

## **On the Co-Nowness of Time and Eternity: A Scotistic Perspective**

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**Abstract:** The paper will explore a key tension between eternity and temporality that comes to the fore in the seeming contradiction between freedom of the human will and divine foreknowledge of future contingents. It will be claimed that Duns Scotus's adaptation of Thomas Aquinas's view reduces the tension between a human being's freedom and divine foreknowledge of future contingents to the question of how to conflate the now of eternity and our experience of the instantaneous now. Scotus's account of the matter is unfortunately not satisfying and it is the purpose of this paper to develop this insight further in a speculative manner. In order to make such co-nowness possible it will be asked how the eternal and the temporal can co-cause together. This problem will be tackled through a development of Scotus's doctrine of the will taken elsewhere, in order to examine how the divine and the human wills can occur together. It will be claimed that such co-willing produces a co-nowness of the eternal and the instantaneous "nows" which generates a logical temporal movement.

**Keywords:** Thomas Aquinas; Duns Scotus; Time; Eternity; Temporality; Will; Existence

### **Freedom of the Will vs. Divine Foreknowledge of Future Events**

The problem of how to reconcile the seemingly obvious freedom each of us has with divine foreknowledge of future events belongs to the hall of unsolvable philosophical riddles. But why should we call it a riddle? A modern post-Nietzschean interlocutor might simply dismiss the problem by stating that there is no sense in speaking of *Divine* foreknowledge for 'it is a piece of naïveté to posit [the Divine and his so called foreknowledge]... or any other particular of the sphere of consciousness as the highest value

... [and] to justify “the world” by means of this.’<sup>1</sup> However, one can claim that in fact this problem is not solely a theological one and can easily be transformed into the more philosophical terminology of truth and knowledge, as can be seen for example in Aristotle’s much discussed *De Interpretatione* 9 that examines the tension between truth and future contingents. Putting aside the important differences between the philosophical and the theological claims and their motivations, the post-Nietzschean interlocutor can be given the response that the so called “theological riddle” offers us an interesting perspective to examine the problem of future contingents, i.e., the tension between *Time* and *Eternity* or the tension between truth, contingent possibilities and our genuine experience of freedom.

Before we read further it is important to note few remarks regarding the disciplinary affiliation and purpose of this study, for some might misplace it. As opposed to many problems in the history of philosophy that receive specific disciplinary attention, the problem of future contingency is one of those rare problems where ancient, medieval and modern scholars join forces. It is thus important to emphasize that the nature of this paper is to develop the understanding of time and the problem of future contingency and to offer a new speculative angle and not to relate to all the relevant literature. Thus, though the study will refer to many different dimensions that relate to the problem of future contingency, they will be presented only briefly. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, this study is not historical in its nature but rather uses scholastic thought as a springboard to develop tensions and insights regarding the nature of time and the problem of future contingency.

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

## Aquinas

It is well known that the question of eternity in the Latin-West stems from Boethius's<sup>2</sup> and Anselm's<sup>3</sup> discussions. However, since our primary interest is to examine Scotus's modification of the relation between eternity and the temporal, which is made in regard to Aquinas's position, and since Boethius's and Anselm's conception of eternity has been discussed extensively by other scholars,<sup>4</sup> a brief account of Aquinas's view on divine foreknowledge of future contingent will be presented,<sup>5</sup> which according to Wippel, 'was to become the focal point for centuries of subsequent controversy.'<sup>6</sup>

However, before we discuss Aquinas's view, it is important to introduce McTaggart's famous distinction between A and B type of time from 1908, which is fundamental to the philosophical treatment of time since its publication. A-type is what is known as *dynamic* or *tensed* time. According to this view, the now of becoming is real and truly determines future events which, as future events, have no real ontological status or determination other than as future possibilities: 'the distinctions of past, present and future are essential to time, and that, if the distinctions are never true of reality, then no reality is in time. ... If it [a thing] is really in time, it is really in the A series.'<sup>7</sup> In contrast to this stands the static or tenseless view of time, or what is called B-type. This view holds that past, present and future are of the same ontological status but are related differently as prior or subsequent: 'The series of positions which runs from

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, Prove VI.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Anselm, "Monologion," in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian David and G.R. Evans (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch. 22; "Proslogion," in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian David and G.R. Evans (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch. 19-21; "De Concordia," in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian David and G.R. Evans (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), I, 5.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Leftow, *Time and Eternity*; Lewis, "Eternity, Time and Timelessness"

<sup>5</sup> For further reading see Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*; Kenny, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom"; Fox, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought*; Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will*

<sup>6</sup> Wippel, "Divine Knowledge, Divine Power and Human Freedom in Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent".

<sup>7</sup> McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time"

earlier to later I shall call the B series.’<sup>8</sup> Thus it follows that the future is not generated out from the present but is only related to it as prior is to later.

Though some scholars hold that Aquinas held A-theory of time, e.g. Harm Goris,<sup>9</sup> most studies hold that Aquinas presents a B-theory of time. Since I have confronted Goris’s brave position elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> Aquinas’s account will be presented briefly as a B-type without delving into the subtleties that might suggest that it is an A-type. Aquinas’s account of divine foreknowledge and his conception of time aim to collocate the following three points:

1. That God possesses knowledge of future events.
2. That although God foreknows future events, they are indeed contingent.
3. That our conception of the future as *opened* can be reconciled with God’s foreknowledge of future events.

God, according to Aquinas, knows everything through his essence:

God knows completely the power and perfection of His essence, His knowledge extends not only to the things that are but also to the things that are not.<sup>11</sup>

With regard to the first two points, Aquinas puts forward two arguments. The first holds that for God all events exist simultaneously, however ordered according to before and after, like up and down:

[S]ince the vision of divine knowledge is measured by eternity, which is all simultaneous and yet includes the whole of time without being absent from any part of it, it follows that God sees whatever happens in time, not as future, but as present. For what is seen by God is, indeed, future to some other thing which it follows in time; to the divine vision, however,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>9</sup> Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will*, 93.

<sup>10</sup> See Gordon, "Some Thoughts About Aquinas's Conception of Truth as Adequation"

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas *SCG I*, ch. 66, 4.

which is not inside time but outside time, it is not future but present. Therefore, we see what is future as future because it is future with respect to our seeing, since our seeing is itself measured by time; but to the divine vision, which is outside time, there is no future.<sup>12</sup>

In this passage Aquinas not only aims to explain the sense according to which past, present and future events are present to the divine mind, but also our experience of time. According to this, the distinction we make between past, present and future is not a real distinction but rather a product of the manner in which we perceive events, that are present to God simultaneously: ‘we see what is future as future because it is future with respect to our seeing, since our seeing is itself measured by time; but to the divine vision, which is outside time, there is no future.’

The presentness of the past and future is not a virtual presentness, nor carried through divine ideas, but a real one, for God knows them ‘not only as they are in their causes but also as each of them is in actual existence in itself.’<sup>13</sup> In order to explain the contradiction between human beings' and God's cognition of temporal events, he gives as an example the relation between a point on the circumference of a circle and the center of the circle. While every point of the circumference of the circle ‘[does] not co-exist simultaneously with any other point... the center of the circle, which is no part of the circumference, is directly opposed to any given determinate point on the circumference. Hence, whatever is found in any part of time coexists with what is eternal as being present to it, although with respect to some other time it be past or future.’<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Aquinas *De Veritate* 2.12. See also *SCG I*, ch. 66, 7: ‘Hence, whatever is found in any part of time coexists with what is eternal as being present to it, although with respect to some other time it be past or future. Something can be present to what is eternal only by being present to the whole of it, since the eternal does not have the duration of succession. The divine intellect, therefore, sees in the whole of its eternity, as being present to it, whatever takes place through the whole course of time. And yet what takes place in a certain part of time was not always existent. It remains, therefore, that God has a knowledge of those things that according to the march of time do not yet exist.’

<sup>13</sup> *STH* Ia.14.13.

<sup>14</sup> *SCG I*, Ch. 66, 7.

The second claim explains how the contingent, despite being contingent, can be known for certain. This is based upon the fact that ‘in so far as the contingent is present, in that time, it cannot not-be’ and thus ‘nothing is lost to the certitude of sense when someone sees a man running, even though this judgment is contingent.’<sup>15</sup> The two moves, put together, result in Aquinas’s view according to which all events are determined but contingent: for God all events exist simultaneously and relations of before and after are conceived by us as past, present and future. As a result all events are determined. However, this does not yield the fact that they are not contingent, for God could have chosen a different set of events; however, when a contingent set of event was chosen, it is conceived as certain by the divine mind.

## **Duns Scotus**

As in the case of Aquinas, it is not the purpose of the present author to discuss Scotus’s conception of time at length, for it can be found in other excellent studies,<sup>16</sup> and because a lengthy discussion of the subtleties is not always required for the problem that concerns us here.

Scotus's metaphysical treatment of time follows primarily distinctions 38-39 of the first book of Lombard commentary on *the Sentences*.<sup>17</sup> Scotus first presents and refutes various opinions of others. Let

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<sup>15</sup> SCG I, Ch. 1, 67,2.

<sup>16</sup> Cross, "Duns Scotus on Eternity and Timelessness"; *The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision*; "Angelic Time and Motion: Bonaventure to Duns Scotus"; Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*, 127-45; Wolter, "Scotus' Paris Lectures on God's Knowledge of Future Events"; Massie, "Time and Contingency in Duns Scotus"; Lewis, "Space and Time"; Boulnois, "Du Temps Cosmique À La Durée Ontologique? Duns Scot, Le Temps, L'aevum Et L'éternité".

<sup>17</sup> As Wolter explains in the above article, Scotus’s scholars have significant problems in determining Scotus’s genuine position. On the one hand, and thanks to the findings of Balić and the Scotistic commission, Scotus missing early Oxford commentary on the *Sentences*, the *Lectura*, was discovered and critically edited. However, the committee also came to the conclusion that the account given in the Wadding-Vivès editions is not a genuine account but rather represents a refined version of the position given in the *Lectura*. Wolter writes that ‘Since it exists in substantially the same form in all the important manuscripts, however, they contend these must have stemmed from some single "apograph" composed by some disciple who not only knew Scotus' mind on this subject but had access to sources over and above his initial *Lectura* and the "examined report" of his Paris lectures. Consequently, they have given us a

us inspect some key objections. Following Henry of Ghent, Scotus argues against the view that holds that God knows future contingents through divine ideas. He explains that the divine ideas exist in the divine intellect, according to necessity, prior to the act of the will. Thus it follows that if future contingents are grounded upon divine ideas then they cannot be contingent for the divine ideas are determined by necessity. Hence, since they are contingent, they must be grounded within a contingent faculty.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to the view of Aquinas according to which God knows future contingents because he can see past-present-future, like the center of the circle that is juxtaposed to all points on the circumference, he argues that God would not be ‘co-existing with any place (in any “now”) unless existing... for the same reason eternity will not be the reason for co-existing with anything except with what is existent: and this is what is argued, that “that which does not exist, cannot coexist with anything”, because “to co-exist” speaks of a real relation, but a relation is not real whose foundation is not real.’<sup>19</sup> Craig remarks on this matter that if future knowledge were to hold some ontological status, then it follows that God will produce an event twice, e.g., sitting down, both as a future event and as a present event.<sup>20</sup>

Scotus holds that the example of the circle can be used to support his view. He explains that a circle holds a real relation between the center, which is immobile, and another point on the circumference which is not standing but is rather ‘a flowing circumference, whose circumference is nothing but an instant in act.’<sup>21</sup> Other than that actual point there are no other actual existing points on the circumference but potential points which do not exist: ‘the circle of time is not a fixed and already constituted figure, it is not given as a whole, *totum simul*, but is thought “according to the imagination of the geometrician”.’<sup>22</sup> If the

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critical edition of this apograph and included it in an appendix to volume VI of the Vatican edition of the *Ordinatio*. Whether or not it represents his latest thought on the subject, the fact that Scotus did not incorporate it in his *Ordinatio* suggests he may not have been completely satisfied with his treatment.’ Wolter, "Scotus' Paris Lectures on God's Knowledge of Future Events." 285-6. Since this work does not presume to offer any solution to this historical conundrum, the Appendix will be used in order to exploit Scotistic insights.

<sup>18</sup> See *Ord.* dd. 38-9, Appendix A, A – *Opinio Prima*, [7] (VI:406-7).

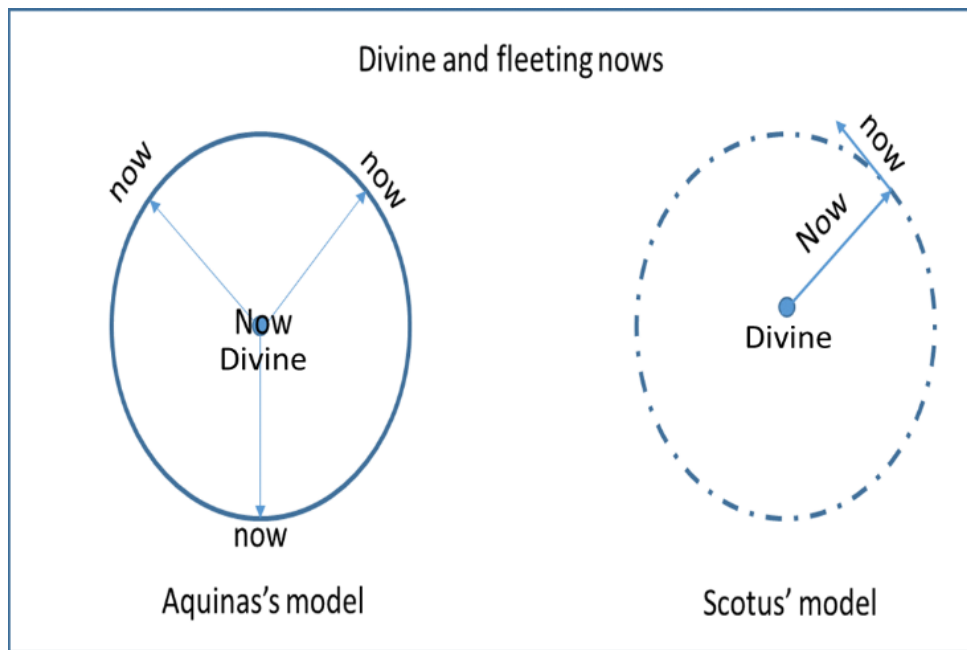
<sup>19</sup> *Ord.* I, dd. 38-9, Appendix A, *Opinio Secunda*, [9] (VI:409).

<sup>20</sup> Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*, 130. On this see Scotus remark on the “sitting down” in Appendix A, [9] (VI:410).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, [33] (IV:442).

<sup>22</sup> Massie, "Time and Contingency in Duns Scotus," 20. See *Lect.* I, d. 39, qq. 1-5, n. 85 (XVII:507)

circumference as a whole were to exist together then it would be simultaneous to eternity, but the nature of any of these points is that they are fleeting and thus each of them is present to the eternal center only for an instant. It follows that Scotus agrees with Aquinas that the “now” of eternity as it co-exists, does not equal the temporal “now”... because the “now” of eternity is formally infinite, and so exceeds formally the “now” of time; however not by co-existing with other “now” [i.e., with a *now* other than that which is present].<sup>23</sup> Like Aquinas, Scotus maintains that the relation between the *Now* of eternity and the fleeting *now* is analogous to the relation between the center of the circle and its circumference whereby the first is eternal insofar as it is immobile, and the latter is present for an instant (these *N/nows* should not be understood as simple points but rather as points on a continuum which is bounded by instants<sup>24</sup>). However, unlike Aquinas he maintains that the difference between their natures does not imply that the whole of time is given to God (or the center) simultaneously in an instant.



**Figure 1: Thomistic vs. Scotistic models of the relation between Divine *Now* and temporal *now***

<sup>23</sup> *Ord. I*, Appendix A, [34] (VI:442)

<sup>24</sup> *Ord. II*, d. 2, nn. 99-101. (VII:200-2)



What is the nature of this relation between eternal and temporal *N/nows*? Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann distinguish between simultaneity of temporal things, T-simultaneity, eternal things, E-simultaneity, and between eternal and temporal things, ET-simultaneity.<sup>25</sup> Though it is not exactly clear how E and T can be put together, or as Cross admits, ‘[i]t is not clear to me just what ET-simultaneity amounts to,’<sup>26</sup> and putting aside the important controversy regarding Stump and Kretzmann’s treatment,<sup>27</sup> ET-simultaneity is definitely applicable to the current state. Cross’s analysis would be very useful to elucidate the nature of such a relation in Scotus’s case. Cross explains that the relation between God and creatures is not (1) transitive, i.e., the fact that God co-exists with t1 and t2 does not imply that t1 and t2 co-exist; nor is it (2) symmetrical<sup>28</sup>, i.e., ‘while creatures are really related to God, He is not really related to them.’<sup>29</sup> In other words, whereas the divine eternal *Now* has a real effect on creatures, the temporal *now*, although “seen” virtually by God through his essence, does not alter God. It is the purpose of the following to clarify a sense according to which the *Now* of eternity and the temporal *now* co-now together.

### **Non-Reductive Willing and Co-Causing**

We are left then with the following question: how the divine, which acts from eternity, and the temporal, can be brought together in such a way that the non-divine cannot be reduced to the divine or vice versa. But what does it mean to be brought together? The togetherness of eternal *Now* and temporal *now* are senseless if there is nothing which is present there. Thus, instead of speaking of the coexistence of now, we shall look for the co-presentness of the divine and the temporal. But if the temporal and the divine co-now together, and we take this coexistence seriously, it follows that we cannot reduce one to the other, for

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<sup>25</sup> Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity"

<sup>26</sup> Cross, "Duns Scotus on Eternity and Timelessness," 12.

<sup>27</sup> See for example Fitzgerald, "Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity"; Leftow, *Time and Eternity*.

<sup>28</sup> Cross, "Duns Scotus on Eternity and Timelessness," 15. See *Ord. I*, d. 30, qq. 1-2, n. 51 (VI:192)

<sup>29</sup> Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325*

then it would only be a seeming coexistence which amounts to the typical claim that one of the *N/nows*, usually taken to be ours, is but an illusion and a product of some imperfection.<sup>30</sup>

As was seen earlier, Aquinas's position maintained that the distinction between past-present-future, along with our experience of the flow of time, are but illusions, and that, for God, who sees the whole picture, they are but a present which is grasped together. Thus, before we can answer how the eternal and temporal *N/nows* can co-exist together we need to show how the divine and the non-divine can be co-present together in a non-reductive manner. It is this author's contention that such non-reductive co-presence can be found in the act of the will and specifically in sinning. But why sinning? Why should we not examine the act of willing generally or acting generally regardless of whether it is a natural or volitional act? These are important questions that will allow us to understand why sinning is so important for our needs.

Before we can address sin as a unique case of volitional act, let us first distinguish between natural and free acts. Scotus explains that what constitutes a natural act is that 'when the agent and patient meet in the way appropriate to the potency in question, the one must act and the other be acted upon.'<sup>31</sup> While a natural contingent act must act with necessity when a proximate reception relation is constituted with the thing acted upon, a free act can elicit opposites without necessity when there is no impediment between the agent and that which is acted upon. A natural act, because it acts according to necessity, is reductive by its nature to its causes and thus cannot be the grounds for a non-reductive co-presence of the divine and the non-divine, and consequently cannot be the ground to explain how the non-divine can be co-present in a non-reductive manner.

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<sup>30</sup> Modern philosophers, such as Heidegger, would reverse this by claiming that the eternal now is derived from our fleeting now. This however calls into question the notion of truth which presupposes its immutability. Thus, finding a way to hold together both eternity and the fleeting temporality is motivated by the need to reconcile eternal truths and our temporality and freedom.

<sup>31</sup> *Quodl.*, 16.13. See also *Ord.* IV, d. 43, q. 4, n. 2; *Rep* I-A, d. 10, q. 3, n. 54; *Quodl.*, q. 16, n. 13; *QM* IX, q.15, nn. 21-22 (IV:680-1). For further reading on the matter see González-Ayesta, "Scotus's Interpretation of Metaphysics 9.2" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 2009), 218. and Hoffmann, "The Distinction between Nature and Will in Duns Scotus"

And so we come again to our question: why should we refer to sinning and not simply willing, for the will acts not according to necessity but freely and thus is non-reductive by definition? The problem with willing is that willing, taken generally, can be read in a non-natural way which is yet reductive to the divine will, as with Aquinas. As we have seen earlier, Aquinas held that although events are by nature contingent, and that there is no necessary causal relation between the act and its effects, they were pre-ordained by the divine will. In such a case it follows that when we choose, although we choose not according to nature, our will was determined in a non-natural way by the divine will. It follows then that the non-necessitation that characterizes the act of the will, taken simply, cannot of itself be the ground for a non-reductive co-presentness of the divine and the non-divine. What is unique about sinning is that it cannot be reduced to God's will for God cannot will sinning. A transcendental inquiry of how sinning is possible if God cannot will a sin, is in fact a transcendental examination of how a co-presence of the divine and the non-divine will is possible.<sup>32</sup>

It was a commonly accepted view, as Gloria Frost remarks,<sup>33</sup> that God was part of any causation of created things. In *Ordinatio* II, d. 37, q. 5 Scotus asks 'whether the created will is the total and immediate cause of its volition.' There he examines several possibilities. The first holds that only the creature is responsible for its act of willing and that God's role is solely to sustain the creature's will.<sup>34</sup> This view preserves the fundamental freedom of the will and, at the same time, exempts God from willing sins. Scotus however had to reject this solution for he couldn't reconcile it with God's foreknowledge of contingent events and also because it seems to limit God's power.<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that although Scotus rejects this solution in the *Ordinatio*, there are two strong indications that that might not be his last word on the matter. The first are the words of his personal secretary and closest disciple, William of

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<sup>32</sup> This sheds new light on the nature of sin: the possibility of sinning (not the actual sinning) becomes a transcendental condition for autonomy.

<sup>33</sup> Frost, "John Duns Scotus on God's Knowledge of Sins: A Test-Case for God's Knowledge of Contingents"

<sup>34</sup> *Ord.* II, d. 37, n. 97 (VII: 408-9). Also Wolter, "Scotus' Paris Lectures on God's Knowledge of Future Events," 317.

<sup>35</sup> *Ord.* II, d. 37, nn. 120-24 (VIII: 418-9). See "William of Alnwick on Scotus and Divine Concurrence"; Frost, "John Duns Scotus on God's Knowledge of Sins: A Test-Case for God's Knowledge of Contingents," 25; Wolter, "Scotus' Paris Lectures on God's Knowledge of Future Events," 323-25.

Alnwick, who said that this was a ‘view that Scotus considered probable.’ The second piece of evidence rests in the fact that in his late *Reportatio* II<sup>36</sup> he maintains that both the “official” solution and the first “rejected” solution can “be sustained.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, before we turn to the official solution of the *Ordinatio*, it is clear that Scotus did not have a final view on the matter and that he was not too happy with the conjunction of his insights and the theological demands that he was forced to maintain.

The second solution, which he accepts in the *Ordinatio*, holds that both God and creatures co-cause the volition of the creatures. Scotus examines two ways by which causes can co-cause essentially, termed by William Frank “participative” and “autonomous.” Participative co-causation is an instrumental co-causation, such as when the hand and the pen join together in the act of writing. In this kind of co-causation the superior cause moves the inferior and thus the inferior cause is only responsible instrumentally for the product, which leaves the superior cause essentially responsible for the effect. Scotus must reject such co-causation for it implies that God, who causes more perfectly, is responsible for sinful acts. Scotus then says that the co-causation between God and creatures in the act of volition is of another kind, the “autonomous” kind. In this co-causation both causes, whether equal in power or not, are independent, and no production can come to be without the participation of the other cause. An example of that is the conception of a child where the father and the mother are its co-causes which are independent of each other.<sup>38</sup> As Frank notes, autonomous co-causality is implemented by Scotus throughout the cognitive process: the co-causality between species of intellection and the agent intellect,<sup>39</sup> the intellect and the will, the human and the divine agent.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that the co-causation solution does not bring us

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<sup>36</sup> Whereas the *Reportatio* (lecture report written by a student) on the first book of the *Sentences* was checked and supervised by Scotus, *Reportatio* II-IV were not examined and thus do not carry the same weight of approbance. See Williams, *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*; Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*

<sup>37</sup> *Reportatio* II-A, d. 46, q. 2, §3 (Wadding edition vol. XI). See Frost 30-31 and footnote 1 on p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> *Ord.* II, d. 37, q.5, nn. 117-18. See also Wolter, "Scotus' Paris Lectures on God's Knowledge of Future Events," 322-23; Frank, "Duns Scotus on Autonomous Freedom and Divine Co-Causality" See *Ord.* I, d. 3, n. 496 (III:293-4)

<sup>39</sup> E.g., *Ord.* I, d. 3, nn. 498-500, 511, 523, 563 (III: 294-7, 303, 311-2, 335)

<sup>40</sup> Frank, "Duns Scotus on Autonomous Freedom and Divine Co-Causality," 155-56.

closer to understanding how God foreknows future contingents but only that such a solution does not necessarily undermine our objective, unlike what seems to result from the first solution.

### **Perfecting Rationality**

Given the above account, two questions can be asked: 1. How God foreknows future contingents. 2. What is the manner in which the divine and creaturely wills co-act together. In regard to the first, the author would postpone the answer by using a *phenomenological epoché*, for it seems that the different positions Scotus holds do not work together, at least not without strongly qualifying some of them.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, as was explained above, it seems that Scotus himself was aware that there was a serious problem in reconciling the different views, and that the best that he could achieve was to reject the solution that contradicted such a possibility but not to present a positive solution for how exactly they could be reconciled.

The second question brings us back to the primary question: how the divine now and the temporal now co-act together. The above discussion made use of Scotus's discussion of sin in order to show how the divine and the creature can co-act together. This concluded with the understanding that such co-action is an "autonomous" co-causation whereby the inferior causer, the creature, must be able to produce an independent effect, for otherwise the superior causer, God, will be responsible for sinful causation. Thus it follows that the created agent must truly be independent to act otherwise. Placing the *epoché* in the first question will allow us to accept such independence without questioning its freedom. However a problem remains. In what was described above, a father and a mother were given as an example of co-causation of an offspring. But if we are to be the mother/father, where is the father/mother in the co-causation of the act of volition? If God co-wills in every act of our will, why is it that his will is not present for us (other

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<sup>41</sup> Both Willaim Frank and Eef Dekker try to work this out. See *ibid.*; Dekker, "Does Duns Scotus Need Molina? On Divine Foreknowledge and Co-Causality".

than his supposed footprints within history)? As was explained, co-causation was an accepted stipulation for Scotus and his contemporary scholars, but this only resulted in some clarification of such co-causation and left us empty-handed regarding how such co-causation occurs.

In a previous study, a Scotistic doctrine of truth was developed in a speculative way. The insight that guided that examination was Scotus's position that rationality reaches its completion not at the level of the intellect but that of the will. It was claimed that synthetic a-priori truths, specifically those of geometry, are "truths of the will" insofar as they are not determined according to necessity but could be otherwise. Let us consider the key argument (footnotes omitted):

The essence of a triangle simply has nothing to say about whether or not there are  $180^\circ$  in a triangle. Kant teaches us the triangle holds  $180^\circ$  a-priori, but not analytically, i.e. as embedded within the concept of the triangle itself, but is rather a truth which is grounded in the nature of space, that could be otherwise. Moreover, modern mathematics constructed different possible geometries and thus concludes that in non-Euclidian geometries, a triangle has, in a synthetic a-posteriori manner, more or less than  $180^\circ$ . This means that just as the proposition "a triangle has  $180^\circ$ " is true only in regard to the existence of a specific geometry, so there are numerous amounts of mathematical truths that are true synthetically a-priori due to existence. Willing the world to be Euclidian or non-Euclidian is thus tied to the truth of existence which is not just a matter of predication, to exist or not to exist, but rather refers to a manner of existence which applies to existing things in a synthetic a-priori manner. What characterizes synthetic a-priori truth is that although it is evident, its truthfulness is not contained within it analytically but can be known as true only through something which does not belong to it, i.e. the intellect cannot ground it in itself and thus it follows that it is determined or grounded in something other than that of the intellect. As was seen above, the intellect is such a rationality which knows according to necessity and if  $180^\circ$  of the triangles are not known through the intellect alone, it follows that it is known

not according to necessity. This does not mean that that such other through which it is known is irrational, for in any case nothing can force upon the triangle a contradiction and still remain conceivable. On the contrary, the plain fact that the concept of triangle is in itself indifferent to existence, and thus to whether it will be actualized in Euclidian or non-Euclidian geometry, makes it possible for it to be actualized freely in different actualized geometries that cannot be preferred by the intellect. From all this, it follows that synthetic a-priori truths can thus be understood to be truths of the will.<sup>42</sup>

Putting aside the theological question, *who* it is that wills such synthetic a-priori truths of existence, what is important for our present investigation is that in every act we will, the objects of our willing presuppose such synthetic a-priori truths as part of their constitution. Thus, the “divine” will is present in a transcendental sense in the willed objects. One might say that a triangle can be willed generally and since it is a general triangle it does not presuppose that it has  $180^\circ$  and thus that that act of willing is not a co-willing. To this it can be replied that there is no sense of willing a triangle as such, for willing (or nilling) is intelligible only in regard to existence (or not to exist) and thus that when one wills the triangle as such, e.g., the abstract triangle ABC, this is in reference to some imagined triangle  $\Delta ABC$  which is not utterly abstract.

### **Co-willing and Time**

We now return to our initial question. The question regarding the co-nowness of the divine and the fleeting *N/nows* was reduced to the co-actness of the divine and creaturely wills. The above hypothetical maneuver showed that synthetic a-priori truths regarding the geometrical truths of space, are truths of the “divine” will which transcendently ground the objects that are present to the will of the created creature.

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<sup>42</sup> See Gordon, "On Truth, the Truth of Existence, and the Existence of Truth: A Dialogue with the Thought of Duns Scotus"

Consequently, the creature does not will in a vacuum but only in a secondary sense. The willing act of created creatures is a synthetic co-willing which synthesizes together the a-priori divine will and the a-posteriori will of the created agent. These two acts of will are two *N/nows*, one from eternity, i.e., as given synthetically a-priori, and the other temporal, i.e., as a-posteriori, that coincide in the act of willing. Moreover, these two *N/nows* that coincide are constituted in a relation of before (a-priori) and after (a-posteriori) that “counts” the movement of the willing into existence, and thus meet the requirements of *time*, i.e., numbering the ‘motion in respect of before and after.’<sup>43</sup> This time is independent from worldly motion and is grounded in the inner transcendental relation between the eternal a-priori willing *Now* and the temporal a-posteriori willing *now*. This structure not only explains how the divine a-priori *Now* and the creaturely a-posteriori *now* co-cause together but also why the relation between them is asymmetric and intransitive. It is asymmetric, for while the a-priori *Now* conditions the a-posteriori *now*, the a-priori *Now* remains unmoved by the a-posteriori *now*. It is intransitive, for while the eternal *Now* is a transcendental condition which is present in any willable object, any a-posteriori act of willing is distinguished from any other a-posteriori act of willing. As a result, although at any moment a willable object could be willed and unwilled (what Scotus refers to as the divided sense), in actuality it is either willed or unwilled (the composite sense).<sup>44</sup>

Following the same argument one may claim that since the numbers 2 and 3 hold a relation of before and after, they can also constitute temporality. This however is an abstract time that is used in any typical clock. Against this abstract counting of time, the suggested temporality between the eternal and the passing

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle *Physics* 4.11.219b1-2.

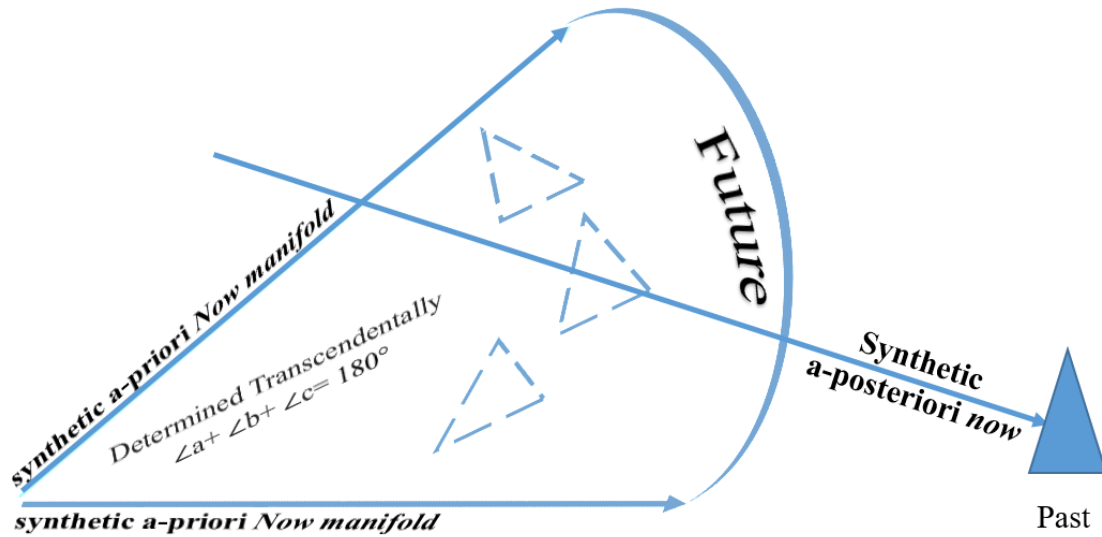
<sup>44</sup> See *Lectura* I, d. 39, nn. 50-1 (XVII: 495-6): ‘at the same moment the will has an act of willing, at the same and for the same moment it can have an opposite act of willing... Likewise, at that moment at which it elicits an act of willing, the will is prior by nature in regard to its volition and is freely related to it. Hence it is contingently related to willing and has a contingent relation to not-willing at that moment at which it elicits a volition; ... We must distinguish the composite and the divided sense. It is false in the composite sense, as we understand the predicate to be attributed to this whole: the will willing at a, together with the possibility operator. ... but it is true in the divided sense because there are two propositions, because it implicitly includes two propositions. In one proposition the will is said to have the act of willing, and in the other one the will is said to have the opposite act taken on its own with the possibility operator, and then the meaning is: The will is willing at a and The will can be not-willing at a.’ Translation from Duns Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom: John Duns Scotus Lectura I* 39



*N/nows* counts the co-causation into existence that is made by a-priori and a-posteriori acts of willing existence. The terminology that is used might resemble that of the B theory of time, however this is not the case, for the relation of before and after considered here is not of events but rather of two willing acts which are simultaneous temporally and at the same time hold a logical relation between the prior and the posterior. Moreover, whether events are predetermined or not by the divine will, the a-priori and a-posteriori now-acts of will relate differently to the past and the future. The a-priori *Now*, because of its synthetic a-priori nature, is determined only transcendently, just like the triangle is only determined transcendently to have 180°. Thus the synthetic a-priori act of willing opens a manifold of possible, distinct and/or opposed willings that co-now together in an approaching now-possible-manifold (either practical willable objects, e.g., to marry or not to marry Regine, or simple contemplative futural objects). This open-manifold that is transcendently determined is what is can be called the *future*.<sup>45</sup> Thus it can be said that the a-priori act of willing is a *Now* act of futuring which opens a transcendental manifold of possibles from which willable are made into existence. The a-posteriori *now*, which naturally comes afterward, is the act by which the open manifold is determined and the willable is made into past, whether as actualized past or unactualized past.

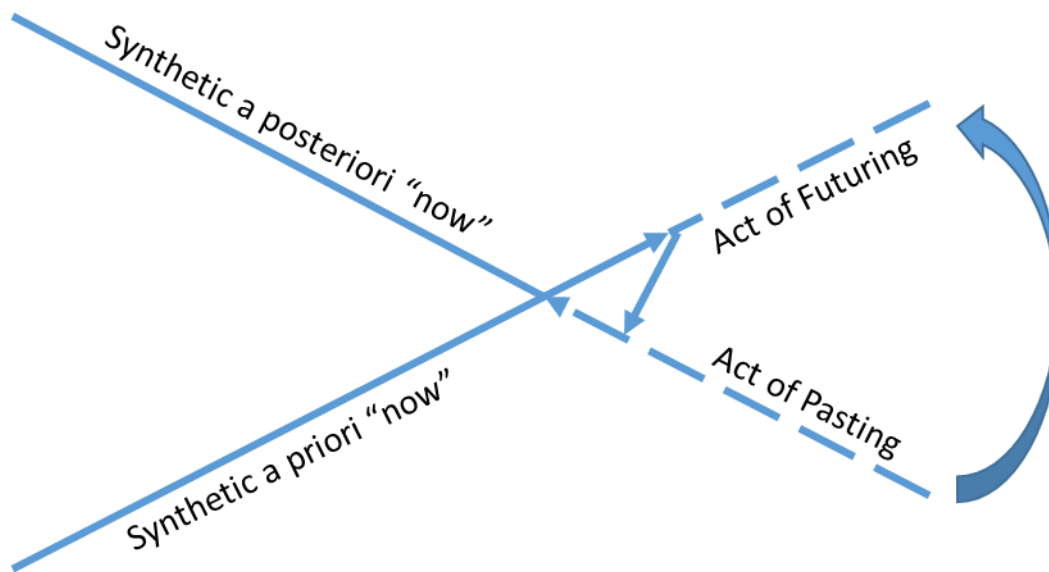
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<sup>45</sup> This futural manifold is determined only at the level of the “divine” will. For the level of the intellect determines the manifold of any possible world whereas the future refers to a specific world, i.e. to a world that was willed among other possible worlds.



**Figure 2: Co-Nowness as an Actualization Movement**

Putting it differently, the co-nowness of the a-priori and a-posteriori “nows” creates a movement whereby the open manifold of the future is actualized into an a-posteriori specific past. This produces a reversed temporal thrust whereby the a-priori willing act, which opens the future manifold, is pushed into the past by the a-posteriori willing act.



**Figure 3: Co-Nowness as a Temporal Thrust**

It is at this point that we need to turn back to the question of divine foreknowledge and do away with the *epoché*. As was said above, the problem of how to reconcile divine foreknowledge and the freedom of the will belongs to the hall of unsolvable philosophical riddles. Based upon the above analysis, two positions can be asserted: 1. Although an a-posteriori act of will was not proven and in fact was presupposed in order to safeguard God from willing sinning (which is taken as a theological fact regarding our willing existence in the world), we contend that it is more plausible to accept our a-posteriori act of willing than to reject it. Since such an act is a-posteriori by definition, it is impossible to prove that in an a-priori manner. However, since it was shown that the synthetic a-priori truths of geometry are truths of will, and thus that truths of will are facts of reality, it is more than plausible to accept that our inner experience of freedom is not a mere illusion (although it might be). Putting it differently, once it is proven that reality is transcendently constituted in a contingent manner, it is less rational to decline our basic experience of existence which intuitively itself as acting freely. 2. The analysis maintains that the “future” is but a projection that is caused in an a-priori act of will which opens a manifold of the willable into existence. Thus it follows that the question whether tomorrow, at noon, a sea battle will take place, is a question regarding willable things which are willable in an a-priori manner. However the truth value cannot be determined by the a-priori futuring act for it is only determined a-posteriori, insofar as it is willed into the past. Therefore it can be claimed that any question regarding the truth value of future contingents, based upon the claim that the truth value of propositions are immutable, is untenable. This is because existential truths presuppose a-posteriori determination act, i.e., their pastness. Thus it follows that a truth value regarding existence is indeed unchangeable for existence logically refers to what had being determined in an a-posteriori sense.

## **Conclusion**

Brian Leftow writes ‘we can ask believers in a flowing now why it flows: what “powers” the passage of time.’<sup>46</sup> This study tried to offer an answer. The paper transforms Scotus’s co-nowness of the eternal and the temporal *N/nows* to the co-causation of the divine and creaturely wills. It has been shown that the synthetic a-priori truth which governs the geometrical truths of space can be understood as eternal truths of the will which govern the constitution of possible willing objects insofar as they can be willed to exist. Replacing eternal *Now* and temporal *now* with synthetic a-priori truth and synthetic a-posteriori truths explains the sense these two “nows” co-now together, like the specific triangle which co-nows with the eternal contingent truths of geometry, i.e., that it has 180°. Not only that, it shows that such a relation is in fact a relation that meets the definition of time which measures the movement. Thus, geometrical truths are understood to be not only spatial existential truths but also the presence of eternity at each moment, that along with our internal act of willing, constitute a logical-temporal movement.

### **Note on contributor**

Liran Shia Gordon received a PhD degree in philosophy from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2015, for a dissertation entitled *On the Possibility of Naturalistic and Evident Cognition: Examination and Structural Comparison of St. Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus*. In the last year Gordon has published several articles on Aquinas and Scotus and he is currently a Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn postdoctoral fellow at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

### **Abbreviations**

Thomas Aquinas:

*ST* = *Summa Theologiae*, Benziger Bros. edition, 1947, Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province;

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<sup>46</sup> Leftow, "God's Impassibility, Immutability, and Eternality".

*QDV* = *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company 1952-4, trans. Mulligan, McGlynn and Schmidt.

*SCG* = *Summa contra Gentiles*, Hanover House, 1955-57, trans. Anderson.

John Duns Scotus:

*Lect.* = *Lectura: Prologue, I-III. Opera Omnia. edited by Commissio Scotistica. Vol. 17-21: Città del Vaticano: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 17-21: 1966-2004.*

*Ord.* = *Ordinatio, Prologue, I-IV. Opera Omnia. edited by Commissio Scotistica. Vol. 1-13: Città del Vaticano: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1-14: 1950-2013*

*Quodl.* = *God and Creatures : The Quodlibetal Questions* trans. Allan B Wolter and Felix Alluntis (Princeton University Press, 1975);

*QM* = *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle by John Duns Scotus, Bk. I-IX, Vol. 1-2.* Translated by Girard J Etkorn and Allan B Wolter. Text Series 19. St. Bonaventure, N.Y: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1997, 1998

*Rep I-A* = *Reportatio I-a, Prologue, D. 1-48: Latin Text and English Translation.* Translated by Allan B. Wolter and O. V. Bychkov. Vol. 1-2, St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2004, 2008.

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