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FUTURE CONTINGENTS,  
OCKHAMISM (RETROACTIVISM)  
AND THOMISM (ETERNALISM)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The problem of future contingents is one of the most difficult, most multi-layered and oldest philosophical problems. In the current paper, I will discuss its theological version, arguing with the views of Fr. Prof. Marcin Tkaczyk OFMConv expressed in his excellent book *Futura Contingentia* (2015)<sup>1</sup> and in its modifying summary, “The Antinomy of Future Contingent Events” (2018). In my argument, I will consider some writings of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophers of religion concerning the topic of divine fore-knowledge.

As shown by Tkaczyk, and quite unquestionable, the titular antinomy<sup>2</sup> arises when the following assumptions are accepted:

- (1) Every past state of affairs is determined.
- (2) At least some future states of affairs are contingent.

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<sup>1</sup> Tkaczyk’s book is distinguished by a well-aimed connection of four exploratory layers: (i) presenting of rich material from the area of the history of philosophy, logic and theology; (ii) analysing the material by means of different logical calculi; (iii) formulating original theses from the borderlands of epistemology, philosophy of language, ontology (metaphysics) and the philosophy of religion (natural theology); (iv) illustrating these theses with accurate examples from sciences, humanities and literature.

<sup>2</sup> Tkaczyk treats it as „a scheme of many antinomies” with the same source—but some authors (see FISCHER 1989: 3-18) believe that we are dealing here with different antinomies (including some which are only apparent), supported by different arguments (or arguments of differing value). I pass over this problem, limiting myself, as I already noted, to the theological antinomy.

- (3) Every state of affairs can be represented at any time (in particular by an omniscient subject which has foreknowledge about future events—especially about those stemming from free action).

It is easy to notice—and confirmed by Tkaczyk in a formalized argument—that if one accepts the assumptions (1) and (3) simultaneously, one cannot accept the assumption (2). That results in an antinomy, which needs to be removed. The way to remove the antinomy proposed by Tkaczyk is based on negating the thesis (1), i.e. the thesis about the closeness of the past. Positively, such negation is connected in his argument with the acceptance of retroactive causation or a similar phenomenon.

The generally accepted name for the solutions of this type (because of their connection to some claims of William of Ockham) is *Ockhamic solutions*—or simply *Ockhamism*.<sup>3</sup> (The name *retroactivism*, as referring to essential factual factors and not just free historical associations, would perhaps be better.) One needs to remember that the version of Ockhamism (retroactivism) associated with future contingents can assume at least three forms. Let us call them strong, weak and moderate Ockhamism.

In what follows I will try to reconstruct and assess the positions mentioned above and confront them with the most promising—in my opinion—solution of the problem: the one which does not require retroactivity. At the same time, I need to note that Tkaczyk’s writings—if I understand them correctly—do not unambiguously say which version of Ockhamism is best. (The aim of his argument was rather to present a general defence of retroactivism as an efficient solution of the antinomy.) Nonetheless, on the basis of their analysis I believe that he favours moderate Ockhamism—the one which I consider to be the most interesting version.

#### STRONG OCKHAMISM (STRONG RETROACTIVISM)

Strong Ockhamism can be expressed by the following thesis:

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<sup>3</sup>Linda Zagzebski (2017) describes as Ockhamian the solution consisting of negating the principle of the necessity of the past—the principle corresponding to the assumption (1) in Tkaczyk’s terminology. Zagzebski identifies this solution with the position which I am calling “weak Ockhamism” here. Conceptual combinatorial analysis, supported (thanks to Tkaczyk) by an analysis of the notion of retroactivity, allows for the introduction of other kinds of Ockhamism. Due to the lack of space, I pass over the aspect of this problem connected to its sources and history. In Polish literature the aspect in question has been elucidated to a significant degree in the anthology of writings edited by Andrzej P. Stefańczyk (2018).

(SO) At least some past state of affairs (particularly the states of affairs which are epistemic representatives) are not determined, since they can change as a result of other states of affairs occurring (with reference to them) in the future.

In this account, divine omnipotence is the truthmaker of the thesis (SO): by an act of his will God can make other states of affairs occur than those which occurred in the past. That is especially true about divine beliefs: for example, God can make it the case at a moment  $t_3$  (or  $t_2$ ) that at a moment  $t_1$  he believed that at the moment  $t_2$  would occur a particular state of affairs (especially one stemming from free action), even though at the moment  $t_1$  (unrevised at  $t_3$ ) he denied the occurrence of such state of affairs.<sup>4</sup> In this way, through retroactive adaptation or correction, God could know at the moment  $t_1$  that the state of affairs in question would occur without determining its occurrence.

Throughout the history of philosophy and theology, strong Ockhamism was rarely if ever explored. Tkaczyk (2015: 370, 374), even though he ascribes to Ockham implicitly stating the thesis about the existence of retroactive causation, he does not consider him to hold such a strong, even magical, conception of the causation in question. (It could rather be ascribed—though not without any doubts—to Peter Damian.)<sup>5</sup> That is hardly surprising. The thesis (SO) not only is counterintuitive and *ad hoc* but also (if we want to avoid contradiction) generates a difficult problem of the existence of two pasts: the primary past (which functions until cancelled by the occurrence of retroactive causation) and secondary past (established by retroactive causation as the new past, now in force). If we allow the possibility that the second past also gets changed, the problem of two pasts becomes the problem of many pasts.

Though Tkaczyk does not accept (SO), he defends the thesis about the (logical) possibility of the occurrence of retroactive causation. At the same time, it seems that such possibility also concerns the type of such causality consistent with (SO).<sup>6</sup> However, I did not find in his texts the solution of the problem of two (or many) pasts—and without such a solution it is hard to accept the possibility of the causation in question. Because of that, it is hard

<sup>4</sup> Of course, I am assuming that the moments in question are temporally ordered in accordance with the numbering I have given.

<sup>5</sup> See PLANTINGA 1989: 187–9.

<sup>6</sup> The simplest and most intuitive explication of the notion of retroactive causation should contain the thesis (SO) or a thesis which implies it.

to repeat after Tkaczyk (2018: 28) that “retroactive causal connections [...] can be difficult to imagine, but there is nothing irrational about them”.

#### WEAK OCKHAMISM (WEAK RETROACTIVISM)

Weak Ockhamism, the view probably closest to Ockham’s intentions and most popular in analytic philosophy of religion, can be expressed by means of the following thesis:

(WO) At least some past states of affairs (especially states of affairs which are epistemic representatives) are not determined, since they are tied up with future (with reference to them) states of affairs.

The states mentioned in the thesis (WO) are nowadays called “soft facts” as opposed to “hard facts”, i.e. past states of affairs which are not tied up with states of affairs later than themselves. The tie-up in question — a (*prima facie* unnoticeable) extending or complement in (a later) time — is supposed to be a decisive factor in non-determination (or, when there is no involvement, determination) of past states of affairs.

It is true that making a strict distinction between hard and soft facts encounters serious difficulties. At the same time, it is also true that not every authentic difference needs to have a precise linguistic description. It is enough that it can be illustrated with accurate examples. In order to do that, let us compare the following two propositions:

(HF) Gabriel Narutowicz was a president of the Republic of Poland.

(SF) Gabriel Narutowicz was the only president of the Republic of Poland who bore the name of a Biblical angel.

The truthmaker of the proposition (HF) contains (apart from possible cultural conventions) only a state of affairs (or an event, or an arrangement of events) which took place in the days 9-16 December 1922.<sup>7</sup> The truthmaker of the proposition (SF), in turn, encompasses a broader state of affairs (or a broader arrangement of events) — namely the one whose occurrence can be dated to the period 9–16 December 1922 and some later time. In other words: the logical value of the proposition depends also on what happened

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<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Narutowicz was elected president on 9 December 1922, took a presidential oath on 11 December 1922, took the office of president on 14 December 1922, and was murdered on 16 December 1922. A new president was elected on 20 December 1922.

later and could have changed at that later time. (And, if we do not add the expression “so far” to the proposition, it still can change.) In that sense, the extralinguistic equivalent of the first proposition is a (past) hard fact, while the equivalent of the second proposition is a (past) soft fact.

Two things are worth noting here.

First, the thesis (WO) assumes not as much that retroactive causation occurs as that there occurs a retroactive dependency or conjunction. In the case of the soft fact represented by the proposition (SF) it is not the case that what happened after 16 December 1922 changed what happened in the days 9-16 December 1922. Rather, it is the case that the fact of being the only president of the Republic of Poland bearing the name of a Biblical angel, connected to the past presidency of Gabriel Narutowicz, is a composite fact, encompassing components from different times. Because of that, one can say that the fact in question is *not only* a past fact, or that *as a past fact* depends non-causally on future facts.

Second, a consequence of soft facts being (retroactively) tied up with the facts following them is that past soft facts (or past components of soft facts) are temporally contingent. For instance: Gabriel Narutowicz was the only president of the Republic of Poland who bore the name of a Biblical angel, but if after his death the history of the Republic of Poland saw a president with the name of “Gabriel”, “Michael” or “Raphael”, he would not possess that property. What is more, it can be assumed that the property in question is not completely “determined” until the end of the history of the Republic of Poland.

How does weak Ockhamism apply to the theological version of the problem of future contingents? The proponents of this approach treat (past) beliefs of God about future events—and God’s beliefs, because of his infallibility, constitute knowledge—as soft facts. If that is the case, acknowledging that at a moment  $t_1$  God made a true judgment that at a moment  $t_2$  would occur a particular (especially based on a free action) event, while the latter was not determined at  $t_1$ , does not lead to any antinomy. This is because the state of affairs at the moment  $t_1$  constituted by the knowledge of God about the occurrence of an event at the moment  $t_2$  was a fact tied up with that event. By the same token, that foreknowledge was somehow dependent on the event following it and, as a result, was not determined (or was contingent): if the event in question did not occur at the moment  $t_2$ , God would have simply not believed at the earlier moment  $t_1$  that it did.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Analytic philosophers, referring to a well-known paper by Plantinga (1989), talk about the counterfactual power (of human beings) with reference to the past: we have the capacity of

Is the solution described above (as suggested by Tkaczyk (2015: 374, 378, 380) an *ad hoc* solution?<sup>9</sup> I believe that it is not. Examples of soft facts include not only divine foreknowledge but also the equivalents of the propositions of the type (SF). In addition to that, the foreknowledge of future events, belonging to *any* subject (not only God), is a soft fact.

The consequences of the version of Ockhamism we are discussing, mentioned by Tkaczyk (2015: 380-381), may constitute its weakness. My Adversary illustrates one of them with the following (counter)example (while discussing the views of William Lane Craig): if God knew that Pontius Pilate would not sentence Jesus to death, he would not send Jesus to the world, so the proposition

(T) Jesus was born

would be false. However, the truthmaker of this proposition is a hard fact and thus a temporally non-contingent or determined fact, which, since around 4 BC, rules out its falsehood. As we can see, the proponent of weak Ockhamism, “calling some propositions describing the past contingent, automatically makes contingent also the propositions which certainly should not be considered determined” (TKACZYK 2015: 381).

This objection can be weakened, if we direct our attention to two points.

First, the proposition (T) is a true proposition about the hard fact in our

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choice with reference to past facts in the sense that „we have the power to do something such that, had we done it, the past could have been different” (MURRAY & REA 2008: 53; see ZAGZEBSKI 2017) — e.g. God would make another judgment than he did (rather than change his judgment). We are not dealing here with a determination, since “God’s past beliefs do not determine our present [and future — J.W.] actions, they are *explained by* our present [and future — J.W.] actions” (MURRAY & REA 2008: 53; see CRAIG 2001: 262–3). It is worth noting here that it is easy to reconcile weak Ockhamism with the intuition of truth as a correspondence: since the proposition about the future is true always and only when what it describes *will* exist (see CRAIG 2001: 250–3, esp. 251), the truthfulness of that proposition depends on future facts.

<sup>9</sup> Tkaczyk puts forward this and other objections (see below) with reference to the solution of Ockham and analytic neo-Ockhamians who make use of the notion of soft fact. Let us note two things here. First, Tkaczyk criticizes in the first place applying the notion in question to God’s existence and not, as seen here, to his beliefs. (See FISCHER 1989: 33, where the difference between “Existence Ockhamism” and “Belief Ockhamism” is highlighted.) Second, some utterances of Tkaczyk can be interpreted as another way of expressing the idea of soft fact. See e.g.: “a proposition *de contingenti futuro* is already [...] true or false, but it is only in the future that it will be invested with that present logical value” (TKACZYK 2015: 413, see 401); “God can possess foreknowledge insofar as the latter is an effect of future contingent events” (TKACZYK 2018: 35). It is only the context and, in particular, the provided examples (and the use in the above quotes of the words “invested” and “effect”), that suggests that we are dealing here with another kind of Ockhamism—especially moderate Ockhamism (see below).

world and at the definite time within the history of this world (since around 4 BC). Nonetheless, nothing prevents that proposition from having a different status in other possible worlds. The world in which the proposition (T) is understood as the proposition

(T') Jesus was born before the end of history

is certainly possible, and (T') stated between 4 BC and 2018 AC is a proposition about a soft fact whose logical value is not yet known to humankind.<sup>10</sup> (That is because the logical value of this proposition can depend on future events.) Thus, Tkaczyk's objection is accurate if we do not consider the relativization of the logical value of propositions and the softness or hardness of facts to possible worlds and to times (moments or periods) at which they exist. However, if we do perform such relativization, the objection loses its grip. The negation of the proposition (T) should be examined within the relativization which is appropriate for it, and our world certainly is not such relativization.

Second, let us assume that the possible world in which God has foreknowledge about the consistent honesty of Pilate is a world similar to ours and thus worth examining. In such a world (the world in which God knows that Pilate would not sentence Jesus to death) God—strictly speaking—would not so much not send Jesus to the world *at all* as he would not send Jesus there *at the time* when the latter could (as an adult) be judged by Pilate. What is more, in such a world God would choose *another* way which would lead to Jesus' redemptive death. Thus, in such a world the proposition (T) understood as the proposition

(T'') Jesus was born at such time and in such circumstances that, as an adult, he could be judged (sentenced to death) by Pilate<sup>11</sup>

would be a false proposition. However, the proposition (T) understood as the proposition

(T''') Jesus was born at such time and in such circumstances that, as an adult, he could be unjustly made to die by any human

would be a true proposition. In addition to that, both propositions, as referring also to what happened after the birth of Jesus, could be the propositions about soft facts at sometime.

<sup>10</sup> For the sake of simplicity I assume that all possible worlds share the same chronology.

<sup>11</sup> That proposition could be replaced with "Jesus was born before Pilate died," but the proposition (T') seems to reflect the consequence we are discussing better.

My Adversary may remark that each one of the propositions (T')-(T''') implies the proposition (T), i.e. the propositions about soft facts imply the proposition about a hard fact. However, this undesirable upshot does not occur, since the proposition (T) is in fact an ellipsis and not a complete proposition. After we precisely outline (relativize) the propositions in question it should not be the case that (non-trivial) propositions about hard facts imply (non-trivial) propositions about soft facts, or the reverse. Of course, outlining these propositions precisely requires a more complete theory of hard and soft facts and their connections to time and modalities. So far such theory has not been created, but, as Alvin Plantinga (1989: 193) writes, “we may not be able to give a criterion for being strictly about the past [being a hard fact—J.W.]; but we do have at least a rough and intuitive grasp of this notion.” That is enough for distinguishing between the hard and soft facts, which is the basis for weak Ockhamism.

I believe that there is one more difficulty with this position—a more serious one. In order to highlight it, let us consider two propositions concerning the knowledge of two subjects:

- (K1) On 8 December 1922 Stanisław Thugutt knew that on 9 December 1922 Gabriel Narutowicz would be elected the president of the Republic of Poland.
- (K2) On 8 December 1922 God knew that on 9 December 1922 Gabriel Narutowicz would be elected the president of the Republic of Poland.

Let us assume that both propositions are true. How can we know that they are? In case of the first proposition, which concerns the person who officially put Narutowicz forward as a candidate, recognizing its truthfulness comes down to checking whether on 8 December 1922 Thugutt had a justified belief about Narutowicz’s election and whether the election really took place on the next day. In case of the second sentence, however, that is not the case—since, if divine knowledge essentially differs from human knowledge, in order to make sure that it is true it is enough to get to know whether God had a particular belief on that day. But such operation assumes that the state of God’s knowledge does not depend on the events which will follow it, so it is not a soft fact. As Brian Leftow says, “God could have given before  $t$  a perfectly determinate answer if asked whether  $S$  would do  $A$  at  $t$ ”. Making this answer dependent on what will happen after  $t$  would make it non-determined before  $t$  and thus would weaken the status of divine knowledge.

As we can see, we are facing a dilemma: either God’s foreknowledge is a soft fact (dependent on the future)—hence there is no way to distinguish it



from human foreknowledge operationally — or God's foreknowledge is not a soft fact (dependent on the future), in which case it remains operationally distinguishable from human foreknowledge but the weak Ockhamian key to solve the theological version of the problem of future contingents is lost. To put it simply, acknowledging divine foreknowledge, just like human foreknowledge, to be a soft fact does not allow for distinguishing them from each other operationally.

One can ignore the problem described above by saying that the notion of distinguishing divine foreknowledge from human foreknowledge operationally is itself non-operational, or that there are other ways of distinguishing both types of knowledge from each other. Nonetheless, it is obvious that within the problem of the future contingents a weak Ockhamist thinks in the same terms about divine and human knowledge. Because of that, one can ask him: how can foreknowledge *as a soft fact* be omniscience or the knowledge of a being independent on the future? I have not so far found the answer to that question.

#### MODERATE OCKHAMISM (MODERATE RETROACTIVISM)

I believe that Marcin Tkaczyk's most original and valuable contribution to the debate about future contingents is proposing (explicitly or implicitly) a new, moderate version of Ockhamism (retroactivism). The position he proposes is stronger than the weak version in that it postulates real retroactive causation (and not just retroactive dependence). At the same time, however, it is weaker than the strong version in that the postulated retroactive causation concerns the meanings of physical or psychical events and not the events themselves.

I would formulate the main thesis of moderate Ockhamism in the following way:

(MO) The meanings of at least some past states of affairs (especially the states of affairs which are cognitive representatives) are not determined, since they can be changed as a result of an occurrence in the future (with reference to them) of other states of affairs (especially the states of affairs which are acts of investing with meaning).

Tkaczyk (2015: 395–98; 2018: 26–7) lays out three plausible illustrations of the thesis (MO)<sup>12</sup> in the area of human culture: retroactive legal norms, retroactive construction of “such cultural being as World War II” (by choosing one of a few dates of its beginning which are under consideration), a belated beginning of the academic year by the power of a performative act of the rector. In all three cases the meaning of the states of affairs which occurred earlier changes, even though the grounding states of affairs do not change. To limit ourselves to the last example, as a result of the utterance of the rector of KUL from 21 October the classes which took place at KUL in the days 1–20 October simply acquire the meaning (status) of being a part of the academic year at KUL. The classes in question do not change—the change occurs only in their meaning.

In order to retain the continuity of my considerations, I will cite one more example of a cultural change of meaning. In order to make it clear, let us transform the proposition (HF) into the proposition

(HF') Gabriel Narutowicz was the first president of the Republic of Poland.

It would be difficult—though some tried—to question the fact of Narutowicz's having been a president, but it is easy to question the fact of his having been *the first* president of the Republic of Poland (even though he was one *nominally*). That is because one can consider (for example) Józef Piłsudski's being the Chief of State to constitute factually being a president—just under a different name. On such interpretation of some events from the history of Poland in the years 1918–22 the proposition (HF') turns out to be false. Its logical value depends then on some interpretation (being invested with meaning by historians, lawyers, and politicians) and can be retroactively changed by competent persons. The only important thing is that the change in question is not arbitrary but grounded in the competences (or authorizations) and rational motivations of particular creators of culture.

To apply the thesis (MO) to theology, it is enough to ascribe to God “in the area of the physical world the power analogical to our power over cultural creations” (TKACZYK 2015: 413). This means—if such a reading of the above quote is justified—that it is enough to ascribe to God the power of retroactively investing with meaning also those past states of affairs which do not form the basis for cultural entities. On this account, God can change the

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<sup>12</sup> For the time being I omit in it the first bracketed clause, which I will discuss separately below. When it comes to the specific sense of the word “meaning”, connected to Tkaczyk's conception, I am going to illustrate it by examples.

meaning not only (or not so much) of such entities as university classes or offices held by people but also of the ones such as the movements of stars or elementary particles.

Can God also change the meaning of the past beliefs or judgments, i.e. cognitive representatives, which have been mentioned in the first bracketed clause of the thesis (MO)?

Yes. Such a change of meaning can be understood in two ways. If by the *meaning of a belief* we understand its truth value, then God can change it by changing the meaning (in Tkaczyk's sense) of the equivalent of that belief, which is not a belief. In other words, God can — also retroactively — make a judgment true by investing a given state of affairs with such meaning (in Tkaczyk's sense) that it becomes a truthmaker of that judgment. If, however, we take the *meaning of a belief* to mean its content (expressible in different possible states of mind — beliefs or judgments in psychological sense), then God can change it by transforming it so that a given state of affairs or its meaning (in Tkaczyk's sense) make that belief true. In other words: God can — also retroactively — invest his judgment with such content that it conforms to the meaning (in Tkaczyk's sense) of a given state of affairs in terms of truth.

I am not going to ponder over the question which of the readings of the element of the thesis (MO) under discussion corresponds more closely to Tkaczyk's intention. (It is important that they both allow the phenomenon which can be called retroactive epistemic or doxastic causality). I accept the second one as more moderate and closer to common linguistic conventions. Its acceptance provides us with a simple tool for solving the theological version of the problem of future contingents in an incisive way.<sup>13</sup> This allows God to make it the case at a moment  $t_3$  (or  $t_2$ ) that at a moment  $t_1$  his judgment (belief) concerning what will occur at  $t_2$  (especially in the free way) has a different meaning (content) than it initially had at  $t_1$ . Such retroactive correction of meanings — contents, and in some cases truth values — allows God to know what will occur in the future without determining such occurrences.

The difference between the solution of the type (SO) and (MO) needs to be underlined here. In the first case, God, in order to preserve the knowledge about the future without determining the latter, retroactively replaces his thoughts about the future. In the second case, God changes only the meaning

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<sup>13</sup> Especially that, as rightly noted by Tkaczyk (2015: 404–5; 2018: 29), in order to solve the antinomy it is enough to transform the thesis (1) into the thesis (1') ("Every past event which does not represent a contingent event is determined"), and thus to allow the thesis (183) ("Present or past events which represent contingent events are also contingent").

(content) of his thoughts. On the second account, one can say—to develop our anthropomorphization to an extreme form—that God could say about himself: since today, I have had something else in mind.

Seeing its numerous illustrations, the thesis (MO), as opposed to the thesis (SO), is not *ad hoc*. But is the difference between moderate and strong Ockhamism strong enough to allow for solving the problem of two (or many) pasts?

On the one hand, yes. The existence of the plurality of meanings of the past is less shocking intellectually than the existence of the plurality of pasts. At the same time, it seems that Biblical monotheists should be used to the plurality of past meanings, since the latter is essentially connected to prophetism, which “constitutes the core of the Bible’s content” (TKACZYK 2018: 17). Here is the example.

Christians interpret particular prophecies from the Old Testament (or the books of the Bible which precede Christianity) as foreshadowing the life and acts of Jesus of Nazareth as Christ. One of the best known prophecies goes as follows: “Behold, a young woman (Hebrew: *alma*, Greek: *parthenos*) shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman’u-el” (Isaiah 7:14).

Adherents and theologians of Biblical religions debate the meaning (content) of this prophecy, originating from God but conveyed by a man, wondering whether it refers to the son of the prophet Isaiah (Shear-Jashub – Isaiah 7:3) or to the son (or descendant) of the king Ahaz (especially Hezekiah – Isaiah 7:10-11 or, among other places, 2 Chronicles 28:27-30:27), or to the whole Judah or Israel (Isaiah 8:8) or to Jesus (Matthew 1:23). However, one cannot rule it out that all those meanings (contents) coexist—or that the Christian meaning is dominant over and grounded in Jewish meanings, or on only one of them. Moderate Ockhamism allows to interpret the situation as God’s having had foreknowledge about the birth of (say) Hesekiah at a certain time in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, and retroactively investing his foreknowledge with a new, more important meaning (content) at the moment of the birth of Jesus. This new sense, without the previous one being cancelled, has been received by the inspired author of the Gospel.

If such an interpretation of Biblical prophecies is philosophically acceptable and can be extended to other types of divine foreknowledge, the problem of many pasts is solved. At this point, however, we need to ask: can God invest his beliefs (revealed or not) with meanings (contents) contradicting the meanings (contents) with which he already invested them?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On the conception of the modification of meaning as an automatic change of truth value (and on the assumption of the principle of bivalence) every modification of meaning amounts to

If the answer is yes, then either God can hold a belief with contradictory content in the past (which breaks the laws of non-contradiction or makes God's belief radically ambiguous) or there can be different pasts with different contents of the belief in question (so the problem of the plurality of pasts returns). In such case, God's retroactive causality, just like in case of the account (SO), comes close to magical causality—especially that investing a belief with content contradicting with the one it already possessed implies the immediate change of its truth value.

If the answer is no, divine foreknowledge has primarily fuzzy character and God sometimes makes it more precise by means of the acts of investing it with meanings.<sup>15</sup> Given the situation, God can fore-know everything that is going to happen, since he can invest his past beliefs with any meaning (content), and not just any meaning within the bounds of the law of non-contradiction, if only that meaning is consistent with a particular state of affairs—and a meaning (content) in which a particular belief is true will always be found. Such account is radically inconsistent with semantic intuitions connected to the verb *to know*, which differentiate it from the verb *to deem* on the one hand and the verbs such as *construct* or *interpret* on the other.

By choosing the second, negative answer to our question we will save moderate Ockhamism from the objections which can be put forward against strong Ockhamism. What is more, such answer would probably allow us to sort out the difficulties encountered by weak Ockhamism. Postulating God's omnipotence in bestowing meanings—comparable with the hermeneutic power of creators or interpreters of culture—is enough to deal with the counterexamples we mentioned and to differentiate divine and human foreknowledge from each other. Nonetheless, this advantage of moderate Ockhamism is also its decisive vice, since it requires abandoning the standard notion of knowledge. Because of that, I consider moderate retroactivism an unacceptable option.

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investing with a meaning which is contradictory. However, that does not have to be the case on the conception of the modification of meaning as the modification of content, preferred here. In order to avoid such possibility within this conception, in the thesis (MO) one would have to use the word "completed" or "revalorized" rather than "changed" (in accordance with the interpretation of the Biblical text presented above).

<sup>15</sup> That consequence applies, though less distinctly, also to the first possibility.

## THOMISM (ETERNALISM)

The failure of Ockhamist solutions calls for an alternative. I believe that the most serious one stems from the intuitions of (among others) Boethius, St. Anselm of Canterbury, and St. Thomas Aquinas. (The intuitions I have in mind have probably been developed most extensively by the last one of them—hence the abbreviation “Thomism”.) According to them, “God timelessly knows that *S* does *A*” (LEFTOW 1991: 251) or, on Tkaczyk’s (2015: 217) accurate summary of Aquinas’ account, God possesses not as much foreknowledge as “eternal knowledge about the events which we take to constitute the future”.

Tkaczyk (2015: 219, 412) joins the critics of such solution, calling it “absurd” and explaining that “escaping the past to eternity is no solution” (both areas are determined). Indeed, if God’s eternity has temporal structure, the problem of the determination of the past (and of fatalism) returns (FISCHER 1989: 50–1). If, however, we are dealing here with an absolutely atemporal eternity, the situation is even worse: “propositions *de contingenti futuro* are not only necessary but eternally necessary, just like mathematical theorems” (TKACZYK 2015: 219).<sup>16</sup>

Such stern criticism of eternalism, however, does not take into consideration its presentist version. According to the latter,

“God ‘sees’ all temporal events happen at once” (Leftow 1991: 217)

in the sense that

“God [...] knows that *S* does *A* while *S* does *A* by ‘watching’ *S*” (LEFTOW 1991: 250).

As a consequence,

“in eternity, God’s knowledge is simultaneous with the free creaturely acts God knows about, and [...] is not causally [or in any other way!—J.W.] prior to them” (Leftow 1991: 251).

In other words, presentist eternalism states that God’s eternity is “eternal presence”, ontically and epistemically coexistent with every temporal object,

<sup>16</sup> This is shown more precisely by Linda Zagzebski (2017), who talks about a so-called Boethian solution, though she is more cautious in its assessment: since “the nature of the timeless realm is elusive, the intuition of the necessity of the timeless realm is probably weaker than the intuition of the necessity of the past”. Fischer (1989: 51–53) similarly states that the arguments against the atemporal version of Thomism (against the so-called “Thomism One”) are not decisive.

no matter what temporal characteristics (past, presence, future) can be ascribed to it.

Tkaczyk does not take into consideration the above account—probably because he interprets the assumption (1) in the following way:

“with reference to a state of affairs  $x$  every state of affairs earlier than  $x$  and every state of affairs simultaneous with  $x$  is determined.” (TKACZYK 2018: 8; see TKACZYK 2015: 406).

I guess that the motivation for accepting the second element of the above conjunction stems from the belief that every state of affairs simultaneous with the state of affairs  $x$  already-exists and is already-determined. We should agree with that on the condition that the states of affairs in question (simultaneous with  $x$ ) are *perfected* or occur in the kind of presence corresponding to the English present perfect tense. However, it can be the case that they are not perfected but rather are occurring or happening precisely at the time of the occurrence of  $x$ . In such case, they can be described in the English present simple or, even better, present continuous tense. I think that this second situation takes place when one person is observing another. In the course of an observation, the observer does not already-know what has-been-done by the observed person but rather acquires the knowledge about what the observed person is doing. If there is any determination present (a determination which is not having-been-determined), it is the determination of the acts of the former by the acts of the latter and not the reverse.

If we assume that God finds himself in the situation analogical to that of any observer of events simultaneous with him, the problem of future contingents does not arise, since for God there is no past or future tense—for him there is only present imperfect. Because of that, divine knowledge about what occurs in the world, which encompasses everything which is, was or will be from our viewpoint, is in every case the knowledge in present imperfect tense.<sup>17</sup>

The most serious challenge faced by presentist eternalism is the explanation of how the simultaneity (eternal presence) of God with any event in the created world can be reconciled with the fact that not all events are simulta-

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<sup>17</sup> The propositions representing God’s knowledge may be already perfected or determined, but they constitute only an imperfect approximation of what the knowledge of God really is (or express the *content* and not the *mode* of God’s knowledge). Things may work in the same way with the knowledge of a human observer. It cannot be ruled out that at the moment of observation the observer has pre-propositional non-determined (and not determining) knowledge which only later will be transformed into propositional knowledge. I will discuss an analogical problem below.

neous with each other (in the created world). According to presentist eternalism, God simultaneously knows that Narutowicz is being elected president, that he is dying, that the 96<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death takes place, etc. At the same time, we know that these events are not and were not simultaneous.

There are three types of solutions of the above problem, which can be shortly described by means of the following theses:

- (PE1) God gets to know everything at the same time, though not everything occurs at the same time.
- (PE2) God gets to know everything at the same time and everything occurs at the same time.
- (PE3) God gets to know everything at the same time and in some frame of reference (or in some aspect) everything occurs at the same time.

Each one of these accounts has its problems, but none can be described as *ad hoc* in the sense of not having an analogy in our knowledge. The situation postulated in the thesis (PE1) has an analogy in the phenomenology (or psychology) of perception, which points out that time as experienced by the perceiving subject is not necessarily identical with the time of perceived objects. Sometimes it happens that (if only because of the intensity of attention) we perceptively experience at one moment the occurrence of some events which follow each other in time. In this context, the infinite “now” of God’s cognitive act would be a liminal example of the extended “nows” of regular cognitive acts. The thesis (PE2), in turn, corresponds to B-theories of time popular in the contemporary philosophy of physics—especially the block universe theory. God is there supposed to be the only cognitive subject who has access to the whole content of the universe and does not succumb to the illusion of the flow of time.<sup>18</sup>

The most promising and currently most discussed solution (PE3) is based on the assumption taken from a relativistic physics—namely, that the notion of simultaneity is relative. If that is the case, one cannot rule out the frame of reference in which all the events in the world are simultaneous with God’s only cognitive act or all his cognitive acts simultaneous with each other. In order to get a grasp of such situation, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (1981: 439) introduced the notion of ET-simultaneity—the simulta-

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<sup>18</sup> However, the account (PE3) seem to me preferable, since it can be suspected that the thesis (PE1) implies some flaw in divine cognition, while the thesis (PE2) generates the problem of the relation between (specific) A-presence of God and B-temporality of the world.



neity occurring between what is eternal and what is temporal.<sup>19</sup> Given the difficulties implied by their definitions, Brian Leftow (1991: 227–8), in turn, prefers to talk in terms of a common (atemporal) frame of reference:

“God and all spatial objects share a frame of reference, one in which nothing changes”

and in which

“the whole span of temporal events is actually there all at once. Thus [...] all events are simultaneous”.

The reason why that is the case is that the distance between God and every spatial entity is the same and equals zero, which implies that from God’s viewpoint no local change (and no change grounded in it) occurs in the world. That does not invalidate the fact that in other (temporal) frames of reference all spatial entities are changeable and do not remain in the relation of simultaneity with each other.<sup>20</sup>

The conceptions I mentioned became the object of a detailed and technical criticism and debate.<sup>21</sup> I will not go into the details of it, since I believe

<sup>19</sup> According to the definition of ET-simultaneity, (i) its correlates are: any eternal being and any temporal being; (ii) the unique eternal reference frame includes both: the first one as eternally present and the second one as observed as eternally present; (iii) any temporal reference frame also includes both: the second one as temporally present and the first one as observed as eternally present. As a result, “an eternal entity’s mode of existence is such that its whole life is ET-simultaneous with each and every temporal entity or event, and so Nixon’s death, like every other event involving Nixon, is really ET-simultaneous with the life of an eternal entity.” (STUMP & KRETZMANN 1981: 443–4; see 453–4).

<sup>20</sup> When Leftow develops his theory of time and eternity, he assumes that God exists in eternity while other beings exist both in time and in eternity. At the same time, eternity (supertemporality) is here, in a way, an additional (and distinguished or invariant) dimension or (hyper)coordinate, shared by God with every moment in time (see LEFTOW 1991: 213–6). Leftow draws mainly from the intuitions of Anselm, which he tries to defend by transforming speculatively some ideas of (the philosophy of) relativistic physics.

<sup>21</sup> When it comes to the criticism and improvements on the definition of ET-simultaneity, see CRAIG 2001: 89–92 and LEFTOW 1991: 164–82. The critics are joined by Marek Piwowarczyk (2012: 301–6), who compares the conception of the absolutely extended presence (which he considers to be self-contradictory) with the analogical conceptions from the ontology of Roman Ingarden. Note that the thesis (PE3) does not have to make use of the metaphor of the extension of presence. The conception of Leftow, in turn, is criticized by Craig (2001: 92–7), who ascribes to the Leftow’s Zero Thesis (“there is the distance-relation between God and any spatial entity, and the distance between them is zero”) a category mistake, even though he does not analyze Leftow’s arguments for preferring that thesis over its negative counterpart (“it is not the case that there is the distance-relation between God and any spatial entity”). Leftow’s book (1991) constitutes a detailed defence of eternalism against almost all known objections. However, that

that even if the objections which have been put forward are deserved and require making corrections within the discussed conceptions, they do not undermine (PE3)'s being generally a metaphysically acceptable option. If that is the case, it cannot be dismissed as "absurd". It seems that the idea of the relative simultaneity of the divine cognitive act with all events in the world is coherent and consistent with theological intuitions. Among the latter, the crucial one is the image of God as the omnipresent, perfect observer, which encompasses everything—every object or event, no matter their temporal and spatial characteristics (but with the knowledge of spatial and temporal relations occurring between them)—with one "look".<sup>22</sup> Thus, if there are no essential obstacles preventing us from accepting this idea—which, as I already noted, allows for invalidating the problem of future contingents as not arising in the context of it—then it should be accepted by us.

In order to make sure that there *really* are no essential obstacles preventing us from accepting presentist eternalism (Thomism) when it comes to future contingents, I will consider one more difficulty with it—more than just a technical detail.

The difficulty in question is based on the argument of Peter Van Inwagen (2008: 218–20) against human freedom's being consistent with the omniscience of the atemporal God. Even though Van Inwagen does not distinguish here between different conceptions of atemporality, it seems that his argument concerns also the thesis (PE3). According to the argument in question, the atemporal (which here means existing in one presence, relatively simultaneous with every event in the history of the world) God could create at any moment of history a "Freedom-denying Prophetic Object" (2008: 219), i.e. an oral or written prophecy made infallible by the power of God. However, such a prophecy, existing (within a particular temporal frame of reference) at a moment  $t_1$ , would determine a human action existing (within the same frame of reference) at a later moment  $t_2$ . In such a situation—

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impressive defence shows that developing a simple idea of eternalism requires complex analytic procedures.

<sup>22</sup> The bracketed clause is especially important in the context of the debate on whether God can know the judgments naturally expressible only by means of occasional expressions (see WIERENGA 2008: 135–7; LEFTOW 1991: 313–48). One of the solutions of that problem is assuming that when I state "I am here," (i) God knows that Jacek Wojtysiak is in the Department of Theory of Knowledge at KUL on 31 August 2018 at noon (and knows it with more precision than expressed in this proposition); (ii) God knows that Jacek Wojtysiak experiences himself as coexistent with the particular time and place; (iii) God is cognitively coexistent with the abovementioned person, time and place.

without denying that divine foreknowledge itself is an atemporal or present knowledge—we would return to the initial antinomy: such knowledge could make it possible for an irrevocable judgment determining the future to exist in the world.

Let us notice, following Van Inwagen, that the answer to the above objection referring to the small amount of divine prophecies about the world does not solve the problem. Divine prophecies, like every miracle, indeed occur in the world quite rarely and have a definite goal (which is why they can, as an exception, interfere with the natural course of events and maybe even with human freedom). Nonetheless, the sole *possibility* of their occurrence means that the nature of God's knowledge is such that it can be represented in the world as foreknowledge which rules freedom out. Because of that, the knowledge in question somehow implies the foreknowledge which gives birth to the antinomy.

I believe that the above objection can be weakened by underlining the *difference* between the nature of God's knowledge in the present tense and its representation in the world in the future tense. In the divine frame of reference, God knows everything in the present imperfect tense, and every element of that "everything" is simultaneous with him. As I already noted, within this frame of reference the problem of future contingents does not arise at all. It arises, however, in any temporal frame of reference in which there is a representation of a fragment of divine knowledge, which in this frame has to be treated as the knowledge about the future. God's omnipotence allows him to change perspectives—i.e. to transfer his knowledge from the divine frame of reference to any temporal frame. However, in these two cases the knowledge is not *the same*. In the first case, it is the knowledge of God *proper*; in the second case, it is *just* a representation of this knowledge from the human viewpoint. It is true that from such viewpoint the knowledge in question appears to be a determining foreknowledge, but that does not concern God's proper knowledge. Human beings are simply unable to represent God's knowledge in any other way (than as foreknowledge)—but that does not mean that God's knowledge is foreknowledge. If that is the case, then—to develop the example of Van Inwagen—even if we were to gain the access to the library created by God before the anthropogenesis and containing the biographies of all human beings, the problem of future contingents would arise for us and not for God. The problem in question, though of much practical importance, would be only apparent theoretically, the false impression stemming from the temporal representation of what is eternally

present. Such miraculous change of perspectives just has to result in a kind of illusion on the human side.<sup>23</sup>

I suppose that the rebuttal of Van Inwagen's argument which I have presented may seem too costly to some readers—but, to paraphrase the words of Tkaczyk, there is nothing irrational about it. In addition to that, it is hard to say that other solutions of the problem of future contingents are less costly or more polished. If that is the case, I can see no serious obstacle preventing us from treating seriously the position I have just discussed.

### CONCLUSIONS

How does presentist (and possibly relativist) eternalism relate to the abovementioned varieties of retroactivism in terms of intellectual advantages and disadvantages?

Let us remember that the positions in questions were (or were not) able to deal with the following objections:

- (i) being *ad hoc*;
- (ii) generating the problem of two (or many) pasts;
- (iii) being subject to counterexamples;
- (iv) not differentiating between divine and human knowledge;
- (v) modifying the notion of knowledge.

In connection to that, let us note that:

(i) As has been shown above, presentist eternalism is not an *ad hoc* solution, and the thesis (PE3) finds a good analogy in contemporary physics. When it comes to the ability to deal with the objection of being *ad hoc*, conceptions (WO), (MO) and (PE3) are in a similar and quite good situation.

(ii) For a proponent of the thesis (PE3), as opposed to a proponent of (SO), the problem of two (or many) pasts does not arise. It is true that it is replaced with the problem of the plurality and relativity of the frames of reference (along with its other relativistic upshots). But, if that is the cost, it needs to be born also in other disciplines—especially physics. In addition to

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<sup>23</sup> As an analogy to the previous footnote, we can add that when a prophet foretells the future, God (i) knows the prophet's foretelling eternally-now; (ii) he knows the foretold future eternally-now; (iii) he knows the prophet's experiences as happening in his "now" and referring to his future eternally-now (or understands the temporal relations in the prophet's frame of reference eternally-now); (iv) he is coexistent with the time of foretelling and the time of the foretold future.

that, let us note that the proponent of (WO) and the conception of soft facts also has to allow relativization — namely, the relativization of truth values in relation to temporal perspectives. Similarly the proponent of (MO) — insofar as he avoids the problem of many pasts, he has to accept the relativization of the validity or hierarchy of meanings in relation to interpreting subjects and the time of interpretation.

(iii) The counterexample I have discussed earlier — that of the just Pilate — which could perhaps undermine the consistency of the conception of soft facts, does not undermine the consistency of the conception (PE3). At the same time, the counterexample leads to the question how does God, being the Providence, uses his omniscience in his actions. That question, however, is a puzzle faced by almost all theological conceptions.

(iv) Presentist eternalism provides us with a clear operational criterion of distinction between divine and human knowledge: divine knowledge, as opposed to human knowledge, is in every case the knowledge in present imperfect tense. In that respect, the account (PE3) has advantage over (WO).<sup>24</sup>

(v) Presentist eternalism, based on the analogy of observer, does not modify the notion of knowledge in any essential way. In that respect, the account (PE3) has advantage over (MO).

As we can see, in light of the objections (i)–(iii) all the conceptions we have discussed — with the exception of (SO), which does not come out very well, are in a similar position. At the same time, presentist eternalism deals better with the remaining objections, distancing weak retroactivism first and moderate retroactivism after it. Because of that, while discussing the problem of future contingents I am inclined — as opposed to Marcin Tkaczyk — to prefer the eternalist account to the retroactivist one. To put it shortly, I am inclined to prefer the intuitions of Aquinas (and his predecessors) to those of Ockham.

However, I need to add some restrictions to the above conclusion.

First, philosophical analysis is not just a system of cognitive acts but also, to paraphrase my Adversary, of the acts of conditionally investing with meaning. In other words, the outcome of an analysis depends, among other factors, on the

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<sup>24</sup> Both accounts face the problem of the (inconsistent with the notion of God) dependence of God's knowledge on external objects: present (PE3) or future (WO) ones. Leftow (1991: 255–266) tries to cancel the first kind of dependence by introducing to his theory the elements of Molinism and the conception of duplicates as well as the notion of “an absolutely perfect comprehension of free agents' natures and circumstances”, imminent to God. Even if Leftow's attempt is unsuccessful, the notion (PE3) still has advantage over (WO) in that it allows for distinguishing between divine and human knowledge operationally.

assumptions, intuitions, criteria, omissions etc. which have been decided upon. Because of that, my conclusion involves a declarative factor.

Second, if we introduced other criteria to our comparison, its outcome could be different. In particular, if we were concerned—as is the case in Tkaczyk’s writings—with a general solution of the problem of future contingents (and not just its theological version), presentist eternalism would not be the optimal solution, since maintaining it would require making questionable assumptions.<sup>25</sup> In such situation, I would prefer weak Ockhamism as universal (referring to both human and divine foreknowledge) and economical (doing without ascribing to any subject such abilities as changing past states of affairs or their meanings, or getting to know everything at the same time).

Third, as great theologians have taught us, what we do not know about God surpasses everything we know about him. The contentions between natural theologians do not concern the nature of God—something inaccessible to us—but the model of God which is its best approximation. Every one of such models has its limitations and is unavoidably tied up with the human cognitive perspective. What is important is that such models respect the standards of rationality and fit in the area of universal philosophical problems. The proposal of Fr. Prof. Marcin Tkaczyk is a perfect example of the set of ideas fulfilling this requirement in an inspirational way.

*Translated by Sylwia Wilczewska*

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<sup>25</sup> One would have to assume either that for any true human belief about the future there is a temporal frame of reference in which it is simultaneous with its truthmaker or that all true propositions or judgments in the logical sense (as meanings or contents of human beliefs) exist in the eternal “now”.

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## FUTURE CONTINGENTS, OCKHAMISM (RETROACTIVISM) AND THOMISM (ETERNALISM)

### Summary

In the current paper, I enter into debate with Marcin Tkaczyk and the chosen Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophers of religion to discuss the theological version of the problem of future contingents. I take into consideration some varieties of Ockhamism (retroactivism)—the position denying the temporal necessity (non-determination) of all past events and allowing some form of retroactivity. Strong Ockhamism postulates real retroactive causation, moderate Ockhamism limits it to the meanings of physical and psychical events, and weak Ockhamism replaces the notion of retroactive causation with that of retroactive dependence. I compare different forms of retroactivism with eternalism (of Boethius, St. Anselm of Canterbury, and St. Thomas Aquinas) to show that the latter has significant advantage. At the same time, I point out that eternalism in its presentist and relativist version (proposed by Brian Leftow) avoids the objections put forward against it, and that, within such eternalism, the problem of future contingents does not arise.

## FUTURA CONTINGENTIA, OCKHAMIZM (RETROAKTYWIZM) I TOMIZM (ETERNALIZM)

### Streszczenie

W niniejszym tekście, dyskutując z Marcinem Tkaczykiem oraz wybranymi anglosaskimi analitycznymi filozofami religii, rozpatruję teologiczną wersję problemu *futura contingentia*. Biorę pod uwagę kilka odmian ockhamizmu (retroaktywizmu) — stanowiska negującego temporalną konieczność (zdeterminowanie) wszystkich zdarzeń przeszłych oraz dopuszczającego jakąś postać działania wstecznego. Ockhamizm mocny postuluje realną przyczynowość retroaktywną, ockhamizm umiarkowany ogranicza ją do sensów zdarzeń fizycznych i psychicznych, a ockhamizm słaby zastępuje pojęcie przyczynowości retroaktywnej pojęciem wstecznej zależności. Porównując różne odmiany retroaktywizmu z eternalizmem (Boecjusza, św. Anzelm z Canterbury i św. Tomasza z Akwinu), wykazuję przewagę tego drugiego. Zaznaczam przy tym, że eternalizm

w (zaproponowanej m.in. przez B. Leftowa) wersji prezentystycznej i relatywistycznej unika stawianych mu zarzutów, a w jego kontekście problem *futura contingentia* w ogóle nie powstaje.

**Key words:** future contingents; Ockhamism; eternalism; retroactive causation; soft fact; divine foreknowledge.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *futura contingentia*; ockhamizm; eternalizm; retroaktywna przyczynowość; miękki fakt; Boska przewidzina.

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