and Peckham agree with Alexander that *ex nihilo* means *post nihil*, and thus it is impossible that something was created out of nothing and yet is eternal.<sup>14</sup> But while most earlier authors simply took this for granted, Bonaventure gives an argument: if something recedes into nothing, that means that it exists for a while and *then* it stops existing. But then, conversely, if something comes to be from nothing, that means that it starts existing *after* not having existed.<sup>15</sup> Peckham adds that since the world was created, it has a participated, finite being, and must be temporally bounded; otherwise it would be infinite like

God. (As he preempts an objection, even eviternity would imply an actual infinity, since time has a being and thus actuality.<sup>16</sup>)

Regarding infinity, both Bonaventure and Peckham think that an eternal world (or eternal matter) would result in various absurdities. Thus, impossibly, an infinite time would have had to be traversed to reach the present; something would be added to an infinity as time goes on, which is also absurd, since one infinite cannot be greater than another; and again impossibly, an actual infinity of souls would end up existing.<sup>17</sup> Peckham also notes that if the world were eternal, its creation could not be past, since every past was, at some point, present (the thought seems to be that in order for something to have receded into the past, a finite time need to have elapsed between the point in which it was present and now).<sup>18</sup>

While Bonaventure and Peckham mostly continue the earlier treatments of the question, Richard of Middleton gives some new arguments. Disagreeing with his predecessors, he argues that even if, *per impossibile*, matter were eternal, God could not have eternally created the world from it (and, *a fortiori*, neither *ex nihilo*). Creation would either be by motion (*motus*) or by mutation (*mutatio*).<sup>19</sup> Not by motion, since that would necessarily mean delay (no matter how quickly something moves, motion takes time!). If, however, something is made by mutation, instantaneously, it cannot be made eternally, since there can be no infinite time between two instants, i.e., between the instant of creation and the instant of now. Hence, the world cannot be eternal.<sup>20</sup>

Richard also repeats some of the earlier arguments. He agrees that being a creature necessarily implies being temporally finite, but clarifies that it is not simply because one receives being from another (in that case, even the Trinitarian production would imply temporal finiteness); but rather because one receives a *new* being. The Trinitarian production can be eternal – while still being a production – since the being that the Son receives is not a new being but that of the Father; in creation, however, this is not the case.<sup>21</sup> He also agrees

that the eternity of the world would result in the actual infinity of souls;<sup>22</sup> or, supposing that God could create and conserve a stone every day, an actual infinity of stones.<sup>23</sup> To these, he also adds that eternal creation would mean that God could not *not* create – since there was no time when he did not create – and hence he created by necessity.<sup>24</sup>

*Creation is not necessarily temporal*

While the majority of Franciscan thinkers until around the end of the thirteenth century thought that being created entails having a temporal beginning, disagreements start to emerge around Scotus's time.<sup>25</sup> Scotus's discussion is lengthy and detailed, rehearsing a plethora of arguments for both sides without taking a stance, except for showing that none of them were in fact successful.<sup>26</sup> William of Ockham, Walter Chatton, and Francis of Marchia, however, positively argue for the claim that the temporality of creation cannot be philosophically demonstrated, and thus that the world could have been created from eternity. While Chatton often criticizes Ockham, on this particular question they agree, and their arguments are similar enough that I will discuss them together.

Ockham's approach may seem to resemble Scotus's as he thinks that the debate cannot be demonstratively settled.<sup>27</sup> But he also explicitly invokes the principle that God can do whatever does not imply a contradiction, and concludes that since there is no *apparent* contradiction in an eternal world, it is more likely than not that God could create it – and, as Kretzmann notes, we should not underestimate the strength of this claim.<sup>28</sup> Chatton goes further, claiming that since there is no contradiction in an eternal world, and since God can make anything that does not imply a contradiction, God could have produced the world eternally. He thinks that there is no contradiction in terms in the claim 'the world is eternal', since just as one may think that there are entities that lack an endpoint (such as angels), one

may also think that something can lack a starting point.<sup>29</sup> Ockham also notes that receiving existence does not necessarily imply a temporal succession of being after non-being. Rather, it only assumes that a thing's non-being is prior to its being by nature, without connoting any temporal order.<sup>30</sup>

Ockham and Chatton address several of the infinity worries seen earlier, arguing that none of them is conclusive. For one, Ockham notes that while positing an infinite future that still needs to be traversed is indeed impossible, no absurdity arises from an infinite past having been traversed already.<sup>31</sup> Second, both Ockham and Chatton think that actual infinities may not be logically impossible, and thus God could create infinitely many souls. As Chatton notes, positing that God could create a soul in every day for an infinite time is no more absurd than maintaining (as one should) that God could create a soul at every instant in a day, of which there are also infinitely many.<sup>32</sup> Ockham also explains that alternatively, just because it is true in the divided sense that 'God can create a soul every day', even if there are infinitely many days, it may be false in the composite sense (as it is true in the divided but false in the composite sense that 'this black thing may be white': what is black, may possibly be white, but something cannot be both black and white at the same time). Finally, neither Ockham nor Chatton see it as a manifest contradiction that one infinite exceeds another.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding divine freedom to create or not to create, Ockham and Chatton think that just because something is eternal, it may still be free.<sup>34</sup> Even if God had always produced the world, he could also have never produced it, and thus he produced it freely.

Ockham concludes that there is no demonstrative proof for the claim that the world cannot be eternal, while also arguing that there is no demonstrative proof for the world's actual eternity either: Aristotle's arguments do not show that the world in fact has always existed, but only that it was always possible for it to exist – two claims that should not be

confused.<sup>35</sup> Chatton's conclusion is bolder, claiming that since there is no demonstrative proof against the world's eternity, it lies within God's power.<sup>36</sup>

The last author to be discussed here is Francis of Marchia, who, after defining creation as a 'production of the whole thing, according to all its intrinsic principles',<sup>37</sup> argues that God could have created the world from eternity, even though he did not. He addresses all the major arguments seen for the contrary, which will also serve as a good summary to this section.

First, regarding the *ex nihilo* to *post nihil* argument, Marchia responds that this would imply that there could be no subject coeval with its cause at all, which seems false, since causation only posits natural, as opposed to temporal priority. Moreover, Marchia argues, a production is more strongly attached to a subject than to a preceding terminus; but by the divine power, creation can come about without the former, hence it can also come about without the latter.<sup>38</sup>

Second, regarding the infinity arguments, discussing them in terms of the possible eternity of successive entities (such as time and motion), Marchia argues that there is no impossibility implied in an infinite past, or at least no more impossibility than in positing an infinite – as-yet-to-be traversed – future. The solution to the difficulty is that we need to assume that time is infinite not merely potentially but in act – in a kind of act that exists in the past (*in actu praetereunte*).<sup>39</sup>

Third, regarding the freedom argument, Marchia reiterates Ockham's point: everyone agrees that if Peter is predestined, he had been eternally predestined, nevertheless, he is still contingently predestined, since he could be such that he had never been predestined.<sup>40</sup> Thus, even if God had produced the world eternally, he could have never produced it, and hence would have produced it freely.

Finally, Marchia addresses Middleton's worry, according to which creation could not have been eternal since it is at an instant. As Marchia argues, this argument assumes that the act of creation is only present at the instant in which the thing starts existing, and then goes away while the creature remains – which is false (see more about this below). Rather, the act of creation continually remains with the creature, and hence no absurdity arises about infinite distances between instants.<sup>41</sup> As Marchia concludes the discussion, similarly to Chatton, there seems to be no contradiction in eternal creation; and since God can do whatever does not imply a contradiction, God could have eternally created the world, even if he in fact did not.

As can be seen from this cursory overview, earlier Franciscans by and large maintained that God could not have created the world from eternity. One family of characteristic arguments for this claim had to do with the meaning of creation *ex nihilo*; another one with various resulting absurdities about infinity; and a third one with creation being a free act.<sup>42</sup> Later authors, who endorsed the possibility of eternal creation,<sup>43</sup> had to clarify their understanding of *ex nihilo* creation, infinity, and divine freedom. Many of these issues, as Ockham, Chatton, and Marchia note, were also intertwined with the question of whether creation and conservation were the same; to which issue we must now turn.

### **Creation and conservation**

While it was never a question whether creation and conservation denote different acts in God (as God was regarded as altogether simple), it was less clear whether, viewed from the creature's side, being-created and being-conserved (*creatio-passio* and *conservatio-passio*) are distinct, especially (but not only) if one thinks that eternal creation is possible. While the identity of creation and conservation has sometimes been regarded as the manifestation of a 'remarkable consensus',<sup>44</sup> as will emerge from this section, it was not



unambiguously upheld among Franciscan authors,<sup>45</sup> and especially earlier ones resist endorsing it.

*Creation and conservation are different*

Bonaventure's position on the identity question is somewhat ambiguous.<sup>46</sup> On the one hand, as was seen above, he is committed to the argument that creation *ex nihilo* implies temporal creation, partly because it implies a creature receiving existence after not existing. This seems to indicate that he regards, at least here, creation and conservation as different: conservation implying previous existence, while creation necessarily implying the opposite. On the other hand, when discussing angelic eviternity (the idea that angels can exist in time, even though without change), he explains that an angel can be eviternal and still receive its existence from God in the same way as a light ray receives its existence from the sun; in such a case, 'in the eviternal thing's being, what is first given is continued by God's continuous influence.'<sup>47</sup> While indeed there may be a tension between these two accounts, it could also be that Bonaventure regards creation and conservation as rather special when it comes to changeless entities, which would not, in itself, rule out that he thinks that in general, creation and conservation denote distinct acts – which seems to be his considered position when addressing the issue directly.

The distinction thesis is endorsed more unambiguously by Richard of Middleton. According to Richard, the philosophers' mistake of admitting the possibility of an eternal world stems precisely from their confusion regarding creation and conservation: while they thought that the making of the world is no other than the prevention of its falling into nothing, 'that is a clear mistake'.<sup>48</sup>

It is a mistake for several reasons. First, as was seen above, Richard thinks that creation implies the reception of a *new* being, while conservation does not.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, relations are individuated by their termini, and while the terminus of creation is the creature's being, the terminus of conservation is its duration.<sup>50</sup> Also, while a creator gives a thing being, a conserving cause presupposes it. Finally, Richard argues, the world does have being; hence, if its conservation were its creation, it would first need to lose this being; the world would be constantly annihilated and recreated, at least as far as its incorruptible parts are concerned, which is 'manifestly false'. This means that conservation does not amount to a continuous giving of being, but rather, to preserving the being that something already has.<sup>51</sup>

Very similar arguments, if in somewhat less detail, are given by Vital du Four. He also thinks that the distinction follows from the fact that at the first instant of its existence, a thing is created and yet is not conserved; and that conservation is necessarily temporally extended (that is, it has temporal parts that are not simultaneous), while creation is instantaneous.<sup>52</sup> These points will be taken up by the advocates of the identity thesis.

### *Creation and conservation are identical*

While the distinction thesis seems to be the more prevalent one among Franciscan authors in the earlier period, just as the eternity question, this seems to change around Scotus's time. While Scotus treats the issue rather briefly, he is committed to the thesis that creation and conservation are in reality the same relation. He explains that we use two terms for it when we add various mind-dependent relations: when we talk about conservation, we imply a relation (but a purely mind-imposed one) of the thing to its previous states; while when we talk about creation, we imply the lack thereof.<sup>53</sup>

Francis of Meyronnes's treatment is also rather brief, but his conclusion is clear: that creation (defined as a passive origin by which a creature has being) and conservation (defined as a continuation by which a thing has being through time) are not distinct in reality.<sup>54</sup> He lists several theses, although sometimes without much explanation. First, that creation and conservation *are* distinct by the nature of the thing (*ex natura rei*), because something is created in the first instant, and then conserved but not created. Second, that there is no formal distinction between the two, since a formal distinction can only arise if either the termini or the foundations of the relations are distinct, which here they are not. Third, that they are also not distinct in reality, since both creation and conservation are identical with the created/conserved thing. Fourth, concluding, similarly to Scotus's point, that creation and conservation differ only accidentally, insofar as they have different extrinsic relations to time: creation implies that something receives its being in the first instant of its existence, while conservation implies that it receives it subsequently.<sup>55</sup>

Neither Ockham nor Chatton seem to be very interested in the identity-question, although both endorse it. Ockham's main concern when discussing creation and conservation is to establish that neither creation-as-action, nor creation-as-passion is a real relation (and the same goes for conservation-as-action and conservation-as-passion).<sup>56</sup> Rather than signifying a real relation, 'creation' signifies the divine essence, connoting the existence of a creature and that it cannot exist except when the divine essence is posited; while 'conservation' signifies the divine essence and secondarily connotes the creature and its dependence on God.<sup>57</sup> (Ockham establishes these claims by his usual principle: the only truth-makers needed for the claim 'God created this stone' to turn out true are God and the stone.<sup>58</sup>) As Ockham concludes, similarly to earlier authors, the only distinction between creation and conservation is a distinction of reason: while 'creation' connotes the negation of the thing's previous existence, conservation connotes its continuation.<sup>59</sup>

The perhaps most interesting treatment of the question can be again found in Francis of Marchia, who, as was briefly mentioned above in one of his arguments for the possible eternity of the world, also endorses the identity thesis. Marchia agrees with his contemporaries that every created thing is in continuous actual dependence of the first cause, hence needs continuous conservation, and argues that neither a real nor a formal distinction holds between this conserving act and creation, but only a distinction of reason.<sup>60</sup>

Marchia's main argument for the identity thesis is rather ingenious. He points out that according to the distinction theorist, creation goes away, making way to conservation, while conservation arrives after a subject had already started existing – which means that both creation and conservation are accidents. But surely, Marchia goes on, neither creation nor conservation can be an accident. Not creation, since every accident presupposes a subject, while creation does not. Nor conservation, since God can preserve accidents without their subjects, and thus God could preserve the conservation of a thing without it existing, which is clearly absurd.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, creation cannot 'leave' the subject, nor conservation can 'arrive' to it.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly to Meyronnes, Marchia also argues that there is no basis for distinguishing the relations of creation and conservation. We make distinctions between relations based on the distinction of their foundations or their termini; however, in creation and conservation, both the former (God) and the latter (the created/conserved thing) are the very same. (As Marchia argues elsewhere, it is no good to say – as Middleton did – that the terminus of conservation is the thing's duration, since the thing and its duration does not differ in reality.<sup>63</sup>)

There are also some objections that Marchia considers, shedding further light on his view. First, someone (like Vital du Four) may say that while creation is a permanent thing, conservation is successive, having different parts at different times. But Marchia argues that

this would imply that the terminus of conservation is also successive, different at every instant, so that ‘the heavens is not the same now as it was in the beginning’, which is false. Thus, conservation must also be a permanent thing just like its terminus, the conserved substance.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, someone (like Middleton) may want to say that in the first instant of its existence, a thing is created but not conserved, and in the later instants, it is conserved but not created. But to this, Marchia responds similarly to what Scotus and Meyronnes alluded to: that creation and conservation can be considered in two ways, either in themselves, bracketing all other relations, or together with some relations of reason. In the former way, both ‘creation’ and ‘conservation’ signify the created/conserved thing, together with the real relation that its being is dependent; hence, they are entirely identical. In the latter way, if we understand ‘creation’ to also connote that there was no prior existence of the thing, we are adding a relation of reason to creation proper (and similarly in the case of conservation). This, however, cannot establish real or formal distinction but only a distinction of reason.<sup>65</sup>

As can be seen from this brief overview, if there was any consensus about the identity or distinctness of creation and conservation, it may have changed around Scotus’s time. Earlier authors tend to argue that creation and conservation are distinct, mostly because they do not occur together: the former occurs at the first instant of a thing’s existence, while the latter in the subsequent instants. Scotus, Meyronnes, Ockham, and especially Marchia, on the other hand, argue that the distinction is merely a distinction of reason. That so diverse authors share this view is in itself interesting, because it suggests that neither an author’s view on the question of eternal creation, nor his view on the ontological status of relations implies a particular view regarding the identity question (Meyronnes thinks that eternal creation is impossible; as was seen above, Scotus is agnostic, while Marchia and Ockham support its

possibility. Scotus and Marchia are realists when it comes to certain relations, while Ockham is not).

## Concurrence

Assuming that God created and conserves the world, is God also active in its causal happenings? Medieval authors discussed this question in different contexts. First, towards the beginning of the second book of the *Sentences*, asking whether both God and secondary agents are active in bringing about effects in causal interactions. We can call this the *general problem of divine concurrence*. Many Franciscan authors, however, tend to focus on what we may call the *special problem*, a particular test-case for the general theory: whether (and if so, how) God is active in bringing about sinful volitions. Since the forming of a volition is a particular kind of causal interaction – the will as a causal power producing a quality in the mind – if one thinks that God concurs with created agents, the question arises whether this is also true of this particular case. The question becomes more puzzling if the volitions in question are sinful, i.e., are against the moral law or divine command.

As is well known, most medieval authors endorsed a ‘concurrentist’ view, positing divine and creaturely contribution in both the general and the special problem. (Despite the single label, the view comes in many forms, depending on how one conceives of the concurring activities.) Indeed, there are some often-quoted authorities for this view, such as John the Evangelist claiming that ‘apart from me, you can do nothing’,<sup>66</sup> or the *Book of Causes* opening with the claim that ‘every primary cause contributes more to its effect than a universal secondary cause’.<sup>67</sup> Yet, as will be seen below, some Franciscans disagreed, and endorsed what we may call the ‘mere conservationist’ view – i.e., that God merely conserves things but does not immediately contribute to their causal activity.

## *The General Problem*

Bonaventure gives a good summary of what we may regard as the ‘standard view’, arguing that ‘every action ... insofar as it is an action, is from God’.<sup>68</sup> Apart from citing the usual authorities mentioned above, he gives what would become one of the common arguments. God as a first cause must influence the secondary causes, otherwise they could not act: having been created from nothing, they are always intermixed with the potency of matter, needing the pure actuality of the first cause to bring them to action.<sup>69</sup> Elaborating on the theory, Bonaventure notes that we should not imagine God’s and the secondary agent’s actions as analogous to two people carrying a stone together, each being a partial cause. Since the secondary agent’s power itself would recede into nothing if God did not sustain it, God is acting in the innermost way in every causal agent – thus the effect is wholly from God and also wholly from the secondary cause.<sup>70</sup>

The standard view, very briefly presented here, came under attack famously by Peter John Olivi, and slightly later by Peter Auriol and Aufredo Gonteri Brito. Olivi argues that the answer to the special problem is negative since it is also negative for the general problem: i.e., sinful acts of the will are not caused immediately by God, because no effect of a created cause is caused immediately by God. He establishes this by giving a thoroughgoing critique of the concurrentist position, distinguishing several versions of it and ruling them out one by one.<sup>71</sup>

According to one way of understanding divine concurrence, God’s concurring action terminates in the effect itself. Olivi thinks, however, that the view implies that God produces the effect both immediately and mediately (by his conservation), and hence produces it twice – which, for many reasons, Olivi deems absurd.<sup>72</sup>

Second, the concurrentist may maintain that God's concurring action does not terminate in the effect but augments the secondary cause's power. As Olivi argues, this view also faces multiple difficulties. For one, it does not explain how this contribution would be immediate (God's concurring action is different from God, and hence, in a way, is just another creature by the mediation of which God acts). For another, there seems to be no reason why God could not create a secondary cause with sufficient power to start with, instead of having to augment the agent's power every time it tries to act.<sup>73</sup>

Third, the concurrentist may think that God's cooperation amounts to the application of the agent's power to its act. Olivi thinks, however, that there is no need for this, as natural powers seem to be capable of it whenever a patient is well disposed and sufficiently near. Moreover, Olivi thinks, just as before, that since the application itself is distinct from God, it would not result in an immediate concurring action.<sup>74</sup>

Building on Olivi's critique of the concurrentist view, Auriol also claims that divine concurrence would only be needed if bringing about a proper effect would exceed the secondary cause's power, which, however, it does not: once God has created matter, secondary agents are able to elicit the relevant forms from that matter by their own powers.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, if there were divine concurrence, the relation between God's and the secondary agent's action would be problematic: they would either be partial causes (in which case we do not need divine concurrence for *every* action of the secondary agent, after all); or they would both be total causes, in which case the effect would be produced twice.<sup>76</sup>

Apart from Olivi, Auriol, and Gonteri (who focuses entirely on the special problem), the majority of Franciscan authors agree with Bonaventure that God is immediately active in the causal interactions of creatures. Thus, when discussing the special problem, Scotus attacks Olivi's position directly. Others, like Petrus Thomae,<sup>77</sup> simply endorse Bonaventure's position, while Ockham develops it further.



Ockham agrees with the majority view that both God and created agents are immediate causes of secondary effects; however, he conceives of these actions differently from his predecessor.<sup>78</sup> He proposes an analogy (in striking contrast to Bonaventure's admonition): imagine that a strong person can carry a heavy weight on his own, which no one else apart from him could. Still, if one of the weaklings were to carry it together with him, they would both be carrying it immediately, and neither of them would be superfluous.<sup>79</sup> While it is not entirely clear how much one should read into this *exemplum crude* (as Ockham calls it), what it does suggest is that God is causally active, and that God's action is immediate – two points of agreement with Bonaventure's view. Ockham argues for both.

As for the first, he points out that natural agents (contrary to voluntary ones) are equally directed towards all their effects, possibly infinitely many. Thus, if they produce a specific one, that means that a primary cause is conducting them to it, in which case the natural agent is not in fact a total but only a partial cause.<sup>80</sup>

As for immediacy, Ockham remarks that if God's existence and concurring action is posited, so is the effect, while if (*per impossibile*) it is not posited, nor is the effect – which fulfills his definition of an 'immediate efficient cause' given elsewhere.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, every effect depends more on an unconstrained universal cause than on a constrained one; but God is the most unconstrained and universal cause of all, hence all effects depend on him the most. Finally, Ockham utilizes an argument for God's immediate concurrence to which we will return below: if God did not concur with secondary causes, we could not account for cases where an agent is exercising its power, there is no impediment, and yet the effect does not come about.<sup>82</sup>

While in these two claims, Ockham is in full agreement with Bonaventure, in contrast to his predecessor, perhaps due to his general skepticism regarding essential orders, he does not seem to regard the primary and secondary cause as constituting a hierarchically ordered

series (even while acknowledging various senses in which God is primary<sup>83</sup>). Relatedly, while Bonaventure was explicit that in some sense, both God and the secondary agent are total causes of the effect, Ockham is equally explicit that they are partial causes.

### *The Special Problem*

Regarding the special problem, Bonaventure again expresses the standard view. To see how sinful actions<sup>84</sup> are caused by God, he claims that we need to make a distinction: on the one hand, we can regard them as actions (this would be later referred to as their ‘material’ component); and on the other hand, as prohibited (or lacking due justice; their formal component). Sinful acts are from God, considered as actions; but are not from God, considered as prohibited.<sup>85</sup> This is so, he explains, even if the deformity is not separable from the act (such as in the case of idolatry or disobedience, where there is no seeming positive aspect at all – a point the mere conservationists will press on): even in these cases, the defect is an in-ordination, attributable to the secondary agent as to a deficient cause; but the action itself, which is something rather than nothing, is attributable to God as to a primary cause.<sup>86</sup>

We have seen above that Olivi questions the standard view on the general problem. He also addresses directly the explanation given by Bonaventure to the special problem, noting that distinguishing the two aspects of sinful volitions is not sufficient: if the deformity does not have a proper cause but follows directly upon the essence of the volition, then whoever causes that essence must also cause the deformity. In particular, in some acts, the deformity is so inseparable that we cannot understand the essence of the act without it; and in this case, whoever causes the one must also cause the other.<sup>87</sup>

Scotus rejects Olivi’s view, but instead of answering his objections, he offers a *reductio*: if Olivi were right, God could not know the future acts of created wills.<sup>88</sup> Since God

does know these future acts, God and the secondary agents are their partial, essentially ordered, autonomous co-causes.

We do not have the space here to present Scotus's elaborate view on divine foreknowledge.<sup>89</sup> It suffices to say that according to Scotus, God knows future contingents by causing them,<sup>90</sup> more precisely, by knowing the determinations of his own will (the source of contingency in the world), upon which the future contingents follow. If the created will were a total cause of its volitions, then divine knowledge would not follow upon the determination of God's will, and hence God could not know these volitions – which is of course absurd.<sup>91</sup>

When Scotus explains *how* God brings about sinful acts, he follows Bonaventure, maintaining that while God concurs with bringing about the material aspect of sinful volitions, the cause of their formal aspect (a *per se* deficient or *per accidens* efficient cause) is the created will. As he explains further, responding to Olivi's worry, an effect, which is a result of two different causes, can have a deficiency as a result of one only; thus, while God concurs with all volitions, whether just or unjust, unjust volitions are such only because of the deficiency in the created will.<sup>92</sup>

While Scotus agrees with Bonaventure in this much, he disagrees with him about some particulars. Again, while Bonaventure maintains that God and the secondary agent are both total causes, Scotus thinks that they are partial causes, constituting one total cause. Now, according to Scotus, partial causes may be related to one another in various ways.<sup>93</sup> They may exercise the same power or each their own; and in the latter case, one may be acting as an instrument of the other or autonomously. This last one is the way in which, according to Scotus, God and secondary agents are related: they act by different powers, each moving to act on their own, constituting a non-trivial order of essential dependence.<sup>94</sup>

With Scotus, the problem of foreknowledge became intertwined with that of divine concurrence, and hence Auriol, siding with Olivi on the latter, will also need to address the

former. In doing so, he claims that God's foreknowledge does not derive from his causal activity, but rather, similarly to what the Boethian solution maintains, from his 'in-distant' presence to all things.<sup>95</sup> Gonteri Brito, while sometimes counted among the members of the Scotist school, in this question disagrees with Scotus,<sup>96</sup> repeating some of Auriol's arguments and developing some of them further.

Besides undermining Scotus's motivation for the concurrentist view, Auriol and Gonteri also argue directly against it. Like Olivi, they regard the distinction between the material and formal aspect of sinful volitions unhelpful: they are so inseparable that whoever produces the one, must produce the other.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Auriol thinks that there is no consistent way of spelling out the priority relation between the determinations of the divine and the human will. On the one hand, if the human will determined itself first and God's determination followed, then God would choose to concur with sinning, and would also not be active in the determination itself (hence, if Scotus is right, could not know this determination). On the other hand, if God determined himself first and our will followed, then God would determine the human will to its sinning – which is a contradiction, since in this case, the will could not sin at all, since it would not be acting freely.<sup>98</sup> As Gonteri elaborates on the second horn on this dilemma, if there were divine concurrence in volitional acts, then the act of the will would not be more in the power of the will than an act of any natural substance is in the power of that substance, which he deems absurd.<sup>99</sup> Regarding sinful volitions in particular, he also argues that it would result in the absurd conclusion that God both wills and nills the same act at the same time.<sup>100</sup>

Auriol and Gonteri also address some objections, which shed further light on their views. First, Gonteri's quibbler calls attention to the passage from the *Liber de causis*, according to which every primary cause contributes more to its effect than a secondary cause. Gonteri responds that he does not deny God's contribution, but only that it is immediate. As

he notes, two causes may be essentially ordered even if one only conserves the other, without contributing to its act; thus, God and the secondary agent are indeed essentially ordered causes, without God acting immediately.<sup>101</sup>

Second, Auriol and Gonteri both address the objection that according to some, presents a compelling case for the concurrentist view<sup>102</sup>: the metaphysical possibility of certain kinds of miracles. For instance, if we assume that God does not ordinarily concur with fire, but fire is a sufficient cause of burning, then it may be difficult to explain cases where burning did not occur in some well-disposed patients (the standard example being the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego not burning in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace<sup>103</sup>). Although Auriol addresses the objection, he says little except merely affirming the possibility by the absolute divine power.<sup>104</sup> Gonteri, however, gives a brief account: God can simply not will the burning, since the action of the fire is posterior to the fire's essence and hence can be annihilated while the latter is kept intact.<sup>105</sup>

When it comes to the question of divine concurrence, the Franciscan landscape is diverse. Some, such as Bonaventure, Scotus, Petrus Thomae, or Ockham, defend what seems to be the majority view in the period – that God concurs immediately with secondary agents in their causal interactions. Nevertheless, some authors, and perhaps more in the Franciscan than in any other tradition,<sup>106</sup> were willing to give up this standard view. Along the way, the question of concurrence became intertwined with some other important issues, such as the question of divine foreknowledge or, when discussing the possibility of certain kinds of miracles, the ontological status of actions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Enchiridion* 428; Denzinger 1911, 189.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's arguments are complex, and so was their early reception. For an analysis, see especially Sorabji 1983, and the wealth of literature cited therein.

<sup>3</sup> Boethius, *Consolations of Philosophy*, 5.6; see Stump and Kretzmann 1981 for some analysis.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., *De civitate Dei*, 11.5.

<sup>5</sup> SH 2, p. 1, i. 1, tr. 1, sec. 1, q. 2, m. 2, c. 1; Alexander of Hales 1928, 33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2, q. 2, m. 2, c. 2, 58–59.

<sup>7</sup> *De duratione*, q. 1; Alexander of Hales 2013, 167.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 2, 173.

- <sup>10</sup> *Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2; *Hexaëmeron* 4.13; and *Breviloquium* 2.1.1–3. For an English translation of the relevant texts, see Vollert, Kendzierski, and Byrne 1984. Bonaventure’s arguments are presented in detail in Bonansea 1974, with plenty of further bibliography.
- <sup>11</sup> *De civitate Dei*, 10.31.
- <sup>12</sup> *Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2; Vollert, Kendzierski, and Byrne 1984, 111.
- <sup>13</sup> *De aeternitate mundi*; John Peckham 1993, 9–10.
- <sup>14</sup> *Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2; Peckham, *ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>15</sup> *Hexaëmeron* 4.13; *Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2, 110.
- <sup>16</sup> Peckham, *ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>17</sup> *Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2, 109–110. See also Peckham, *ibid.*, 34, citing Augustine, *De civitate* 12.15.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.
- <sup>19</sup> These are technical terms: ‘motion’ denotes a temporally extended change, while ‘mutation’ is instantaneous.
- <sup>20</sup> *Quaestiones disputatae* q. 4, a. 1; Richard de Mediavilla 2012, 112–114.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2, 132.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 1, 116.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2, 130.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.
- <sup>25</sup> One may think that they came relatively late; the most famous take on the Dominican side is, of course, Thomas Aquinas’s treatise on the *Eternity of the World*, written some decades earlier, and we should also mention Maimonides, who had earlier argued for an agnostic position.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ord.* 2.1.3; Johannes Duns Scotus 1973, 50–90.
- <sup>27</sup> He treats the issue twice – *Quaestiones variae*, q. 3 (OTH 8:59–97), and *Quodlibeta*, 2.5 (OTH 9:128–135) – but his position seems constant.
- <sup>28</sup> Kretzmann 1985, 12, citing the *Summa logicae*, according to which probabilia are ‘necessary [propositions which are] neither the principles nor the conclusions of demonstration, but which because of their truth are apparent to everyone, or to most people.’
- <sup>29</sup> *Rep.* 2.1.3; Walter Chatton 2002, 55. This explicitly contradicts one of Alexander of Hales’s arguments in *De duratione* q. 1, 165–166.
- <sup>30</sup> *Quaest. var.*, q. 3, 82–86.
- <sup>31</sup> Ockham’s formulation of this argument is extremely brief in both versions. According to Kretzmann, ‘there is indeed a kind of infinite that cannot ever have been gone through – namely, an infinite that is to be gone through’ (20). But the eternity of the past is not that, since it does not *yet* to be gone through.
- <sup>32</sup> *Quest. var.*, q. 3., 58.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–69. Dales claims that the thinker who changed the way in which authors dealt with the infinity arguments was Henry of Harclay, whose disputations Ockham probably also attended in Oxford. See Dales 1990, 201–208.
- <sup>34</sup> See more about this in his *Tractatus de praedestinatione*, where Ockham argues that even though ‘Peter was predestined’ is seemingly past and eternally true, assuming that Peter is still living, its truth is contingent since it depends on the future.
- <sup>35</sup> *Quodl.* 2.5, 133.
- <sup>36</sup> *Rep.* 2.1.3; Franciscus de Marchia 2008, 81.
- <sup>37</sup> *Rep.* 2.1.1, 2.
- <sup>38</sup> *Rep.* 2.12.1.1., 203–204.
- <sup>39</sup> *Rep.* 2.12.1.2, 218.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 207–208.
- <sup>42</sup> Not all early authors endorsed all of these. For instance, Richard Rufus emphasizes that *ex nihilo* does not mean *post nihil*, but only implies natural priority between the non-being of a thing and its being. Cf. his *Sententiae Oxonienses*, 2.1.
- <sup>43</sup> Similarly to the previous note, not all later authors did so. William of Alnwick is adamant that God could not have created an eternal world; so is William of Nottingham and William of Ware.
- <sup>44</sup> Miller 2009, 471.
- <sup>45</sup> For the modern parallel of this debate, see, e.g., Craig 1998 and Miller 2009.
- <sup>46</sup> Richard Cross, when analyzing the position, arrives at the conclusion that he may be endorsing contradictory assumptions (Cross 2006).
- <sup>47</sup> *In Sent.* 2.2.1.1.3; Bonaventure 1885, 62b.
- <sup>48</sup> *Quaestiones disputatae*, 4.3; Richard de Mediavilla 2012, 136.
- <sup>49</sup> *Quaestiones disputatae*, 4.2.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.3, 138.

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- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.4, 140.
- <sup>52</sup> *Quodlibeta memorialia*, 2.10; Vital du Four 1947, 247.
- <sup>53</sup> *Quodl.* q. 12, nn. 7–8 (Vivès 25: 479–480).
- <sup>54</sup> *In Sent.* 2.1.4; Francis of Meyronnes 1520, 138va.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 138va–b.
- <sup>56</sup> *Rep.* 2.1.2–3.
- <sup>57</sup> *Rep.* 2.1 (OTh 5:9); cf. *Quodlibet* 7.1, 703–706.
- <sup>58</sup> *Quodl.* 7.1, 704.
- <sup>59</sup> *Rep.* 2.3–4, 65.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>61</sup> *Rep.* 2.4.1, 86.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 85–86.
- <sup>63</sup> *Rep.* 2.5.
- <sup>64</sup> *Rep.* 2.4.1, 87.
- <sup>65</sup> *Rep.* 2.4.2, 90.
- <sup>66</sup> Jn. 15:5
- <sup>67</sup> 1.1; Pattin 1966, 134.
- <sup>68</sup> *Sent.* 2.37.1.1, 862b.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 862b–863a. While Bonaventure’s argument here seems to rely on his universal hylomorphism, there are version of it that do not – e.g., among Dominicans, Aquinas endorses something similar.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 863b.
- <sup>71</sup> *Sent.* 2.116; Petrus Iohannis Olivi 1926, 333–347. Olivi’s position and arguments have been analyzed in Frost 2014. I deviate somewhat from Frost’s analysis who regards Olivi’s arguments as discussing two main models of concurrence. For an earlier account, see Stufler 1930.
- <sup>72</sup> *Sent.* 2.116, 338.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.
- <sup>75</sup> *Sent.* 2.38.1.1; Peter Auriol 1605, 303.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> *Quodlibet* 2.12.2; Petrus Thomae 1957, 181–182.
- <sup>78</sup> I examine Ockham’s account in greater detail in Toth 2019.
- <sup>79</sup> *Rep.* 2.3–4, 72.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 63; for the definition of efficient causation, see, e.g., *Ord.* 1.1.3 (OTh 1:416).
- <sup>82</sup> *Rep.* 2.3–4.
- <sup>83</sup> *Rep.* 1.45.1.
- <sup>84</sup> While the question, strictly speaking, is about sinful volitions (acts of the will), I will follow the medieval authors in treating volitions and actions interchangeably.
- <sup>85</sup> *Sent.* 2.37.1.1, 863a.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 867b–868a.
- <sup>87</sup> *Sent.* 2.116, 342–343.
- <sup>88</sup> Scotus’s discussion is complex, and is further complicated by the change of emphasis (or possibly change of mind) in his different works. In what follows, I mostly rely on the *Ordinatio*, and while am not arguing for it here, will regard the differences in the texts as a shift in emphasis rather than a change in the basic view. For a detailed analysis, see Frost 2010; for a slightly different take, Frank 1992.
- <sup>89</sup> A helpful overview can be found in Adams 1987, ch. 27, 2:1122–1130.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ord.* 1.38.2.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ord.* 2.34–37.1–5, n. 120.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ord.* 2.34–37.2.
- <sup>93</sup> There is no space here to give a full exposition of Scotus’s notion of essential order and partial causes. For some details, see the *De primo principio*, esp. 1.11–12 and *Ord.* 1.3.3.2, n. 496.
- <sup>94</sup> *Lectura* 2.34–37.4, nn. 124–126.
- <sup>95</sup> Auriol’s discussion of foreknowledge is complex and we cannot revisit it here. See the edited text Schabel’s analysis in Peter Auriol 1995.
- <sup>96</sup> I rely here on Gonteri’s *Sentences* as transmitted in ms. Wrocław, I F 184 (W). For some insecurity regarding this text, as well as its relationship to the – in this particular question, identical – anonymous Vaticana Vat. Borghese 346, see Duba, Friedman, and Schabel 2010.
- <sup>97</sup> *Sent.* 2.38.1.1, 303; for Gonteri, see *Sent.* 2.37.1, W 658va.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., W 658va.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., W 659ra.

<sup>102</sup> Peter of Palude, a fourteenth-century Dominican levels it against Durand of St-Pourçain's mere conservationism as one of the deciding arguments (see *Sent.* 2.1.4). As was seen above, Ockham also makes use of it. For a detailed examination, see Toth 2020; for a modern defence, Freddoso 1991.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. *Daniel* 3:19–27.

<sup>104</sup> *Sent.* 2.38.1.1, 304.

<sup>105</sup> *Sent.* 2.37.1, W 659ra.

<sup>106</sup> Establishing this claim would need further research, but the only well-known Dominican to defend mere conservationism in the period is Durand of St-Pourçain.