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RICHARD LAVENHAM ON FUTURE CONTINGENTS

Peter Øhrstrøm

To Richard Lavenham,¹ who enjoyed great reputation as an active theologian and logician in the years just before 1381, at least sixty-three treatises have been attributed. Twenty-five of these, on logical subjects, are included in ms. S = British Library, Sloane 3899. All but two of Richard's tracts in this ms. are duplicated in V = Venice, B. Marc. Z 300 (1872). Both mss. are from the 14th century. Several of the logical treatises have already been edited by Paul V. Spade.² In this paper I intend to edit the treatise on future contingents which is included in both mss. (S 67v-68r, V 78vA-79rB).

Lavenham outlines four opinions concerning future contingents,³ viz. (1) the fatalistic view, (2) that God has no foreknowledge (3) that there is no determinate truth concerning future events, (4) that future events are contingent in spite of being foreknown by God. He rejects fatalism as an acceptable solution to the problem since it precludes free will. The second opinion is Cicero's, who tried to preserve free will by refusing to allow any foreknowledge. Richard follows St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 5.9-10, in claiming that this is an absurd position. The third opinion was Aristotle's, says Richard. Aristotle formulated his opinion regarding the problem of future contingents in the first book of *Peri Hermeneias* (c. 9, 18a33-19b4). It is, however, not clear how this text should be understood. There seems to be at least two possible interpretations. According to the first Aristotle held that there is no determinate truth as regards future contingent facts. According to the other interpretation he

1. The information about Richard is based on the article of C.L. Klingsford in *Dictionary of National Biography*, v.11, 652f.

2. Spade, P.V.: *The Treatises on Modal Propositions and on Hypothetical Propositions* by Richard Lavenham, *Med. Stud.* Vol. XXXV, 1973, 49-59.

Spade, P.V.: *Five Logical Tracts* by Richard Lavenham, in O'Donnell, J.R. (ed.): *Essays in Honour of Anton Charles Pegis*, 1974.

Spade, P.V.: *Notes on Some Manuscripts of Logical and Physical Works* by Richard Lavenham, *Manuscripta* 19 (1975), 139-146.

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3. For a general introduction to the late medieval ideas of future contingents, see Calvin Normore: *Future Contingents*, in Kretzmann, N., Kenny, A. & Pinborg, J.: *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge 1982 (hereafter CHLMP).

held that all propositions about future contingent facts are true or false although they are neither necessary nor impossible. Richard obviously assumes that the first of these possible interpretations is correct. He refers to "Hokkam"'s commentary on the Peri Hermeneias. Ockham actually says:

"Ad evidentiam istius totius capituli est primo sciendum, quod intentio Philosophi est, quod in talibus contingentibus futuris neutra pars contradictionis est vera vel falsa, sicut res non magis determinatur ad fore quam ad non fore."⁴

Richard formulates some examples. The propositions

"Antichrist will be"

"The Day of Judgment will be"

"The resurrection will be"

are all about future contingent facts. For this reason Richard maintains that they are neither determinately true nor determinately false according to Aristotle. Richard considers the following *consequentia*:

"If a proposition is about a future contingent fact then the proposition is not determinately true."

The validity of this *consequentia* is the crucial claim of Aristotle's theory as Richard understands it. In his opinion, however, Christianity is against the acceptance of the *consequentia*, since the Christian philosopher must believe that God foreknows the future contingent facts. If Antichrist will be, then God knows that Antichrist will be, and for this reason it is determinately true that Antichrist will be.

Having rejected the three classical opinions Richard formulates his own (and many of his contemporaries') answer to the problem. In his opinion the doctrines of divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible. In order to argue that he is right he considers two versions of the inference from God's prescience to the necessity of the future and he explains why they should be rejected.

In order to formulate the first version Richard makes use of an example:

q: "The Day of Judgment will be"

According to Richard *q* is a proposition about a future contingent fact.

Using this example the following *consequentia* can be formed:

(C) "God knew from eternity that *q*; therefore *q*".

4. Expos. Peri H. I.6.15 p.421 ed. Gambatese & Brown (G. de Ockham, Opera Philosophica II, St. Bonaventure 1978).

This *consequentia* is obviously valid. Richard now utilizes the principle:

(P) "A true proposition about the past, the truth of which does not depend on the future, is necessary".

(P) seems to be equivalent to the idea that what has been the case cannot be undone. It appears to follow from (P) that the antecedent of (C) is necessary. By means of the well known principle of modal logic:

(M) "If '*q* follows from *p*' is a valid *consequentia* and *p* is necessary, then *q* will also be necessary"

it follows that the consequent of (C) will also be necessary. In short the argument is the following:

(1') "The Day of Judgment will be"

(2') "God knew that the Day of Judgment will be"

(3') "It is necessary that God knew that the Day of Judgment will be"

(4') "It is necessary that the Day of Judgment will be".

Richard rejects the inference from (2') to (3'). He claims that (P) cannot be used in order to justify this inference, since the truth of (2') depends on the future. For if the Day of Judgment will not be, then (2') turns out to be false! Richard's answer to this argument obviously depends on Ockham's *De praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei*.

Richard also deals with another argument. He considers the propositions:

p: "Antichrist will be"

g: "God wills that *p*"

The *consequentia* from *g* to *p* is clearly valid. Hence it follows that if *g* can be proved to be necessary, then *p* will also be necessary because of (M). Richard considers the following syllogism:

Major premise: *g* is unchangeably known to God.

Minor premise: What is unchangeably known to God is necessarily known to God.

Conclusion: *g* is necessarily known to God.

In this syllogism the minor premise follows from the principle that whatever is unchangeable is also necessary. The major premise follows from a proof *ad absurdum*: If *g* were known to God but not unchangeably known to him, then *g* would be changeably known to God. But this is absurd. Hence it is proved that *g* is necessarily known to God. But more than that is needed, since it should be demonstrated that *g* is necessary. It seems that Richard has forgotten to mention the following premise:

"What is necessarily known to God is necessary", but there is no doubt that this premise is presupposed in his proof. By means of this extra premise it is easily shown that *g* is necessary, and consequently *p* is also necessary. Richard also rejects this argument. In his opinion the minor premise is false. What is unchangeably known to God could after all have been different and therefore it is not necessary!

The four views which Richard mentions were not the only ones to be considered by medieval philosophers. From a modern point of view at least one important opinion seems to be missing. This is the opinion of St. Thomas Aquinas and others who claimed that the knowledge of God abstracts from the difference between past, present and future. According to this view it might be said that all events are present to God. In an important sense, this is to deny the *foreknowledge* of God.

I have elsewhere⁶ assumed that the solution according to Ockham might be regarded as "the Mediaeval theory". It seems that Richard's tractatus provides further evidence for this view.⁷

Principles of edition.

The differences between the two mss. are minute. I have based the edition on *S*, accepting *V* readings only when they seem to be required by the sense. The apparatus is complete. The orthography has been normalized and I have introduced my own paragraphing and punctuation. I would like to thank Prof. Olaf Pedersen, Prof. Paul Vincent Spade and cand.mag. Knud Capion for comments which have been very helpful for me when I was preparing the text for edition.

5. See CHLMP pp.366-67.

6. Danish Yearbook of Philosophy, 18 (1981), 81-95.

7. According to Normore, Ockham's position rapidly became the *opinio communis*. See CHLMP p.370.

<TRACTATUS DE EVENTU FUTURORUM PER LAVINHAM.>

In materia de eventu futurorum quattuor sunt opiniones. Prima est quod omnia futura evenient de necessitate, et haec fuit opinio Stoicorum et adhuc est opinio laicorum. Secunda est quod Deus nullo modo est praescius futurorum, et haec fuit opinio Ciceronis et quorundam Platoniorum. Tertia est quod de futuris non est aliqua veritas determinata, et haec fuit opinio Aristotelis in libro Periermeniarum. Quarta est quod Deus determinate scit omnia futura, et ea quae sunt futura non de necessitate evenient sed contingenter.

Prima opinio est falsa et erronea quia tollit nostri arbitrii libertatem. Quod probatur sic, quia quodlibet tale opus, quod homo faciet, necessario faciet; ergo non est in potestate hominis vitare aliquid quod postmodo faciet. Et si non est in potestate sua aliquid vitare quod postmodo faciet, sequitur quod illud non libere faciet. Conformiter opinantur vulgares et laici qui, quando vident aliquod infortunium homini accidisse, dicunt quod hoc erat fatum suum, et sic illud de necessitate homini accidit.

Secunda opinio etiam est falsa et erronea secundum Augustinum .5^o. libro de civitate capitulis .9. et .10., quia illa opinio poneret quod Deus iam nescit quid postea sit factururus, quod est absurdum.

Tertia opinio, quae fuit opinio Aristotelis, obviat fidei christiana pro tanto quia illa opinio habet ponere quod Deus non plus determinate scit quod Antichristus erit quam quod Antichristus non erit, nec plus determinate scit quod dies iudicii erit quam quod dies iudicii non erit, nec plus determinate scit quod resurrectio mortuorum erit quam quod resurrectio mortuorum non erit. Et ratio est quia de nullis futuris contingentibus ad utramlibet est veritas determinata; sed istae propositiones "dies iudicii erit" et "resurrectio mortuorum erit" sunt propositiones contingentes de futuro ad utramlibet, ergo non sunt ad veritatem determinatae, et per consequens non magis sunt determinatae ad

1 opiniones: species S. 2 futura: om.V. haec: h(o)c V.
 3 et: *unam litteram add. et del. S.* Secunda est: secunda V.
 4 haec: h(o)c V. Ciceronis: citheronis S. 6 et haec: ita S,
 ut videtur: quae V. est: om.S. 8 evenient: eveniunt V.
 10 quia: si (?) *add.S.* 11 ergo: igitur V, et sic *deinceps.*
 12-13 aliquid vitare: vitare aliquid V. 13 sequitur: super S.
 15 fatum: fatum *add. & del. V.* 17 opinio: om.S. 18 capitulis:
 capitulo V. 21 quia: quod V. 22 scit: sit S. 24 erit²: om.S.
 26 istae: i(11)ae V. 29 sunt determinatae: determinatae sunt V.

30 verum quam ad falsum nec e contrario. Patet consequentia, et maior est opinio Aristotelis in libro Periermeniarum. Et illa opinio habet ponere quod nulla propositio contingens de futuro est vera, nec aliqua talis est falsa, et haec fuit intentio Aristotelis, ut dicit Hokkam super librum Periermeniarum.

35 Quarta opinio est opinio modernorum et fidelium christianorum.

Sed contra: videtur quod non, quia necessario dies iudicii erit et necessario resurrectio mortuorum erit et necessario Antichristus erit, et sic de quolibet contingenti futuro. Ergo omnia futura contingentia de necessitate evenient. Patet consequentia; et antecedens probatur sic, quia Deus ab aeterno scivit quod dies iudicii erit, ergo dies iudicii erit. Ista consequentia est bona, et antecedens est necessarium; ergo consequens. Patet consequentia, quia ex propositione necessaria non sequitur nisi propositio necessaria in bona consequentia. Et quod antecedens sit necessarium probatur, quia antecedens est propositio una affirmativa vera de praeterito, cuius veritas non dependet a futuro; ergo antecedens est necessarium. Patet consequentia per communem regulam.

Item, arguo sic: necessario Antichristus erit, igitur de necessitate Antichristus eveniet. Antecedens sic probatur: Deus vult Antichristum fore, ergo necessario Antichristus erit. Ista consequentia est bona et antecedens est necessarium; ergo consequens; quod antecedens sit necessarium probatur, quia antecedens est immutabiliter scitum a Deo, et omne tale, quod est immutabiliter scitum a Deo, est necessario scitum a Deo; ergo antecedens est necessario scitum a Deo. Patet consequentia, et minor ex hoc quod omne immutabile est necessarium; et maior probatur, quia si antecedens non sit immutabiliter scitum a Deo, et ipsum antecedens est scitum a Deo, ergo ipsum antecedens est mutabiliter scitum a Deo, et per consequens Deus aliquid scit mutabiliter. Et sic sequitur quod modus suus sciendi esset mutabilis, vel sua scientia esset mutabilis; consequens falsum et erroneum.

Pro istis dicitur negando quod omnia futura de necessitate evenient et concedo illam consequentiam primam: "Deus ab aeterno scivit

33 Hokkam: hocham V. 33-34 super librum: in libro V. 35 opinio est: est V. 36 quia: om.V. * 41 Ista: i(11)a V. 44 quod: om.V.
 44-45 propositio-vera: ita S, sed vera in mg.: una propositio vera affirmativa V. 48 necessario: supra lin. S. 50 necessario: in mg. S: om. V, sed signum \wedge post erit habet V. Ista: i(11)a V.
 52 est: om.V. 57 antecedens²: om.V. 60 scientia: om S.
 * 40 probatur sic: sic probatur V

quod dies iudicii erit; ergo dies iudicii erit". Et nego quod antecede-
 65 dens sit necessarium. Et tunc ad probationem: quando sic arguitur,
 quia antecedens est una propositio affirmativa vera de praeterito,
 cuius veritas non dependet a futuro, ergo est necessaria, concedo con-
 sequentiam et nego antecedens pro eo, quod veritas illius dependet a
 futuro, ut patet; quia si Antichristus non esset futurus, Deus non ab
 aeterno scivisset ipsum esse futurum.

70 Ad secundum argumentum: concedo quod Deus non scit aliquid mutabi-
 liter, quia nec ipse est mutabilis, nec modus suus sciendi, et concedo
 quod quidquid scitur a Deo immutabiliter scitur. Et negatur quod omne
 illud quod immutabiliter scitur a Deo, necessario scitur a Deo.

Explicit tractatus de eventu futurorum per Lavinham.

65 quia: quod V. 66 ergo est necessaria: om.V. 71 nec: scripsi:
 nullus SV. 74 Explicit: parvus add.V. per Lavinham: om V.