

Two Augustinians and Nominalism

The Festschrift in honor of Father Zumkeller contains an article by William Courtenay dealing with fourteenth-century Augustinians and Nominalism. It admits that it is a preliminary study, and considers a number of Augustinians only from one point of view: their use of the works of Adam Wodeham and their attitude towards Wodeham's teachings. The conclusion of the brief study is that Augustinians were "not as opposed to the thought of Ockham and his disciples as we generally have concluded"¹). The purpose of this present article is to consider whether two well-known fourteenth-century Augustinians were nominalistic. The Augustinians are Thomas of Strasbourg and Alphonsus Vargas of Toledo. And the test of Nominalism will be its most famous doctrine, an interpretation of the absolute power of God which drastically reduces necessity in the created order. This interpretation was to lead to widespread philosophical scepticism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which found its strongest proponent in Peter of Ailly²). Most of the doctrines of Peter are found explicitly or implicitly in the works of William of Ockham and, if the terms Ockhamism or Nominalism are to have any real meaning, Ockham's teaching concerning divine absolute power will be at the heart of it.

THOMAS OF STRASBOURG

Thomas was born at Haguenau, near Strasbourg. He studied and taught theology at Strasbourg and then went to Paris. There he commented on the *Sentences* 1335-37. He obtained his doctorate in theology in 1347 and became Magister Regens. He was made Provincial of Swabia in 1343, and was General of the Order from 1345 to 1357. He died in Vienna in 1357³).

Thomas's *Sentences-Commentary* had five editions after the inven-

¹) "Ockhamism Among the Augustinians", *Scientia Augustiniana* (Würzburg, 1975) 267-275.

²) L.A. KENNEDY, *Peter of Ailly and the Harvest of Fourteenth-Century Philosophy* (Lewiston, N. Y., 1986).

³) P. GLORIEUX, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, XV, 1 (1946) 780. A. ZUMKELLER, "Die Augustinerschule des Mittelalters", *Analecta Augustiniana*, 27 (1964) 212-214.

tion of printing. We shall use the 1490 Venice edition. Six texts, or groups of texts, will be cited in which Thomas appeals to the divine absolute power to claim as possible what thirteenth-century philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas, would have claimed to be impossible.

1. As a general principle Thomas asks whether God is bound to do anything. Thomas answers that there are some things which God is bound in justice to do because they are fitting, that is, in accord with His justice and goodness, but that God could change the present order of things so that what was previously fitting would no longer be fitting. God could then do what, according to the former order, was unfitting. Of course, it would now be fitting. And God can, without unfittingness, change these orders of things at His pleasure. Hence there is nothing He is bound in justice to do.

Uno modo, accipiendo decentiam simpliciter absolute. Alio modo, accipiendo decentiam pro nunc in presenti rerum ordine. Primo modo, omnia que Deus facit operatur ex necessitate iusticie, quia nihil potest Deus facere quod non deceat suam bonitatem. Sed secundo modo Deus nihil facit ex necessitate iusticie quia ordinem totius universi Deus potest pro libito voluntatis immutare. Et per consequens illud idem quod nunc est indecens, mutato rerum ordine, fieret decens, et e converso. Propter quod divine bonitatis condecencia nullam necessitatem iusticie habere videtur respectu istius ordinis quem videmus, nec respectu cuiuscumque alterius ordinis universi, eo quod quemlibet talium ordinum Deus mutare possit quandocumque voluerit⁴).

2. Hence God is not bound by any criterion of justice or fittingness outside of Himself. Nor is He bound by any criterion inside Himself, except His own will. Whatever He wills or does, by definition, is just and fitting.

... Deus nunquam potest facere aliquid iniustum vel indecens quia voluntas sua tribuit rebus decentiam et iusticiam. Et ideo, quicquid Deus facit et vult, hoc est decens et iustum⁵).

3. God can change any creature into any other creature.

Conclusio secunda est quod quelibet creatura realem habens entitatem est convertibilis per divinam potentiam in quamlibet creaturam⁶).

⁴) *Sentences*, I, d. 42 and 43, art. 4 (Venice, 1490) f. y3r. All quotations from Thomas are from this work.

⁵) *Ibid.*; f. y3v.

⁶) IV, d. 11, q. 1, art. 1; f. hh1v.

This means that God can change a material thing into an immaterial thing, and an immaterial thing into a material thing. He can do this because He has as much power over immaterial beings as over material beings.

... virtus divina non minus habet posse super totale esse et non-esse rei indivisibilis quam divisibilis, et ideo non minus potest indivisibile convertere in divisibile quam unum divisibile in aliud divisibile⁷).

It means also that God can change a substance into a relation. Since He can annihilate it, He can do this lesser thing.

... cum entitas simpliciter absoluta per potentiam divinam possit simpliciter annihilari, non video quare per eandem potentiam non possit in respectivum converti⁸).

4. Thomas debated with a fellow commentator on the *Sentences*, Peter of Croso, a Master of arts, concerning whether a person's will could be damned while at the same time his intellect was in possession of the Beatific Vision. Thomas tells us that Peter devoted the four *principia* of his *Sentences* to this question; and Thomas answered each of them. The *principium* was a lecture given at the beginning of each of the four books of the *Sentences*. Though it was customary to be more colorful than serious in *principia*, it is hard to justify Thomas defending the affirmative position, and spending so much time on doing so. His account of the debate occupies sixteen large pages⁹), and he makes a point of saying that he is being brief:

... rationem ... ad presens, causa brevitatis, omitto ne attedietur lector presentis ventilationis.

It is true that Thomas claims that he entered this debate in order to dispute with someone of whose intellectual talents he thought so highly, but the point is that the debate concerned only divine power, with no consideration of any restraints on it from divine wisdom or goodness,

⁷) *Ibid.*; f. hhr.

⁸) *Ibid.*; f. hh2r.

⁹) IV, d. 50, q. 2, art. 3 and 4; ff. hhh1r-jjj2r. Peter de Croso is named in the margin of Thomas's *Sentences*, but not in the text. Peter was a *socius* of Thomas; that is, he read the *Sentences* at the same time. He obtained his doctorate in theology in 1338. See J. KURZINGER, "Alphonsus Vargas Toletanus und seine Theologische Einleitungslehre", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* 22 (1930) Heft 5-6, pp. 83, 84, 92.

so that both protagonists are guilty of the same fault: thinking that what is compatible with divine power alone (leaving out of consideration divine wisdom or goodness) is possible.

Sed in primo meo principio posui conclusionem oppositam, et hoc gratia disputationis et cum intentione proficiendi cum tanto magistro, quem Deus intellectuali claritate eximie decoravit, ut in omnibus suis actibus evidentius elucescit.

Thomas teaches that God could separate the act of a person's intellect from the act of his will so that the intellect does not know what the will loves or hates, and so that the will loves or hates something not known by the intellect. Thus it would be possible for the person to grasp the Beatific Vision intellectually but to hate God in his will.

... supposito quod Deus suspendat voluntatem illius hominis ne percipiat ea que sunt in eius intellectu.

Unde, stante illa suspensione intellectus ne cognoscat ea que sunt in illa perversa voluntate...

... tamen cum hoc stabit quod nesciat se odire Deum, quia, si sciret se odire Deum, tunc cognosceret odium quod est in sua voluntate quo odit Deum ...

Thomas seems to think that the intellect could not be beatified if it knew that the will hated God, but thinks that it can be beatified if it is unaware of this. It will be noticed also that Thomas seems to be treating the intellect and will as two persons, since it is only persons who are beatified or damned. Thomas also speaks, in the quotation above, of the will "perceiving", which gives the will an intellect of its own other than the person's intellect.

Thomas makes his claim stronger by teaching that it is possible for a will which hates God to have as much delight as a will loving God in the Beatific Vision. Such delight and hate are not incompatible, he says, provided the delight does not come from love of the object which is hated.

... delectatio et odium non videntur habere mutuam repugnantiam nisi si sit talis delectatio que innascitur ex amore illius obiecti quod oditur.

For this reason, Thomas thinks that the delight could not be an elicited delight, that is, one coming actively from the will; rather, it would be produced in the will by the divine absolute power, the will being simply passive or receptive. In the case of a beatified will,

however, the delight would come actively from the will. Otherwise, however, the delights would be the same.

... huiusmodi delectatio non esset actus elicitus ab aliqua voluntate creata; ita enim se haberet voluntas creata respectu illius delectationis receptive ...

5. Thomas also teaches that it is possible for the will to enjoy the possession of God without the intellect seeing God.

... probavi quod de absoluta Dei potentia fieri potest quod voluntas sit in actu fruitionis, intellectu manente suspenso ab actu cognitionis.

6. Thomas teaches that God could assume a damned nature, leaving it damned while still united hypostatically to a divine person. He thinks, however, that it could not sin mortally while joined to the divine person. If it could, we would have to say that God hated God. This would be a contradiction.

... Deus quandocumque sibi placuerit potest in ipsa suspendere omnem actum odii et blasphemie et omnis alterius indecentie.

... nec per consequens Deus odiret Deum.

... necesse esset eam suspendi ab omni actu mortalis peccati quia ... huiusmodi peccatum divino supposito esset attribuendum tamquam principio [*text principium*] quod ...

Istud autem implicaret contradictionem quia ... tunc Deus non esset pura bonitas et per consequens Deus non esset Deus.

This certainly is a most strange teaching. How could the nature have gotten into mortal sin? Thomas admits that God cannot sin. The nature assumed can not sin, as Thomas admits, because its acts are the acts of a divine person. It would have to have been joined to a divine person while the human nature was in a state of sin. But then God would have had to create it in a state of sin. This, then, is the state of affairs Thomas is defending. Moreover, he continues with the case so that not only is the human nature in the state of sin, but it does not get out of it (though it is united to a divine person), and can be damned. So it would be assumed by a divine person but never perform one act, since any act of a divine person would cleanse the nature from its sin. Also, it is strange that Thomas claims that the human nature would not be able to commit a *mortal* sin. His argument for this, that it would be against the goodness of God, would hold also for a venial sin.

Thomas is not put off by the objection that, if the Son of God had

assumed a sinful nature which was finally damned, it would be a contradiction because He would have come to save the world and would have Himself (in His created nature) been lost. Thomas answers this objection by saying that Christ died in His human nature, and death is worse than damnation because death deprives a being of its existence and damnation does not.

Quid enim magis repugnat, quod salus dicatur damnatus quam quod vita dicatur mortua? ... magis videretur sibi repugnare esse mortuum quam esse damnatum quia per esse mortuum magis recedit unaqueque res a suo esse quam per esse damnatum; nam esse damnatum presupponit esse.

Again we are amazed at Thomas's doctrine. Certainly, since the human soul is immortal, death does not deprive it of its existence. And also, for a Christian, damnation is worse than death, for Christ said, speaking of someone who might betray Him, "It is better for that man never to have been born".

If God were united hypostatically to a damned created nature it could be said that God was damned. This terminology does not bother Thomas because he realizes that it is said of God only extrinsically, through the created nature united to Him. Moreover, it extols the divine omnipotence because it shows that God can do whatever is not a contradiction.

... esse damnatum extrinseca denominatione de Deo predicatum extolleret Dei omnipotentem maiestatem quia per huiusmodi predicationem nobis insinualetur quod Deus omnia potest que simpliciter non implicant contradictionem.

Thomas also suggests that God's power would be even more extolled if it could do what is a contradiction, which several teachers claim to be possible.

... quia multi et magni doctores tenent quod Dei omnipotentia etiam se extendit ad illa que contradictionem implicant ...

Thomas does not go into the question of *who* would be damned if God were damned in His human nature. Natures are not damned; only persons can be. Hence God would be damned in His divine person. Thomas might have answered that the divine person did not commit any sin to merit damnation of His created nature, but one might retort that the human nature didn't commit any sin either.

ALPHONSUS VARGAS OF TOLEDO

We thus see that Thomas of Strasbourg was heavily nominalistic on several points. Let us now consider his famous pupil. Alphonsus was born in Toledo about 1300. He entered the Augustinians while quite young. He went to Paris in 1340. Since Thomas of Strasbourg was teaching there from 1340 to 1343, it is very likely that Alphonsus studied under him. Alphonsus read the *Sentences* in Paris from 1344 to 1345. He obtained his doctorate of theology in 1346 and became a Magister Regens. In 1353 he became Bishop of Badajoz, in 1354 Bishop of Osma, and in 1366 Archbishop of Seville. He died in 1366¹⁰).

Only the first book of the *Sentences* was printed, in Venice in 1490. According to Trapp, this is the only commentary Alphonsus wrote¹¹). It was reprinted in 1952, with the columns numbered for easy reference (all references to the text of Alphonsus will be to this reprint). Alphonsus shows a vast erudition, quoting the leading thirteenth and early-fourteenth century doctors, and many from his own community¹²). Since we have Alphonsus's commentary on only the first book of the *Sentences*, there are fewer opportunities for him to manifest the nominalist doctrine of divine absolute power than if he had commented on all four books. Following, however, are two topics concerning which Alphonsus brings it in.

1. Alphonsus agrees with Thomas of Strasbourg that, by divine absolute power, it is possible for the intellect of a rational creature to see God intuitively without its will loving God or delighting in Him.

... de potentia Dei absoluta fieri potest quod creatura rationalis intuitive Deum videat et nullum actum dilectionis et delectationis habeat circa Ipsum¹³).

... Deus de potentia sua absoluta potest esse presens in ratione obiecti intellectui creature, omni dilectione et delectatione ab eadem circumscripta¹⁴).

... ista consequentia non est simpliciter necessaria: creatura rationalis videt Deum intuitive; ergo est beata¹⁵).

¹⁰) T. and J. CARRERAS Y ARTAU, *Historia de la Filosofía Española*, II, 489-491. *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, 15 (1950) 2534-35.

¹¹) "Augustinian Theology of the 14th Century", *Augustiniana* VI (1956) 213-214.

¹²) See TRAPP, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-222.

¹³) In *Primum Sententiarum*, d. 1, q. 7, art. 2 (Venice, 1490; New York, 1952) col. 242. All references to Alphonsus's texts are to this work.

¹⁴) *Ibid.*; col. 243.

¹⁵) *Ibid.*

The reason for this is that it does not involve a contradiction.

... quod visio qua nunc creatura rationalis videt Deum intuitive sit formaliter in ea sine omni dilectione et delectatione non implicat contradictionem¹⁶).

Vision is an absolute act, not one relative to love and delight, since knowledge precedes willing. Therefore it does not involve a contradiction to posit such an absolute act without what is subsequent to it.

... visio est actus essentialiter absolutus cum sit quedam qualitas prior dilectione et delectatione, quia cognoscere precedat velle. ... ponere actum absolutum priorem sine posteriori non includit repugnantiam contradictionis formalis...¹⁷)

This would require less divine power, Alphonsus thinks, than producing accidents without a substance for them to inhere in, and God does this in the Eucharist¹⁸).

Similarly, it is possible for the rational creature to both see God intuitively and love him, yet not enjoy Him.

... de potentia Dei absoluta fieri potest quod creatura rationalis beatifice Deum diligat et nullum actum delectationis habeat circa Ipsum¹⁹).

It is even possible, Alphonsus says, for God's absolute power to produce the intuitive knowledge of God in the intellect, and the love of God in the will, and still for the will not to love. This amazing doctrine is defended by an analogy. It is possible, Alphonsus says, for a rational creature to see an object and not see it (that is, think that it grasps an object external to it and yet be deceived because it has grasped only an appearance). Thus it is possible for the will to love an object and not love it.

... de potentia Dei absoluta creatura rationalis potest habere dilectionem qua nunc diligit Deum beatifice solum in voluntate et non diligere²⁰).

... non est maior repugnantia quod creatura rationalis habeat dilectionem qua nunc diligit actualiter formaliter in voluntate et

¹⁶) *Ibid.*; col. 242.

¹⁷) *Ibid.*

¹⁸) *Ibid.*; col. 242-243.

¹⁹) *Ibid.*; col. 245.

²⁰) D. I, q. 4, a. 2; col. 169.

non diligit quam quod habeat visionem qua nunc videt actualiter formaliter in visu et non videat; sed secundum est possibile de potentia Dei absoluta; igitur et primum²¹).

Alphonsus also teaches that God, by His absolute power, could have a rational creature enjoy the delights of beatitude without it loving God beatifically.

Non est maior repugnantia quod dilectio qua creatura rationalis nunc diligit Deum beatifice sit formaliter in ipsa sine omni delectatione quam quod delectatio qua nunc delectatur de Deo beatifice sit formaliter in ipsa sine omni dilectione; patet ex terminis; sed secundum est possibile de potentia Dei absoluta²²).

Alphonsus is therefore willing to treat love and delight on a par; that is, love can exist without delight and delight without love. But he does not do this with knowledge and love. Though knowledge can exist without love, love cannot exist without knowledge. A person, even by divine absolute power, cannot love God beatifically and not see Him intuitively.

Sed per nullam potentiam potest fieri quod beatifice Deum diligit et Ipsum intuitive non videat, quia necessario sequitur: creatura rationalis diligit; ergo intuitive cognoscit²³).

Alphonsus is quite clear that a rational creature cannot be beatified in its intellect and damned in its will, though he is aware that doctors of his own community, such as Thomas of Strasbourg, teach that this is possible by divine absolute power.

... per nullam potentiam finitam nec infinitam fieri potest quod creatura rationalis simul sit beata quantum ad intellectum et damnata quantum ad voluntatem, cuius oppositum videtur quibusdam doctoribus nostris²⁴).

Alphonsus explains also that it is absolutely impossible that a rational creature see God face to face and hate Him, or be saddened by this vision.

... per nullam potentiam potest fieri quod creatura rationalis

²¹) *Ibid.*; col. 170.

²²) D. 1, q. 7, a. 2; col. 245.

²³) *Ibid.*; col. 246.

²⁴) *Ibid.*; col. 245.

facialiter et intuitive Deum videat et Ipsum odiat positive vel de Ipso tristetur²⁵).

The reason for this is that there is no defect, real or apparent, in God thus seen, and, since the will cannot love or hate what it does not know, it cannot be saddened by the sight of an object which contains no evil or defect.

Igitur nihil possumus odire nisi sit cur illud odiamus cum in ipso non sit existenter nec apparenter aliquis defectus boni nec aliqua ratio mali ...²⁶)

2. God cannot be dependent on His creatures. He cannot, for example, have His knowledge or His will dependent on how His creatures act; He cannot acquire new knowledge from them or have His will to predestine them dependent on their behavior. Thus God predestines human beings to heaven or hell antecedent to a knowledge of their merits. But in so doing He is not an "acceptor of persons", or at least not an unjust acceptor of them, because He owes them nothing; He may, in justice, do with them as He wills.

Respondeo igitur aliter et concedo quod Deus sic gratis et misericorditer predestinavit quemcumque quod totaliter absque causa tenente se ex parte predestinati. Et, quando dicitur quod tunc Deus esset acceptator personarum, nego, loquendo de acceptione personarum vitiosa ... quia non est acceptio personarum vitiosa ubi nulli sit iniustitia aut debitum denegatur ...²⁷)

Alphonsus explicitly opposes Thomas of Strasbourg in this teaching²⁸).

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We can thus see that Thomas of Strasbourg in 1335-37 and Alphonsus Vargas in 1344-45 adopted some nominalistic doctrines having to do with divine absolute power. The *Sentences-Commentary* of John of Mirecourt contained several similar doctrines which were condemned in 1347²⁹). John read the *Sentences* the same year as

²⁵) *Ibid.*; col. 243.

²⁶) *Ibid.*; col. 244.

²⁷) D. 40 and 41, q. 1, a. 3 and 4; col. 630.

²⁸) *Ibid.*; col. 627-630.

²⁹) See F. STEGMUELLER, "Die zwei Apologien des Jean de Mirecourt", *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 5 (1933) 40-78, 192-204.

Alphonsus. Several statements of Nicholas of Autrecourt were condemned also a year earlier, in 1346. It is true that Nicholas's condemned statements came, for the most part, from his *Universal Treatise*, and were unconnected with the notion of divine absolute power. But some of them came from his letters, especially his two letters to Bernard of Arezzo, O.F.M., in which Nicholas drew sceptical conclusions from the nominalist doctrine of divine absolute power³⁰). It is quite possible that Thomas or Alphonsus might have had some of their statements condemned instead of John or Nicholas, or in addition to them. Statements of this kind were so widespread that some writers, it seemed, had to be singled out for condemnation, but which writers were chosen may well have depended on chance considerations.

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³⁰) See L.A. KENNEDY *et al.*, trans., *The Universal Treatise of Nicholas of Autrecourt* (Milwaukee, 1971). The letters are in J. LAPPE, "Nicolaus von Autrecourt", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Band VI, Heft 2 (Muenster, 1908) 2*-14*, 24*-30*. The letters are translated in H. SHAPIRO, *Medieval Philosophy* (New York, 1964) 510-527.