

# John Mair on Future Contingency

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*Summary:* John Mair was one of the leading logicians and theologians in Paris at the beginning of the Reformation but his work has been curiously ignored by historians of both logic and theology. This paper examines Mair's contribution to the treatment of a problem that belongs to both of these disciplines, the reconciliation of divine foreknowledge with human freedom. It is shown that Mair's solution attempts to combine Thomas Aquinas' theory of God's relation to the world with John Duns Scotus' metaphysics of possibility and William of Ockham's logic of future contingent propositions.

John Mair, or Major, lived from 1469–1550. He was born in Gleghornie, near Haddington, a few miles from Duns. After first studying at Cambridge he was a student and then a very famous teacher in Paris from 1493 to 1517 and again from 1526 to 1531. The break in his career in France was spent first as Regent and Principal of the University of Glasgow and then as a teacher at Saint Andrews.<sup>1</sup> Mair taught at an extraordinary time. In 1518, as he tells us in the *Introduction* to the 1530 edition of his *Commentary on the First Book of Sentences*, the Theological Faculty at Paris mobilised itself to combat the “execrable heresy” of Luther. Later, he was one of those who were asked to give an opinion on Henry VIII's book against Luther and on Erasmus' *Paraphrases on Matthew*. His name heads the list of theologians who in 1530 took Catherine of Aragon's side in the discussion of Henry's marriage. Mair had famous students: certainly Antonio Coronel, Jacques Almain, David Cranston, and George Buchanan, perhaps also John Calvin, John Knox, and François Rabelais. Rabelais tells us that in the Library at St Victor, Pantagrue came across many curious volumes. Everyone has heard of the *Questio subtilissima, utrum chimera, in vacuo bombinans, possit comedere secundas intentiones*, but with it he found the *Barbouillamenta Scoti*, the scrawlings of Scotus, the *De differentiis soupparum*, of Bricot, and by Ioannes Maior, the *De Modo*

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1. See Farge 1980: 304–11, from where most of the biographical information here is taken. See also the “Life of the Author” prefaced to John Major, *A History of Greater Britain, As Well England As Scotland*.

*faciendi boudinos*, or *How to Make a Haggis*, a work which has sadly been lost.<sup>2</sup>

Given all this, one might expect that Mair's work would have attracted the interest of historians of theology, but curiously he has been quite ignored. In what very little has been written about him he is typically described as upholding in some way both realism and nominalism.<sup>3</sup> He tells us himself that he lectured on the *Sentences* Commentaries of Scotus, Ockham, and Rimini but also that the students stayed away in droves. Mair certainly seems to have divided his literary energies between realism and nominalism: he supervised the editing and publication of an edition of Scotus' *Reportata*, an edition of Adam Wodeham's *Sentences Commentary*, and a revision of John Dorp's edition of Buridan's *Compendium Logicae*. As far as logic goes, Prantl characterised Mair, like his teacher Jerónimo Pardo, as one of the *terministae moderni* but notes that another of his teachers was Thomas Bricot, whom he classifies as a "terminist-Scotist or scotist-Terminist".<sup>4</sup> In theology Torrance finds Mair "using the tools forged by the logical analysts to establish a form of realism".<sup>5</sup> Mair himself, in the Preface to the 1519 edition of his *Commentary on Book Four of the Sentences*, seems to locate his own theological position there as, at least in a limited way, conciliating between nominalism and realism:<sup>6</sup>

I have yet to see a Nominalist who has penetrated to the core of the *Fourth Book*. Others abuse them with this, saying that the Nominalists are so tied up in logic and philosophy that they neglect theology. Nevertheless, there are various points of theology that presuppose metaphysics. I will try, therefore,

2. F. Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, ch. 7. In fact, Rabelais (ca. 1494-1553) may not have been in Paris before 1528. *Pantagruel* was published in 1532 and condemned by the University of Paris in the following year.

3. The only modern study is Torrance 1969-1970.

4. Prantl 1870: 198-99. Prantl quotes a number of texts from the fifteenth century in which the contrast between Antiqui and Moderni is identified with that between Realists and Nominalists and in which the "terministae" are identified as "nominales", the "reales" as "formalistae".

5. Torrance 1969-1970: 1969: 532.

6. Ioannis Maioris, *In Quartum Sententiarum* (1519), iv: "Insuper nominalium adhuc vidi neminem qui opus in Quartum ad umbilicum calcemque perduxerit: quod in eos tanquam probrosum alii retorquent dicentes nominales logice et philosophie sic implicari ut theosophiam negligant: et tamen varia sunt theologica que metaphysicam praesupponebant. Conabor ergo nominalium principiis adhibitis in singulas distinctioes Quarti unam quaestionem vel plures scribere quas et reales si advertant facile capient. Utri[n]que enim vie theologia (circa quam praecipue versabor) erit communis."

while applying the principles of the Nominalists, to deal with one or more questions in various distinctions of the *Fourth Book* in a way that the Realists, if they pay attention, will easily comprehend. Theology, with which I am mostly concerned, will be common to both systems.

Since Ockham clearly and explicitly disagrees with Scotus on a number of points concerning divine predestination and foreknowledge, and their reconciliation with human freedom, and Mair's views here can be easily located in a couple of distinctions, these provide a good set of topics with which to test his relationship to his two illustrious predecessors. The results of the test can be stated briefly in advance: Mair attempts to combine Ockham's logic for future contingents with Scotus' metaphysics of contingency and the Boethian-Aquinian picture of God's relation to time. Given the importance of Mair's works in Spanish universities in the sixteenth century, this combination of views may perhaps be responsible for the account of Ockham's reconciliation of foreknowledge and freedom offered by Luis de Molina in his *de Concordia*.

Although it has been argued recently<sup>7</sup> that any complete account of the reconciliation of divine foreknowledge and freedom must be based upon a satisfactory account of divine providence, I will in this paper limit myself to examining Mair's views on divine foreknowledge, leaving the broader issue of his understanding of the nature of providence for another time.<sup>8</sup> In this I believe that I am following Ockham who seems to me to hold that a logically satisfactory account of the reconciliation of divine foreknowledge and human freedom can be given without reference to an account of divine providence.

The first question that Mair asks in Distinction 38 is whether there

7. By Alfred Freddoso in his introduction to Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*.

8. Mair's views on predestination merit study if only because he taught at the beginning of the Reformation, was involved in formulating a response to the "execrable heresy" of Martin Luther, and had as his students perhaps both John Calvin and John Knox. Mair tells in his Dedicatory Epistle that he rewrote the second edition of his commentary in a style different to that of the first edition (published in 1510 and reprinted in 1519) in response to the changing demands of his audience. A translation of the Epistle is included as an appendix to this paper. Mair's treatment of the problems that I am interested in is different in the two editions and I will be concerned here only with what he says in the second edition. For a discussion of Mair's approach to future contingency and divine foreknowledge in the first edition, see Schabel 2003.

For more biographical and bibliographical information see Farge 1980: 304-11.

are in fact any future contingent propositions.<sup>9</sup> Ockham had claimed that although there can be no *a priori* proof of the fact, nevertheless we must maintain that there are future contingents. Mair certainly does not offer a proof, and indeed in his discussion does not directly answer the question. His concern is rather to show that, given the appropriate definition of determinateness, there can be true propositions about the future that are not determinately true. Thus Mair commits himself to the logical project initiated by Ockham. He is not prepared, however, to accept the criticism of Aristotle's account of claims about the future mounted by Ockham and Gregory of Rimini.<sup>10</sup>

To Gregory of Rimini's plausible reconstruction of Aristotle's argument to show that we may infer from bivalence applied to claims about the future the determinateness of such claims, Mair responds with a move already made by Peter Abelard four hundred years earlier.<sup>11</sup> The putative argument relies upon the use of what we now call the *T-principle* to connect material and formal claims and so, implicitly, on the conventions establishing the denotations for the terms that we employ. The equivalence "a man is an ass" is true if and only if a man is an ass" is false if 'ass' is imposed to denote a being with the ability to laugh (*risibile*). This really isn't much of an argument, however, since all reasoning obviously takes place against the background of conventions of denotation. The best that it shows is that you shouldn't engage in a debate if you don't know what you are talking about.

Mair proposes to defend Aristotle by attributing to him a notion of determinate truth that allows him to claim that God may have knowledge of future truths without those truths being determinate. What he does in effect is to appeal to Ockham's distinction between propositions

9. Ioannis Maioris *In Primum Sententiarum Disputationes*, Paris (1530), d. 38, q. 1, f. 68va: "Primo indagabimus utrum sit aliqua propositio de futuro contingenti vera."

10. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 68vb: "Dicam hic pauca. Non capiunt arguentes <sc. Guillelmus et Gregorius> modum philosophi, propterea eum gratis suggillant, et licet ipsum in aere, non tamen ad eius mentem aggrediuntur, partimque incircumspecte eum oppugnant." Mair cites here Ockham's *Logica* and Rimini's *I Sent.*, d. 38: loc. cit.: "Ceterum Ockam in logicam et Gregorius Ariminensis in hanc distinctionem sinistre philosophum taxant. Suspiciantur enim eum velle dicere idem esse propositionem veram et determinate veram. Arbitrantur enim eum concessurum disiunctivam veram et negaturum copulativam et adversam: et nullam esse veritatem aut falsitatem in illarum partibus." For discussion of many later medieval theories of future contingents and divine foreknowledge, see Schabel 2000, as well as the literature referred to there.

11. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 68vb. Cf. Peter Abelard, *Logica "Ingredientibus"*, pp. 291-93.

purely about the past or present and those about the future to make precise the notion of determinateness in a way that Ockham never did.<sup>12</sup> Mair's determinate truth is what has recently been called "accidental necessity", the necessity, that is, with which the genuinely past is fixed and unchangeable:<sup>13</sup>

A proposition according to <Aristotle> is said to be determinately true which is true in such a way that a past tense proposition signifying it to have been true is not falsifiable at a later time.

What it is to be determinately true will thus depend upon what it is to be falsifiable and what claims, at least verbally about the past, are falsifiable. In these distinctions Mair offers no account of the nature of a human being's power to do other than what he or she will in fact do in the future but rather assumes that all singular categorical claims simply about the future are falsifiable prior to the actualisation of the state-of-affairs which they assert will be actual or its contradictory. Tacitly appealing to *modus tollens* he maintains that a claim verbally about the past – say 'the Antichrist was to come' – will be falsifiable if its truth "requires" the truth of such a claim about the future.<sup>14</sup> Mair interestingly proposes to save Aristotle's words by attributing to him the "common" view that a proposition is determinately true if it is known to be true by some human being. He does not expand on this epistemic for-

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12. *Tractatus de praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei et de futuris contingentibus* – English translation by M.M. Adams & N. Kretzmann: William Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*. Pace Adams & Kretzmann, neither Aristotle nor Ockham has anything like a criterion of "determinateness". Ockham indeed seems generally to use 'determinately true' simply to mean having the truth value 'true', i. e. being true.
13. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 68vb: "Propositio apud eum <i.e. Aristotelem> vocatur determinate vera: que sic est vera quod enunciatio de preterito significans illam fuisse veram haud est in posterum falsificabilis: unde hec enunciatio Socrates est: determinate est vera: licet sit contingens in hoc momento."
14. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 69va: "Ex his liquere arbitror quam via propositio de futuro contingenti est indeterminate vera secundum Aristotelem: et enunciatio de presenti et preterito est determinate vera: si eius veritas a futuro contingenti haud pendeat. Pro illius perspicua notitia scito quod veritas propositionis a futuro contingenti dependet: quia ad illam esse veram exigitur veritas unius de futuro: vel infert unam de futuro contingenti sane intellecta: ut Antichristus fuit futurus respicit illius future veritatem. sane intellecta dixi, hoc est ante positionem rei inesse."

mulation, however, and clearly any attempt to do so would lead directly back to the semantic notion of determinateness.<sup>15</sup>

Mair's own example of a determinate truth is 'Socrates exists'. Which, supposing that Socrates does now exist, following Scotus without acknowledgement, he holds to be contingently rather than necessarily true at the present moment. At any future moment the claim 'Socrates existed' will be unfalsifiable. On the other hand:<sup>16</sup>

The assertion 'Antichrist will exist' is indeterminate; the singular 'this was true' indicating it is falsifiable, for it may be falsified by not positing the contingent Antichrist.

Modern discussions of Ockhamism have noted the difficulty of formulating the notion of determinacy in such a way as to make just the right facts hard.<sup>17</sup> Mair's definition fails in the same way that modern definitions have. He can perhaps argue that Socrates' present existence does not depend upon any truths about the future in the sense of logically entailing one. But assume Aristotle's theory of ceasing and coming to be, and the truth of 'Socrates exists' implies the truth of 'Socrates will exist'. Worse, setting aside physical theory, while simple affirmative categoricals true of the present are determinately true according to the definition, simple negations are not. 'Socrates is not speaking Latin' is now true and for the next few months 'this was true' referring to it will also be true. A year hence, however, after he has taken an intensive course in the language it will be false. The obvious way to avoid this problem is to index assertions to dates but, as in other medieval treatments of the question, there is no trace of such a move in Mair.

15. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 68vb–69ra: "Communiter propositio dicitur determinate vera quae cognoscitur talis ab aliquo mortalium: ut enunciationes de presenti et preterito <non> a futuris dependentes. Antichristus fuit futurus est ita ambigua sicut Antichristus erit. Si enim esset intellectus creatus qui rem sicut est deprehenderet agnita plane esset veritas. Licet ego nesciam Platonem delitescere in antro: opilio vicinus hoc cernit. Et licet arator nescit in quo gradu tauri vagatur sol, astronomus tamen illud novit. Et sic unus nostrum hominum veritates preteritas et presentes communiter capit. Secus est de implexis [*sic!*, *fort.* 'complexis' *scribendum*] futuris. Cecus est eventus periculosi duelli aut iactus tessere future. Loco determinate vere ponas cognite a mortalibus vere."

16. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 68vb: "Secundo sequitur: hanc enuntiationem 'Antichristus erit' esse indeterminate veram: ista enim singularis: hec fuit vera, illam demonstrando est falsificabilis: nam ipsa falsificari valet per non positionem Antichristi contingentis."

17. E.g. Widerker 1990.

Despite insisting that “logical strophes are out of order in these matters”,<sup>18</sup> Mair proceeds in the rest of the question to draw out the logical consequences of his definition of determinateness. On the crucial epistemic point he notes that determinate truth entails truth but not vice versa and insists that God knows certainly the truth values of propositions about the future even though they are not determinate.

Much of Mair’s discussion of the logic of future contingents is familiar from Ockham. The most striking consequence of the definition is that some claims verbally about the past are indeterminately true. It has always been true, for example, that the Antichrist will exist, but until he walks upon the earth that truth remains indeterminate.

The possibility that a past tense proposition that is indeterminately true might be false is a logical possibility that cannot be actualised in a change from truth to falsity – though there may be a change from falsity to truth, as in the case of ‘Adam existed’ during the week of creation. Future tense propositions, on the other hand, can change from being true to being false, and do so when the state-of-affairs that they assert to be going to be the case comes to be so.

Mair’s logic of future contingency is thus that developed by Ockham. Future contingent propositions are immutably true or false but nevertheless indeterminately and thus not inevitably so. Ockham holds that parts of the past are just as soft as the future though they neither can change nor be changed from being the way they are. Mair’s formulation is much less careful and he claims as a corollary of his definition that:<sup>19</sup>

... some proposition has been true from eternity but nevertheless it is in my power to make it to have been perpetually false. For example ‘John is speaking’ before the instant A.

We will see in a moment that taken in conjunction with Scotus’ account of the origins of contingency this view of possibility may be thought to give humans, or God, a causal power over the past.

Having dealt with the semantic problems associated with future contingents Mair moves on in question 2 of Distinction 38 to deal with one half of the epistemological problem that confronted Christian philoso-

18. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 68vb: “... logicas strophas materia quam tractamus non patitur.”

19. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 1, f. 69va: “Secundo sequitur quod aliqua propositio ab eterno fuit vera, et tamen in facultate mea est situm, illam perpetuo falsificasse. Patet de hac Ioannes loquitur ante a instans.”

phers writing on this topic. Given that there are truths about the future such a philosopher might be asked (a) how the contingency of such truths is to be reconciled with divine omniscience.<sup>20</sup> Call this “the Reconciliation Problem”. And (b) how does God come by his knowledge of the truth value of propositions and in particular of the truth value of indeterminate propositions. Call this “the Source problem”. Mair’s treatment of the Reconciliation problem basically follows Ockham, or at least Ockham’s account of the logic of statements concerning divine knowledge as it was developed by Robert Holcot.<sup>21</sup> Mair lectured on Ockham and may well have lectured on Holcot; his student Jacques Almain certainly did.<sup>22</sup>

To deal with the logic of divine knowledge Mair makes a number of familiar distinctions. The most basic principle here is an application of the thesis of divine unity, that God is identical with his properties.<sup>23</sup> Thus God’s cognition is God, and God’s will is God. God’s knowledge of all non-propositional items whether these are possible or actual is called his knowledge of vision, or simple intelligence. His knowledge of propositional contents Mair calls adhesive or, as it is more usually known, apprehensive knowledge. Knowledge by vision of futures is foreknowledge: if it is of what is good, it is knowledge of approbation; if of what is bad, knowledge of reprobation.<sup>24</sup>

20. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 2, f. 69vb: “Secundo queritur an cum prescientia dei stet futurorum contingentia.”

21. Cf. Robert Holcot, *Seeing The Future Clearly*.

22. *Dicta Super Sententias Holcot* in J. Almain, *Opuscula*.

23. The standard medieval view is that God is identical with his non-relational properties. X’s knowing Y is a paradigmatically relational property, but if we distinguish the faculty from the act of understanding we can preserve an identity. Mair does not discuss this issue in Distinction 38.

24. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 2, f. 69vb: “Pro primo, multiplex est notitia dei, multipliciter ex parte cognitorum et non ipsius dei sumendo. Notitia dei est deus, qui ut unus est sic eius notitia est unica. Et confunditur ex usu loquentium scientia cum notitia. Non capimus hic scire more philosophi primo et secundo posteriorum pro assensu evidenti conclusionis demonstrare. Scire cum cognoscere miscetur. Ceterum scientia dei ob ipsa obiecta in que fertur varia sortitur nomina. Vocatur scientia simplicis intelligentie: scientia visionis et prescientia. Notitia simplicis intelligentie est notitia apprehensiva, quam habet respectu omnium rerum possibilium sive existant sive non. Hec est respectu incomplexorum et rerum ad extra. Necessario omnia possibilium representant. Notitia adhesiva est respectu enunciabilium. Illam adhesivam aliubi apprehensivam diximus: sed de hoc nunc non magnopere interest. Vocatur scientia visionis respectu eorum que sunt, fuerunt aut erunt: Dicitur prescientia respectu futurorum. Respectu bonorum est scientia approbationis. ... Nonnumquam sumitur pro notitia evidenti cum detestatione sic cogniti: et vocatur scientia reprobationis.”



In this question Mair goes no further than Ockham in the *Tractatus* in his analysis of the character of divine knowledge. Like Ockham he is concerned at this stage simply to offer a consistency proof for his chosen logic, to show that divine foreknowledge need not threaten contingency. Unlike Ockham, however, who thought that it is beyond our power to solve the Source problem,<sup>25</sup> Mair, as we will see, follows Scotus in offering a solution that appeals to the relationship between divine will and divine understanding.

God's omniscience and the fact that all well-formed propositions have a truth value entail that God assents to all truths about the future and dissents from all falsehoods. Though he does not claim until Distinction 40 that God knows the temporal order in an eternal present – like an eye at the centre of the world watching the heavens – Mair deploys Boethius' familiar reasoning here to argue that contingency is preserved since cognition alone does not necessitate. Thus foreknowledge does not affect the status of what is foreknown as contingent.

The thesis of divine unity in conjunction with divine immutability entails that, since propositions may change their truth value, God makes only one judgement with respect to contradictory propositional contents. Thus though God can know what he does not know, there is no change, or at least only a Cambridge change, involved in his doing so.

Among the various arguments that can be brought against God's propositional omniscience Mair considers one which is very striking and which does not seem to be used by his fourteenth century predecessors. He raises the following objection to his own claim that God assents to all and only truths:<sup>26</sup>

God is an adhesive judgement of some falsehood. Thus we have absurdly claimed that God does not assent to what is false. The antecedent is obvious: God assents to this 'this is false' where the pronoun demonstrates the proposition of which it is a part. That falsifies itself; consequently it is false and things are as it signifies them to be, so God assents to it.

25. William of Ockham, *Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum*, d. 38, pp. 383-84: "Ideo dico ... quod indubitanter est tenendum quod Deus certitudinaliter et evidenter scit omnia futura contingentia. Sed hoc evidenter declarare et modum quo scit omnia futura contingentia exprimere est impossibile omni intellectu statu isto." For Ockham's logic of future contingents see *De praedestinatione* and the comments by Adams and Kretzmann in their translation.

26. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 2, f. 70ra: "... alicuius falsi deus est iudicium adhesivum. Itaque insulse diximus deo non esse assensum falsi. Antecedens patet, deus assentit huic hoc est falsum per pronomen demonstrando propositionem cuius est pars. illa se falsificat proinde est falsa, et ita est sicut ipsa significat deus illi assentitur."

Mair seems to be reporting his own theory of self-referential sentences here. He holds,<sup>27</sup> accepting a principle first proposed by Roger Swinhead,<sup>28</sup> that a proposition is true if and only if it signifies that things are as they are and is not “self-falsifying”. Unfortunately he doesn’t take this opportunity to deal with what seems to be a compelling objection to this account of the semantics of self-referential sentences, replying to it only that there is a great difference between self-referential falsehoods and the usual kind.<sup>29</sup>

The traditional objection to the Ockhamist account of the logic of future contingents gets rather more attention from Mair. Although an Ockhamist may perhaps deal with the argument from divine foreknowledge in the same way as he deals with the semantic argument against future contingency, he cannot at first sight do the same with the argument from revelation. A revelation is, at least in certain circumstances, the utterance, or inscription, of a true assertion about the future. The apparent non-falsifiability of the claim that such an utterance took place in conjunction with the contingency of what is revealed seems to entail that revelations may turn out to be false.

Ockham had very little to say on this issue, suggesting only either that his account of future contingents applies equally well to revelations or, perhaps, that all revelation is conditional.<sup>30</sup> I will return to Mair’s treatment of the second solution later. He himself follows Holcot’s development of Ockham’s first suggestion.<sup>31</sup>

Mair notes, though without saying who was involved in the controversy, that the question of whether or not God can deceive us (*fallere*) was a controversial one. He says, however, that no wise man doubts

27. Ioannis Maioris, *Insolubilia*, f. Bi: “Secunda diffinitio propositionis insolubilis. Propositio se falsificans sive insolubilis est propositio sic se habens quod ita est in re sicut ipsa significat significatione totali et ad ita esse partialiter sive per se vel cum addito infert ipsam esse falsam.”

28. Cf. Spade 1982a.

29. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 2, f. 70ra-b: “Ad secundum dico quod latum est discrimen inter falsum significans taliter esse qualiter est vel etiam aliter esse quam est, per reflectionem: ut hec significat aliter esse quam est et de aliis falsis communibus.”

30. William of Ockham, *De predestinatione*, q. 1.8, p. 513: “... Prophetæ non dixerunt falsum, quia omnes prophetiæ de quibuscumque futuris contingentibus fuerunt conditionales, quamvis non semper exprimebatur conditio.”

31. Cf. Robert Holcot, *Quodlibet* III q. 8: “Utrum generalis resurrectio necessario sit futura”, in Holcot, *Seeing the Future Clearly*, pp. 80-112.

that God cannot be deceived,<sup>32</sup> and so some way has to be found of saving infallibility in conjunction with the contingency of revelation. The standard thought-experiment here is to investigate the possibility that is held to have been open to Peter not to deny Christ three times as Christ revealed he would. Suppose the possibility as actual in an *obligatio* of *positio* and it seems that we must concede that Christ uttered a falsehood. Interestingly, Mair seems to have a rather more dynamic notion of *positio* than Holcot in that he allows that the *positum* may be changed during the exercise and that if the new *positum* is inconsistent with the original one, then that immediately falls from its position.<sup>33</sup> In the case under investigation it thus seems that we must deny that Christ asserted that Peter would deny him three times.

This material had been worked over very thoroughly by Holcot, and Mair follows one of the approaches that he had suggested. To the further objection that Christ uttered the words and that they were uttered assertorically, he replies, in effect, that, though the fact of utterance is determinate, its assertoric character is not. In the hypothetical situation posited, the words uttered may have been false and only recited by Christ. There are many kinds of non-assertoric utterance, but all we are bound to say is that Christ never intends to deceive his listeners. Mair does not, however, go as far as Holcot, who is prepared to allow even deliberate deception to Christ and God just so long as it is not malicious.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the remainder of the question deals with various changes rung on what contemporary philosophers call “the consequence argument” for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and freedom.

32. *Op. cit.*, d. 38, q. 2, f. 70rb: “Licet an deus fallere possit sint controversie, eum tamen non posse falli a nullo sapiente ambigitur.”

33. For details of the way in which medieval logicians regimented hypothetical reasoning in *obligationes* and a discussion of the history of the theory of these devices, see Stump 1982 and Spade 1982b.

34. Holcot, *Seeing the Future Clearly*, pp. 102-3: “Alio modo potest dici quod Christus potest non implere quod promisit, et quando arguitur quod potest esse mendax, vel perius, etc., dicitur negando consequentiam. Et ratio est quia omnes tales termini consignant – saltem ex usu loquendi – quandam malitiam in genere moris, quae nullo modo Deo convenire potest. Et ideo potest ista consequentia negari ‘Deus promisit quod resurrectio erit, et resurrectio numquam erit; igitur Deus mentiebatur’. Sed conceditur quod Deus dixit falsum scienter et quod decepit homines, quia istud non videtur expresse continere malitiam mori, quod hoc dicat falsum scienter vel decipiat.”

This argument claims that the consequence of God's knowing, and having always known, that  $X$  will be is that  $X$  will be in a manner incompatible with its claimed contingency. The answer to these objections often turns on the familiar distinction between the composite and divided senses of a modal claim. One argument, however, returns to the question of the relationship of contingency to power. It is, I think, intended to go as follows:<sup>35</sup>

It is true that if God knows that Socrates is going to sin, then Socrates is going to sin;  
 so if Socrates had the power not to sin, he would have the power to bring it about that God knows that he will not sin;  
 but Socrates has no power over God's knowledge;  
 therefore Socrates has no power not to sin.

This kind of argument is familiar in modern discussions of Ockhamism as an appeal to what Hasker has called a "*Power Entailment Principle*":<sup>36</sup> if  $P$  entails  $Q$ , and  $Q$  is false, then it is in  $a$ 's power to bring about  $P$  only if it is in  $a$ 's power to bring about  $Q$ . While Mair does not accept the principle in general, he is prepared to embrace it here and the inference that it supports. He explicitly attributes to Socrates a power to affect the truth value of a claim about God:<sup>37</sup>

I deny that the antecedent is not in the power of Socrates; if Socrates never will sin, which is possible for him, then God knew from eternity the opposite <of what he now knows>, that is that Socrates is not going to sin.

So far Mair has simply been developing the modal and epistemic logic for future contingent claims invented by Ockham. In the next question he begins to address contingency as an ontological issue, and in doing so shifts his allegiance to Scotus.

35. *Op. cit.* d. 38, q. 2, f. 70va: "Octavo argumentor. Bene sequitur 'deus scit Socratem peccaturum'; ergo Socrates peccabit, ut semper dicimus. et antecedens non est in potestate Socratis; ergo nec consequens: sed proinde necessario peccabit. Quod antecedens non sit in potestate Socratis patet bifariam [et omne eternum est immutabile]. Tum primo quia ab eterno illud fuit verum et prescitur, et omne eternum est immutabile. Tum secundo quia prescientia dei est deus, et quicquid est deus necessario est."

36. Hasker 1985.

37. *Op. cit.* d. 38, q. 2, f. 70va: "Ad octavum concedo consequentiam. sed nego antecedens non esse in potestate Socratis si Socrates nunquam peccet quod est ei possibile. deus ab eterno sciuit oppositum scilicet Socratem non peccaturum."

One of issues on which Ockham most vehemently disagreed with Scotus was over the time with respect to which a contingent item is said to be contingent. For Ockham the relevant possibility is irreducibly diachronic, any claim to possibility for an agent must be supportable with an account of the power that would actualise that possibility in time. For Ockham, to claim that  $x$  is contingently  $F$  at  $t_0$  is to claim either that it was at some earlier time not  $F$  or that there is a power which can bring it about that it is not  $F$  at some later time. For Scotus, on the other hand, though there certainly may be such a power, the contingency of  $x$ 's being  $F$  at  $t_0$  can also be attributed to a 'non-evident' power at  $t_0$  for  $x$  to be other than it is at  $t_0$ . Notoriously this power is, according to Scotus, to be referred to an ordered sequence of non-temporal instants of nature associated with each instant of time.<sup>38</sup>

For his third question Mair thus asks to what period the contingency of a contingent being is to be referred.<sup>39</sup> The background to this is Scotus' famous appeal to the hypothesis of an instantaneous will to argue that the power for opposites that we attribute to such an agent must belong to it at, and with reference to, the very instant at which it is said to be contingent.

Rejecting Ockham's view that the contingency of a contingent being cannot be referred to the instant at which it is said to be contingent, Mair offers a series of arguments in support of Scotus' account of the properties of an instantaneous angel. It is not likely that these arguments would have convinced Ockham, but they do allow Mair to nicely turn one of Ockham's own moves to his own, and Scotus', advantage.

Ockham had tried to save the possibility for the instantaneous angel to merit in the instant of its production by allowing it to resolve to act in the appropriate way at that temporal instant. If the angel has the required knowledge, Ockham argues, it can instantaneously formulate, and grasp all at once, a practical syllogism, the conclusion of which is meritorious action. That is to say, the deliberation required for meritorious action can be instantaneous.<sup>40</sup>

38. See, e.g., Normore 1996.

39. *Op. cit.* d. 38, q. 3, f. 71rb: "Quæritur tertio circa hanc materiam, cum his sit sermo de contingentia, qua mensura temporum contingens est contingens: hoc est an est contingentia in ea mensura adequata qua contingens producitur. Partem negatiuam tenet Ockam: subscribit et Holkotus, et aliqui alii dicentes quod potentia non vocatur libera eo quod pro hac mensura potest non habere actum malum, sed eo quod immediate ante hanc mensuram fuit in potentia ut non esset in hac mensura."

40. William of Ockham, *Quodlibet* II, q. 6.

To the objection, then, that for Scotus' instantaneous agents there can be no contrast between morally significant actions requiring deliberation and "sudden" non-deliberate actions, Mair simply adopts Ockham's account of instantaneous deliberation. The relevant contrast, he claims, is not between a process that takes time and one that does not but rather between different epistemic states supporting reflective and unreflective action. Given perfect knowledge, reflection may be instantaneous.<sup>41</sup>

What Mair does not do in this discussion is to connect this account of the possibility of an instantaneous practical inference to the fundamental Scotistic principle that the temporally instantaneous power for opposites is to be explicated in terms of instants of nature. He firmly commits himself to this principle, however, arguing against various objections to it and in particular defending the contingency of the present against various glosses of Aristotle's principle that all that is, when it is, is necessarily.<sup>42</sup>

Mair's picture of foreknowledge and freedom thus grafts together Ockham's logic for contingency and Scotus' ontology. In the next two questions he argues at greater length that God may reveal any and all true future contingents to a creature, and did so to the soul of Christ, but that such revelation does not conflict with the contingency of the future. In passing he dismisses Ockham's suggestion that revelation cannot fail since it is conditional. To the contrary, Mair insists, God can reveal whatever he wants to in whatever way he wants to.

Mair's last two questions return to the issue of the character of God's understanding and will. Here again the theory is taken from Scotus. Something is not going to be so because God knows that it will be so but rather because something is going to be so God knows that it will be so. This dependence, however, results from a prior dependence of things upon God's will. Without introducing here the apparatus of instants of nature, Mair has the divine will choosing between alternatives indifferent to being or non-being and the divine understanding "seeing the result" of this choice. To the suggestion that such an ac-

41. *Op. cit.* d. 38, q. 3, f. 71vb: "Ad secundum nego sequelam. Pro cuius intelligentia scito quod nonunquam in manifestis intellectus repente iudicat et potest esse iudicium subitarium sufficienter regulatiuum actus. Non enim vocatur actus deliberatus nisi ob notitiam sufficientem. Plena et formalis deliberatio perfectum {an perficitur scribendum?} intellectus iudicio, cui consensus formalis in voluntate respondet volendo nolendove."

42. *De Interpretatione* 9, 19a23.

count will do away with human freedom, since all actions will be necessitated by the divine will, Mair simply refers us back to the claim that the human will is free.

The result of all of this, then, is that we have a picture of world-history as the result of an act of divine will executed outside of time, the result of a choice between complete alternatives. At the same time Mair wants to insist that human actions are free and that indeed agents have a power to change the future history of the world. This could only be by their having some power to affect God's atemporal choice of world-histories. Such very definitely was not Ockham's view. For him the possibility of alternative futures is expressed in a counterfactual without causal implications. Peter might not deny Christ three times, and if he were not to do so, then God would always have known that he was not going to.

In criticising the work of his predecessors, Luis de Molina imposes upon Ockham a theory of causal power over the past, claiming that if Peter were not to deny Christ, then God would cause the past to be such that it was never true that he would deny Christ.<sup>43</sup> The theory criticised by Molina is surely much closer to Mair's than it is to Ockham's. If there is a connection it would not be historically too surprising since Mair's main, and enduring, influence seems to have been in Spain.

## Appendix

The Prefatory Dedication from the Second Edition of John Mair's Commentary on the First Book of *Sentences*.<sup>44</sup>

John Mair of Hadington sends greetings to John Major of Eck in Swabia, his namesake and fellow theologian, a strenuous protector of the orthodox faith, and most beloved in faith and Christian charity.

Almost twenty years ago, O best of men, I published several little questions on the First Book of the Master of the *Sentences* in which I discussed, as far as I was able, many issues of concern to the liberal arts, on the intension of forms and the like, and disproved many claims.

43. See Freddoso in Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*.

44. *Ioannes Maioris Hadingtonani, scholae Parisiensis Theologi in Primum Magistri Sententiarum ... nuper repositae*, Paris, Jose Bade & Jean Petit, 1530. I am very grateful to Sten Ebbesen for help with the translation.

For this was then generally the way in which theologians wrote. But although I had then passed a good many years in the study of Aristotle, nevertheless, as I freely admit, that manner of writing pleased me little since I saw that it was neither pleasant nor agreeable to my audience. For when I lectured on the *Fourth Book of Sentences*, listeners came in great numbers to hear me. When, on the other hand, I lectured on the *First Book of Sentences* of my compatriot John Duns, or of the Englishman William of Ockham, or of Gregory of Rimini, it was remarkable how few listeners there were before I lectured on the work itself. Furthermore, twelve years ago, if my memory serves me, there befell the catholic faith a new and detestable calamity, the execrable heresy of Martin Luther and those who, setting their mouths against heaven<sup>45</sup>, took from him their cue to speak outrageously. In order to confute which, all the theological scholars of Paris bound themselves to Holy Writ, setting aside the definitions of the *Sentences*, so that the members of our Sorbonic Academy fixed their minds on matters easy for everyone to comprehend, and converted Sorbonic theses worthy of gifted minds into matter suitable for what are vulgarly called the greater ordinaries<sup>46</sup>. Seeing this, our holy Faculty, afraid lest the ingenuity of many should thus be blunted and degenerate into a dull Minerva, instructed the Bachelors (who had been initiated into sacred theology) that in their Sorbonic and, as we say, Tentative Disputations, in the manner of our predecessors they should deal with and uphold scholastic and argumentative opinions, allowing them, however, to introduce one thesis with easy corollaries and less theoretical complexity. Because of this I have accommodated my style to the time, not unmindful of the Aristotelian

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45. Ps 73.9.

46. A candidate for the Doctorate in Theology at Paris at the beginning of the sixteenth century studied theology for 15 years after gaining his Master of Arts degree. Before he was permitted to lecture on the *Sentences* – after 9 years of study – he had to engage in a disputation known as the *tentativa*. After lecturing on the *Sentences* for a year he became a *baccalarius formatus* for three years and was required to engage in three more disputations. In the first year the *magna ordinaria*, the *great ordinary*, so called because it took part in the main academic year. In the second year the *parva ordinaria*, the *small ordinary*, so called because it took place in the shorter, summer, term. Finally, in the summer of his last year, the student was required to engage in the *Sorbonica*, the most famous of all academic disputations. Having passed these tests he was awarded his licence to teach. For details see the excellent account of teaching in Paris at this time in Farge 1985: 13-27. “Greater ordinaries” is presumably a colloquial form of “great ordinary”.



dictum that “opinions often return”. The fashion of school disputations changes frequently, they move from one extreme to the other, and when one extreme has become boring to the crowd they run back to the other ignoring, as it were, the middle. Considering this point with care, I have passed briefly over some things which I formerly disputed in the *Prologue* and which have a flavour of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, and I have dealt piecemeal with a few physical questions which make clear the thing at issue. Moreover, to your excellent self, who deserves to be noted and honoured by all, I have dedicated this redone first book. Both because we share name, surname, and studies, and because you have achieved a singular noteworthiness for your name not only among your theological comrades at Paris but also among all Christians of good name. Farewell!

From our room in the College of Montaigne, September 1, 1530.<sup>47</sup>

47. Iohannes Maior Hadingtonanus

Domino Iohanni Maiori Eckio Sueuo cognomini ac contheologo, fideique orthodoxae protectori strenuo, in fide ac charitate Christiana dilectissimo. Salutem.

Abhinc annos ferme viginti virorum optime, quaestiunculas complures in primum Magistri Sententiarum emisimus, in quibus multa quae liberales concernunt artes, de formarum intensione et similia placita pro virili nostra discussimus, multaque refellimus. Hic enim fere mos scribendi tunc theologis erat. At quamquam bonam aetatis illius partem in Aristotelica doctrina transegi, tamen (quod ingenue fateor) mos ille scribendi parum mihi placuit cum viderem eum auditoribus meis nec gratum nec iucundum. Quando enim quartum sententiarum profitebar, auditores ad me numerosi confluebant: dum vero in primum Sententiarum contreranei mei Ioannis Duns, aut Anglicani Guilhelmi Ockam, aut Gregorii Arminensis, praelegerem, mira erat, antequam opus ipsum praelegerem, auscultatorum paucitas. Accessit praeterea a duodecim (si rite recordor) annis fidei catholicae nova et detestanda calamitas, Martini Luteri, et qui ab eo os ponendi in caelum temeritatis ansam acceperunt, execranda haeresis: ad quam onfutandam, omnes theologiae studiosi Luteciae ad sacras sese literas, neglectis sententiarum definitionibus, accinxerunt, ita ut nostra Academia Sorbonica obtutum mentis omnem ad materias cuilibet captu faciles fixerit, positionesque Sorbonicas ingeniosis animis dignas in materias maiorum ordinarum (ut vulgato more loquar) comutarint. Quod videns sacra nostra facultas, ac verita ne sic multorum ingenia torperent, et in crassem degenerarent Minervam, Baccallauriis (qui sunt theologicis sacris initiati) indixit, ut in Sorbonicis et tentativis (ut dicimus) disputationibus, scholastica et argutoria placita more maiorum nostrum tractarent ac sustinerent permittens tamen eis thesim unam interserere cum corollariis facillioris et minus theoriae farraginis. Quocirca stilum tempori accomodavi, non immemor illius Aristotelici dicti, saepius redeunt opiniones. Hoc est mos scholasticarum disputationum variatur crebrius: de extremo enim in extremo transeunt: et rursus dum unum extremum est multitudini taediosum in alterum quasi neglecto medio recurrunt. Quare non oscitanter perspecta nonnulla in prologo {prologum ed.} olim a me disputata,

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quae Aristotelica posteriora sapiunt, paucis percurri, et pauca physicalia quae rem de qua agitur patefaciunt carptim exaravi. Hunc autem primum librum sic repositum observandae et omnibus honorandae praestantiae tuae nuncupavi, cum propter nominis cognominisque ac studiorum inter nos communionem tunc ob singularem observantiam nominis tui, quam non solum apud commilitones tuos theologicis Parisiensis, verum apud omnes boni nominis Christianos meruisti, ob egregiam istam fidei Christianae adversos impios defensionem. Vale.

Ex conclavi nostro in collegio Montis Acuti ad Calendas Septembris 1530.

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