CAN GOD BE PROVED TO ACT FREELY?

Ockham's Criticism of an Argument in Thomas

M.J.F.M. Hoenen

Introduction

One perspective from which to bring out the differences between philosophical thought in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages is that of the relationship between the first principle of reality and the rest of reality. The main question at issue here is whether this relationship was considered to be necessary or free. That is to say, is the existence of reality as necessary as the existence of the first principle? The obvious answer would seem to be that authoritative ancient thinkers, notably Aristotle, thought the relation to be a necessary one, whereas medieval thinkers did not¹. Yet this answer cannot be given so easily. At closer inspection it turns out to be quite difficult to decide on the exact points of comparison between the two realms of thought. There is at least one respect in which medieval and ancient philosophy seem to be particularly different. Whereas philosophy in the Middle Ages can reasonably be characterized as largely a reflective, philosophical articulation of the religious heritage, this does not appear to be the case for the larger part of ancient philosophy before Christ². A fair amount of medieval philosophical thought is, therefore, to be found in theological works, i.e. works that try to articulate reflectively the religious heritage³. The philosophy of the main period of ancient thought, however, is not generally to be found in works of an equivalent theological nature.

The thought of e.g. Plato and Aristotle, as compared with that of Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus, does not seem to make any direct reference to the familiar realm of gods and goddesses in its discussion of the principle of reality. There is no trace of the idea that Zeus, son of Chronos, is identical with the supreme Good or with the Unmoved Mover⁴. The initial answer to our question was, therefore, given prematurely. We had better consider first how an authoritative Greek thinker, such as Aristotle, would have answered the question as to whether Zeus might

¹ In this spirit, e.g. Jolivet, *Essai sur les rapports entre la pensée grecque et la pensée chrétienne*, Paris 1931, p. 67: "En somme, que manque-t-il à Aristote? C'est...la notion d'une libre causalité en Dieu... C'est le point sur lequel saint Thomas insiste fortement".

² Of course, on this matter there is a marked difference between ancient philosophy before and after Christ, as can be seen clearly in the works of the Fathers.

³ The most notable examples are the numerous commentaries on the Sentences, in which philosophy plays a prominent part. On the other hand, the equally numerous works on logic and commentaries on Aristotle demonstrate that, in spite of the theological bias mentioned in the text, medieval philosophy has also managed to develop in relative freedom from purely theological concerns.

⁴ Although the first principles are called 'divine' by Plato and Aristotle (because of their perfection), they are not identified with the gods and goddesses of tradition. With Thomas and Scotus, on the other hand, the first principle is unmistakably taken to be identical with the God of Faith. This bias is typically expressed in the opening words of Duns Scotus' *De Primo Principio*, ed. W. Kluxen, Darmstadt 1974, c. 1, nr. 1, p. 2.

have refused to Deucalion the stone from which he wrought man. Aristotle might quite likely have responded that it was possible for Zeus to have ordered man not to be created, or to be created in a different fashion. This response would imply that Aristotle, speaking as a faithful Greek about the Supreme God and His acts, allows for a measure of freedom and contingency, but that this contingency is absent when, as a Greek philosopher, he is speaking about the relationship between the Unmoved Mover and the rest of reality. A thinker of the Middle Ages, however, such as Thomas, would *mutatis mutandis* have answered 'Yes' on both counts: not only as a devout, medieval man, but also as a medieval philosopher, he took it that God has freely brought forth man, as well as creation in general.

In view of these divergent perspectives and consequent answers, a quite interesting problem is raised in the history of philosophy, viz., whether by identifying the God of Faith with the first principle of reality, philosophy in the Middle Ages was able to penetrate more deeply into the subject of the first principle than ancient philosophy had been able to, precisely because it conceived of the first principle as bringing the world into existence freely, and not out of necessity. In trying to reflect on and account for one of the basic tenets of the Christian religious creed, was philosophy in the Middle Ages led to prove something which was held impossible by ancient, pagan thought?

It must be pointed out in advance that there is no reason to suppose that the majority of medieval philosophers thought themselves capable of proving conclusively that God created the world freely. On the other hand, however, this does not mean that they took Aristotle's view of the matter to be definitive. Medieval philosophy's proper contribution to this perennial question, one might say, has been to show us that the problem of the relationship between the first principle and the rest of reality is, in effect, insoluble. Not even medieval philosophy, despite its special position in trying to supply a philosophical foundation for the religious tenet of a freely acting God, was able to give a firm and unequivocal answer on this matter.

Scope and Object

In William of Ockham, we have a philosopher in whom these latter remarks are conveniently exemplified. According to Ockham, it cannot be proved that God acts freely, nor does this imply that God acts out of necessity. The solution to the problem, he argues, is not a matter of strict proof, but can be based only on probable arguments⁵. This view, however, has not been universally endorsed. On the one hand, some philosophers have held, contrary to Ockham, that the only conclusion that is validated by natural reason is the one that was reached by Aristotle. Such was the opinion of e.g. Marsilius of Inghen, who believed Aristotle's reasoning by natural reason to be sound and irrefutable⁶. On the other hand, there have been those who, in opposition to Ockham, held that God can in fact be proved to act freely. Such was the persuasion of, most

⁵ *Scriptum in I Sent.* d. 43, q. 1 (*Opera Theol.* IV, p. 636) and *Quaestiones in II Sent.* qq. 3-4 (*Opera Theol.* V, p. 55).

⁶ Marsilius of Inghen, *Questiones super IV libros Sent.* I, q. 42, a. 2, ed. Strasbourg 1501, fol. 177rb; I, q. 44, a. 1, fol. 186va and II, q. 1, a. 2, fol. 203 va.

notably, Thomas and the 13th and 14th century Thomists⁷.

Our focus will be on the position of Ockham, he being the main subject of this volume. As our point of departure we shall take Ockham's criticism of an argument in Thomas, that achieved great popularity in the 13th and 14th centuries. We shall, firstly, expound Thomas's argument and trace its fundamental presuppositions. Next, we shall set out Ockham's criticism of the argument and of its presuppositions. Finally, we shall discuss Ockham's own reasonings in support of the claim that God acts freely. In order to establish the historical moment of the arguments used by Ockham, their use by other 13th and 14th century theologians and philosophers will be considered.

Thomas's view

In various passages Thomas puts forward arguments to the effect that God's relationship to the world is not a necessary one⁸. We shall concentrate here on one of his main lines of argument. In the *Summa Theologiae*, God is stated to be perfectly good. His goodness cannot be augmented. This means that God does not need the existence of any other being, and that He need only contemplate His own essence in order to achieve His perfection. God can exist, therefore, and can indeed exist in a perfect way, even if there existed no other beings. Consequently, when God brings about the creation, He does so without the least necessity. In bringing forth the creation, too, the object of God's will is His essence. Creation is a mere instrument to this end. Since every creature partakes in the goodness of God's essence, no creature can be such an instrument that without it God would not be able to attain His object, for, as God's will coincides with its object, viz. God's essence, and as this essence consists in perfect goodness, God's will also contains all possible perfections that can be bestowed upon the creation. If God brings forth a world, this is done solely and merely in order to let the creation share in this goodness. Briefly put, because God's goodness is perfect and capable of existing without anything else, there is no necessity for God to produce the creation. Consequently, God brings forth the creation freely⁹.

This line of thought, which is proposed by Thomas in several of his works, can properly be reckoned to be among the main arguments put forward to prove God's freedom. It is to be found in Dominican theology in the end of the 13th century and at the beginning of the 14th century, in such writers as Thomas of Sutton, Nicholas Trivet, Hervaeus Natalis, and Durandus. It is also prominent in the work of other theologians, such as Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and Thomas of Strasbourg¹⁰. Before dealing presently with Ockham's criticism of these

⁷ See note 10.

⁸ See, e.g. *Scriptum in I Sententias* d. 43, q. 2, a. 1; *De potentia* q. 3, a. 15; *Summa contra Gentiles* I, cap. 81 sq. and *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 3.

⁹ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 3, ad 2: "Licet Deus ex necessitate velit bonitatem suam, non tamen ex necessitate vult ea quae vult propter bonitatem suam: quia bonitas eius potest esse sine aliis".

¹⁰ See Thomas of Sutton, *Quodlibeta* III, q. 4, ed. Schmaus and González-Haba, p. 371; Nicholas Trivet, *Quaestiones de causalitate scientiae Dei*, *Quodlibet* XI, q. 1, ed. Schmaus in: *Divus Thomas* ser. 3 anno 9 (1932), p. 190; Hervaeus Natalis, *In IV libros Sent. commentaria* I, d. 42, q. 2 a. 1, ed. Paris 1647, p. 167, col. 1B and Durandus, *In Sententias libri IV*, I, d. 43, q. 4, ed. Venice 1571, fol. 114va, n. 6. See also Henry of

reasonings, we shall first examine the argument somewhat more closely and discuss its presuppositions.

There are at least two assumptions implicit in the argument, firstly, that God is infinite, and, secondly, that God can bring forth other beings. The first point is obvious: evidently, God is thought to be infinite, since otherwise His essence could not be said to be perfectly good. Only God is good without participating in the goodness of something else. Hence He can be called infinite. If, as we have seen, God's goodness cannot be augmented by any creature, and if God, as Thomas states, is good in such a way that he surpasses any other conceivable perfection, this means precisely that God is infinite¹¹. This point is of fundamental importance. If God were not infinite, His being and His goodness would be bounded, and therefore be caused by something else¹². In this case it would be impossible for God to be completely free.

The second assumption, that God can bring about other beings, is no less obvious than the first. Supposing that God could not bring forth any other being, it would be pointless to speak of the Creator's attitude towards creation. It would be equally pointless to look for an answer to the question as to whether God brought forth the creation freely or out of necessity.

Ockham's criticism

We are now sufficiently equipped to address ourselves to the criticism put forward by Ockham in response to Thomas's argument. The objection is phrased very succinctly, as follows: "Thomas has failed to prove sufficiently that God's will is contingently directed to creation. Yet this is exactly what he should have done"¹³. What does Ockham mean by this? He does not dwell upon the point any further, but it is not too difficult to elucidate his intentions. According to Ockham, not only has Thomas failed to give conclusive proof of God's freedom in bringing forth the creation, but more importantly, it is indeed impossible to give such a proof at all. The reason for this is dealt with by Ockham a few pages later in his text. "It is impossible to prove by natural reason that God is a contingently acting cause, since it cannot be proved that it is not the case that as many effects are the result of the perfection of the sun naturally, so many entities which otherwise could not have been are the result of the perfection of the divine entity"¹⁴. According to Ockham, the belief that God acts freely is solely a matter of Faith. Each argument

Ghent, *Quodlibeta* V, q. 4, ed. Paris 1518, fol. 158vO; Duns Scotus, *Lectura* I, d. 8, p. 2, q. un., ed. Vat. XVII, p. 102 and Thomas of Strasbourg, *Commentaria in IIII Libros Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, ed. Venice 1564, fol. 128vb.

¹¹ *Summa contra Gent.* I, cap. 41, § 331: "Deus est bonus per suam essentiam, alia vero per participationem". Also *op. cit.* I, c. 43: "Non potest esse aliquis modus, nec etiam cogitari, quo plenius habeatur aliqua perfectio quam ab eo quod per suam essentiam est perfectum et cuius essentia est sua bonitas. Hoc autem Deus est. Nullo igitur modo potest cogitari aliquid melius vel perfectius Deo. Est igitur infinitus in bonitate".

¹² *Summa contra Gent.* I, cap. 43, § 361.

¹³ *Scriptum in I Sent.* d. 43, q. 1, p. 626: "Hoc (Thomas's argument) non sufficit, quia non est probatum sufficienter quod voluntas divina contingenter velit ea quae sunt ad finem, et tamen hoc oporteret probare specialiter".

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 636: "Dico quod non potest ratione naturali probari quod Deus est causa rerum contingenter agens, quia non potest probari quin sicut ex perfectione solis naturaliter sequuntur effectus multi, ita ex perfectione entitatis divinae sequuntur multae entitates quae aliter esse non possent".

to the effect that God acts freely can be countered by an opposite argument to the effect that God acts out of necessity¹⁵. Avicenna, for example, argued in favour of the latter conclusion, although he was of the same mind as Thomas in holding that God is wholly perfect and independent of all other beings¹⁶.

Another thinker who, like Ockham, denied the possibility of proving God's freedom of action, was Marsilius of Inghen. He, too, considered belief in God's freedom to be solely attributable to Faith. Using the principles of natural reason, he even proceeds to show that no other conclusion than that of God's necessity of action is open to one not illuminated by the light of Faith.

Now, Ockham denies the possibility of proving that God acts freely. But what about the presuppositions of Thomas's argument? Can they be proved? Ockham does not think so. Let us start with his criticism of the second assumption: can it be proved that God can bring forth other beings?

A separate *quaestio* of Ockham's *Quodlibeta* is devoted to the problem. He argues that it is impossible to prove by natural reason that God is the efficient cause of any effect. It cannot be proved sufficiently, he contends, that other things than the sublunar entities are brought forth. According to Ockham, it is impossible to prove sufficiently that the celestial bodies and the separate substances are produced by an efficient cause. Only sublunar things can be shown to have been caused. The generation and dissolution of the latter, however, can be adequately explained by reference only to the causality of the celestial bodies, i.e. without reference to God¹⁷. It is of crucial importance, of course, what is meant by 'natural reason' and 'sufficient proof'. In Ockham's view, something can be proved by natural reason if it can be proved sufficiently¹⁸. Something can be proved sufficiently, if it can be proved either from principles that are evident in themselves, or from experience¹⁹. God's causality is not provable from principles that are evident in themselves. According to Ockham, God's existence is not evident in itself²⁰. Nor, *a fortiori*, is God's causality. God's causality, however, also cannot be proved from experience, because it is the celestial bodies, rather than God, that are experienced by us to be the cause of the things around us²¹.

But what about the impossibility of proving that the celestial bodies themselves are caused by a further principle? What has induced Ockham to this thesis? Here we encounter a problem that

¹⁵ *Quaestiones in II Sent.* qq. 3-4, p. 55. In his *Scriptum in I Sent.* d. 43, q. 1, p. 637 sqq. Ockham suits the action to the word. To each argument, gathered by him from the works of Thomas and Scotus, he adds a counter-argument in the spirit of the pagan philosophers.

¹⁶ Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima* VIII, c. 6 and IX, c. 1, ed. Van Riet, pp. 412, 434 and 439.

¹⁷ *Quodlibeta* II, q. 1 (*Opera Theol.* IX, p. 108): "Dico quod non potest probari naturali ratione quod Deus sit causa efficiens alicuius effectus, quia non potest probari sufficienter quod sint aliqua effectibilia praeter generabilia et corruptibilia, quorum causae sufficientes sunt corpora naturalia inferiora et corpora caelestia; quia non potest probari sufficienter quod substantia separata quaecumque nec aliquod corpus caeleste causatur a quocumque efficiente".

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 107 and note 17 above: "Non potest probari naturali ratione...quia non potest probari sufficienter".

¹⁹ See Baudry, *Lexique philosophique de Guillaume d'Ockham*, Paris 1958, s.v. 'probari sufficienter' and *Quodlibeta* IV, q. 1, p. 295: "Non potest probari ex per se notis nec per experientiam...quia non potest probari sufficienter".

²⁰ See *Scriptum in I Sent.* d. 3, q. 4 (*Opera Theol.* II, p. 432 sqq.) and *Quodlibeta* I, q. 1, p. 2.

²¹ *Quodlibeta* II, q. 1, p. 111.

was widely debated at the beginning of the 14th century. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Averroes pointed out that, according to Aristotle, an efficient cause can bring forth only composite substances, i.e. entities that are composed of matter and form²². Indeed, an efficient cause works only on the matter, moving and changing it until it has taken on a certain form. The activity of an efficient cause inevitably involves the change of matter, capable of assuming different forms. On this description of 'efficient cause' — the only one known to Aristotle, according to Averroes — the celestial bodies and the separate substances cannot possibly have been brought about, for, unlike the sublunar entities, they are not composed of matter and form²³.

Various medieval philosophers were consequently led to believe that the celestial bodies and the separate substances are not dependent on God as their efficient cause, at least, that is to say, insofar as one agrees with the view of Aristotle and Averroes. For this position, we may refer to such philosophers as John of Jandun, as well as to such theologians as John Baconthorpe and Gregory of Rimini²⁴. Conversely, others²⁵ were of the opinion that one could both follow Aristotle and prove that the celestial bodies and the separate substances are dependent on God as their efficient cause. This view was endorsed by, for example, Scotus and the Thomist Hervaeus Natalis²⁶.

We have seen just now that in Ockham's opinion it is impossible to prove by natural reason that God is an efficient cause. Is this intended to be an exposition of Aristotle's view of the matter? It is not. Like Scotus and Hervaeus, Ockham holds that Aristotle did in effect teach that God is the efficient cause that brought forth the celestial bodies and the separate substances²⁷.

²² Averroes, *In Aristotelis Metaphysicam* XII, t. 18, ed. Iuntina, fol. 304vH.

²³ Averroes, *In Aristotelis Metaphysicam* XII, t. 44, fol. 328rD and *In Aristotelis De Coelo* I, t. 20, ed. Iuntina, fol. 15rCD.

²⁴ See John of Jandun, *Quaestiones in XII libros Metaphysicae* II, q. 5, ed. Venice 1533, fol. 27 rA: "Secundum intentionem Aristotelis et Commentatoris (dicendum est) quod nulla substantia aeterna causata est ab agente simpliciter" et *ibid.* II, q. 5, fol. 27 rG: "Dicit Commentator quod ab agente proprio non procedit nisi abstrahere, et hoc est educere aliquid de potentia ad actum". See also Gregory of Rimini, *Lectura super Sent.* II, d. 1 q. 1, ed. Trapp, p. 8 sq. and John Baconthorpe, *Quaestiones in IV libros Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 1, a. 2, Cremona 1618, p. 424 col. 2C.

²⁵ See Scotus, *Lectura I*, d. 8, p. 2, q. un, p. 77 sqq and Hervaeus, *Quodlibeta* II, q. 1, ed. Venice 1513, fol. 31rb sqq. According to Buridan, *Questiones in libros Metaphysicorum* XII, q. 6, ed. Paris 1518, fol. 68rb, the interpretation of Aristotle's and Averroes's views on this count is encumbered with grave difficulties, since no unambiguous answer can be extracted from their works. "Ista quaestio (Utrum fuerit intentio Aristotelis et Commentatoris quod Deus moveat primum mobile active, an solum quod moveat ipsum per modum causae finalis) est multum difficilis, quia tam auctoritates Aristotelis ad invicem quam etiam auctoritates Commentatoris ad invicem videntur contradicere". In spite of this difficulty, Buridan holds that, according to Aristotle and Averroes, God also is the efficient cause of the celestial bodies. He sides with Scotus and Hervaeus, against Gregory and Baconthorpe (*loc. cit.*). So does Marsilius of Inghen, see *Questiones super Metaphysicam Aristotelis* q. 6, ms. Vienna, *Bibl. Pal. Lat.* 5297 (Univ. 894), fol. 155vb (= fol. 156vb). Incidentally, it may be pointed out that these two commentaries on the *Metaphysics* are remarkably similar in various places. Some passages from Marsilius' commentary map almost verbatim on Buridan's commentary. Probably Marsilius has made use of this latter, while composing his own work.

²⁶ An especially convenient review of this discussion is offered in John Baconthorpe's and Gregory of Rimini's commentaries on the Sentences, as they let the various participants in the debate amply express their views, each with his own arguments and references to the works of Aristotle and Averroes.

²⁷ See *Quaestiones in II Sent.* q. 5, p. 84 and 87. The view held by Maurer, 'Ockham on the possibility of a better world' in: *Mediaeval Studies* 20 (1958), p. 295, to the effect that Ockham in his *Quodlibeta* has abandoned the earlier position of his Commentary on the Sentences (viz. that, according to Aristotle, God is the efficient

However, he attributes to Aristotle a different notion of efficient causality than the one imputed by Averroes. Ockham admits that sometimes this latter notion is used by Aristotle. At other times, though, the Philosopher is seen to have used a different notion. In that case 'being an agent principle' boils down to merely 'being the cause of the existence of something else'. In this latter sense, according to Ockham, the celestial bodies and the separate substances can quite properly be said to have been caused, since no assumption is made as to whether the cause acts only on matter²⁸. However, it is problematic whether this latter notion of causality is really to be found in Aristotle. Medieval thought on this subject has been less than unanimous. Some philosophers (e.g., Gregory of Rimini) have attributed the second notion to Avicenna²⁹. All the same, Ockham does not give the same interpretation of Aristotle as do John of Jandun, Baconthorpe, or Gregory. According to Ockham, on this point Aristotle has evidently supported a belief that cannot be proved by natural reason.

As a consequence of all this, Thomas's argument is severely weakened because one of its presuppositions appears to be unprovable. But what about the other assumption? Can it be proved that God is infinite? Ockham does not think so. He argues that it is impossible to prove that God is infinite, at least if this infinity is taken to involve more than mere eternal existence³⁰. As a matter of fact, Thomas's reasoning does involve more than that. The infinity that is assumed in his argument implies that God is infinitely perfect, i.e. that no being can exist or be conceived, which is more perfect than God. In Ockham's view, it is impossible to prove that God is infinite in this sense. A proof of God's infinity, he argues, can only be based on the effects brought about by God. These effects, however, do not sufficiently establish the conclusion of God's infinity³¹. In the first place, this is obvious from our previous result, viz. that it cannot be proved that God has brought about anything at all. But even granting, for the sake of the argument, that such a proof could be given, a proof of God's infinity still cannot be forthcoming. Consider that no effect produced by God is infinite. All things that are caused are finite. Moreover, even if one were to assemble all things that are ever brought forth, still there will never be an infinity of coexisting effects. Finally, one might suppose that God is infinite because He can produce an infinite subsequence of effects. Yet this argument fails as well, since

cause of the separate substances) is mistaken. Maurer supports his view by the following passage from the *Quodlibeta* (IV, q. 2, p. 309): "Intentio Philosophi fuit quod primum ens sit causa finalis aliorum sed non efficiens, quia posuit quod corpora caelestia cum aliis causis inferioribus producant omnia ista inferiora". This passage, however, does not prove that Ockham has abandoned his earlier position of the commentary on the Sentences. In fact, another passage from the *Quodlibeta* shows clearly that he has not abandoned this position. See *Quodlibeta* VII, q. 16, p. 763: "Intentio Philosophi et Commentatoris est quod Deus moveat caelum effective".

²⁸ *Quaestiones in II Sent.* q. 5, p. 86: "Aliquando accipit (viz. Aristotle) causam pro eo ad cuius esse sequitur aliud esse. Et sic potest aliquid causari licet non extrahatur etc." (see note 24 above). An historical exposition of the origin and tradition of this (non-Aristotelian) notion of 'causa efficiens' can be found in Gilson 'Notes pour l'histoire de la cause efficiente' in: *Arch. d'hist. doct. et litt. du moyen-âge* 37 (1962), p. 7 sqq. and in Dumphy 'St. Albert and the five causes' in: *Arch. d'hist. doct. et litt. du moyen-âge* 41 (1966), p. 7 sqq.

²⁹ See Gregory, *Lectura super Sent.* II, d. 1 q. 1, p. 9. Averroes, too, attributes this view to Avicenna. See *In Aristotelis Metaphysicam* t. 44, fol. 328 rD. Compare Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima* VI, c. 1, p. 292.

³⁰ See *Quodlibeta* II, q. 2, p. 112 sqq.; III, q. 1, p. 199 sqq. and VII, qq. 11-18, p. 738 sqq.

³¹ *Quodlibeta* II, q. 2, p. 112: "Infinitas Dei non potest probari nisi per effectum; sed per effectum non potest probari sufficienter, igitur etc."

the sun, too, can produce an infinity of subsequent effects, and it is nevertheless a finite entity³². In sum, God's infinity cannot be proved from His effects. This line of reasoning, by the way, is not only found in Ockham, but also in the works of other 14th century theologians³³.

It might be argued that God's infinity can be proved from the fact that God is the most perfect being, i.e. a being such that there cannot possibly be an entity that is more perfect. According to Ockham, however, a proof along these lines is doomed to fail as well³⁴. For even if God is the most perfect being in existence, this does not imply that He is infinite. Although all other existing entities may be less perfect than God, it does not follow that God is infinite³⁵. Moreover, if one were to argue that God is that than which no more perfect being can be conceived, it is not clear whether this concept corresponds to anything in reality³⁶. It certainly cannot be proved that to this concept there is a corresponding infinite first principle in reality, since all effects produced by God are finite. This line of reasoning, too, is not only found in Ockham, but in other 14th century philosophers and theologians as well. Arguments very much like Ockham's are used by e.g. Gregory of Rimini, (Pseudo?)-Marsilius, and Marsilius of Inghen, to criticize this extrapolation from the well-known Anselmian proof³⁷.

Summarizing our results so far, we may conclude that the argument put forward by Thomas has not remained unimpaired. We have seen that several thinkers, subsequent to Thomas, dispute the provability of some fundamental presuppositions of the argument. One question is left open, however: if the presuppositions cannot be proved, perhaps their opposites can. Can they? Ockham does not think so.

Ockham's view

As we have seen, Ockham is of opinion that it is impossible to prove sufficiently that God has brought forth anything at all. Yet this should not be taken to imply the affirmation of the opposite thesis, viz. that God did in fact not produce anything at all. Actually, in Ockham's view it is more probable that God did produce something rather than nothing. Otherwise, it would indeed be pointless to assume the existence of something like God at all³⁸. The same reasoning can be applied to God's infinity. Although this infinity cannot be proved from God's perfection, this does not mean that the opposite thesis can be proved. Furthermore, although it cannot be proved that God is infinite, since all His effects are finite, this does not mean that God is finite. On the contrary, by the creed of our Faith we are assured that God is infinite. God is

³² *Ibid.* p. 112 sqq.

³³ See, e.g. Michael of Bologna, *Super IV Libros Sent.* I, d. 43 in: ms. Cracow, *Bibl. Jag.* 1459, fol. 66ra and Marsilius of Inghen, *Questiones super IV libros Sent.* I, q. 42 a. 1, ed. Strasbourg 1501, fol. 176vb.

³⁴ *Quodlibeta* VII, q. 15, p. 755 sqq. and III, q. 1, p. 200.

³⁵ *Quodlibeta* VII, q. 15, p. 758: "(Deus) potest esse ens eminentissimum, ita quod nihil sit melius vel eminentius eo, et tamen esse finitum".

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 759 sqq.

³⁷ See Gregory, *Lectura super Sent.* dd. 42-44, q. 3 a. 3, p. 432 sqq.; (Pseudo?)-Marsilius, *Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Physik* VIII, q. 8; fol. 85ra and Marsilius, *Questiones super IV libros Sent.* I, q. 42, a. 2, fol. 179vb.

³⁸ *Quodlibeta* II, q. 1, p. 109.

always capable of making a creature that is better and more perfect than any other creature, and this, says Ockham, is exactly what is meant by God's infinity³⁹.

It is clear from these considerations why Ockham holds that Thomas's proof is not valid, and also why this unprovability should not be taken to imply that God acts out of necessity. According to Ockham, God can bring forth infinitely many things. Now, if God were acting out of necessity, He would actually bring forth all the things that He could possibly bring forth, as it is characteristic of a natural cause to produce without restriction everything within its power. Yet God did not bring forth everything that is within His power. Ockham concludes that this means precisely that God is free⁴⁰. Like the other arguments, this one is not unique. It can be found in the works of several other theologians as well, both before (e.g. Scotus) and after Ockham (e.g. Gregory of Rimini)⁴¹.

Conclusion

All in all it has become evident how in the time subsequent to Thomas certain doubts were raised with respect to the possibility of proving God's freedom of action. Ockham's criticism of an argument in Thomas has served as a convenient point of departure. On the other hand, Thomas's reasoning has managed to strike root in other thinkers. Various theologians, using the same type of argument, have contended that thinkers such as Aristotle, Averroes, and Avicenna, were just wrong on this count. Once more, we may emphasize the fact that medieval thought on the subject of the provability of God's freedom of action has been divided.

In spite of its conspicuous position in the history of thought, of which we have sketched some fairly broad outlines, medieval philosophy has not appeared to be able to give a firm and unequivocal answer to the question as to whether God has brought forth creation freely or out of necessity. Several thinkers, notably Ockham, held that our certainty with respect to God's freedom is not derived from philosophy, but solely from Faith. Philosophy can do no more than show that this religious tenet is not without reason. Did medieval philosophy show us, we may ask in conclusion, that the problem is really insoluble?

³⁹ See *Quodlibeta* VII, q. 15, p. 758 and VII, q. 18, p. 774 sqq.

⁴⁰ See *Scriptum in I Sent.* d. 43, q. 1, p. 636; *Quaestiones in II Sent.* qq. 3-4, p. 55 and *Quodlibeta* VII, q. 18, p. 778.

⁴¹ Scotus, *Lectura* I, d. 8, p. 2, q. un. p. 100; Gregory, *Lectura super Sent.* I, d. 35-36, q. 1, p. 216.