

OCKHAM'S CONCEPTUALISM: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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IN A VERY DETAILED CRITIQUE of various forms of realism regarding the problem of universals, William of Ockham concluded that universals in no way exist outside the mind. With incisive logic, Ockham argued himself out of thinking that natures or qualities can be common between any two things. The most that one can say is that in reality all things are utterly individual, yet can still be similar in spite of not actually having anything in common. The universal concept, by which one is said of many, does exist, but only subjectively as formulated in the mind from an indistinct awareness of particulars. Ockham's position became quite popular and ushered in a new era of thought, the *via moderna*, overturning the established scholastic wisdom of the *via antiqua*. As the older scholastics were universal realists of some sort or other in holding that common natures existed in reality, this philosophy fell by the wayside under Ockham's influence.

However one may question just how successful Ockham's reasoning is. At times the philosophical disposition requires fortitude in the midst of multitudinous detail and an edginess with intricacy on these occasions will incline one to err. With a razor in hand and perhaps a note of impatience, Ockham tended towards oversimplification in matters philosophically intricate. It is, after all, quite counterintuitive to say that two things cannot really be the same kind, but that "kinds" are only ways of thinking. Common sense tells most of us that, two apples for instance, although distinct in number, are nevertheless the same kind of thing. So intuitively, at least, there is some commonality that seems to transcend the individual and this seems to be a commonality that is not merely a product of one's own mind. Ought we to abandon such common sense in light of Ockham's reasoning?

I do not think that we should and in this essay I want to shepherd a surplus of texts to demonstrate that the problematic results stemming from Ockham's radically individualistic ontology warrant its rejection. As the most extensive treatment of Ockham on universals is in his *Ordinatio* d. 2 qq. 4-8, I will first summarize Ockham's position principally from this text (albeit with supplementation from others), and then critically analyze it. In the end, I hope to show that Ockham's conceptualism¹ is incorrigibly bound up in epistemological and ontological quandaries, and ironically involves a complexity that is immensely greater than the very realism over which it claims the advantage of simplicity. Given just this last difficulty alone, *ceteris paribus*, makes realism the preferable option, while, of course, the success of any additional critiques renders conceptualism more and more implausible.

¹ Strictly speaking Ockham is a *conceptualist* in that he thinks that the mind does have an awareness of universal concepts. The *nominalist* position holds that the mind does not have an awareness of universal concepts, yet both nominalists and conceptualists agree that nothing common exists outside the mind. Hence ontologically speaking, nominalism and conceptualism are the same and the only difference between them is epistemological.

Ockham's Critique of Universal Realism

The trail of Ockham's critique in the *Ordinatio* moves from positions that attribute the most reality to universals to the least. The critique of the more platonic realism is important, for as we will see, Ockham's *modus operandi* will first be to refute the more extreme platonic forms of realism and then reduce all claims of moderate realism to either self inconsistency or to this already refuted platonic position. Walter Burley's opinion was that universals existed in reality really distinct from individuals and that by existing in individuals they were in no way diversified. Ockham finds this impossible and offers several arguments against this theory. We restrict ourselves to summarizing his main points here:

No Single Substance can be Many Argument:

First, nothing one in number and not multiplied can be in several singulars, and a universal such as this theory postulates would have to be just that, viz., one, not many, and not multiplied, which is impossible.² Even if this theory allowed for the universal to be multiplied in individuals, this would just mean each instance is only an individual and thus not a single one of them would be universal either. Everything is either one or many, it cannot be both, and whichever one chooses for the universal establishes Ockham's point.³ In order for something to exist outside the mind, a substance must be an individual, and if that, then not universal:

No universal is a substance that is single and numerically one. For if that were supposed, it would follow that Socrates is a universal, since there is no stronger reason for one singular substance to be a universal than for another; therefore no singular substance is a universal, but *every substance is numerically one and singular*. For everything is one thing and not many, or it is many things...⁴

The Divine Sustaining Argument:

Secondly, if the form of "humanity" were somehow prior to individual men, it could by divine power, exist by itself. Ockham thinks it is clear that whatever is prior to something else can exist without that something else. But the universal according to Burley's theory is prior, therefore the universal should be able to exist without the singular and in that case, God would be able to make a universal nature just exist by itself. But of course, it is absurd to think something like "human nature" could exist by itself, and so this theory cannot be true.⁵

The Creation/Annihilation Argument:

Thirdly, every singular thing should be able to be newly created regardless of how many other things of the same species there are. But creation is absolutely from nothing, and so

² *Ord.* d.2 q. 4; available in Paul Vincent Spade's, *Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994) pp. 119-20. Subsequent English translations will be from this text.

³ "Therefore, a universal thing is either numerically one thing or numerically many things. Whichever alternative is given, the point is established." (Ibid, p. 122)

⁴ *Summa Totius Logicae* I, c. XIV – XVI, translation from *Ockham: Philosophical Writings* tr. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett 1990) p. 35 emphasis added

⁵ *Ord.* d.2 q. 4; Spade 124, cf., *Summa Totius Logicae* XIV; Boehner pp.35-6. Marilyn Adams notes though that it's not clear that the some realists would not find this more unusual rather than impossible. (Marilyn McCord Adams, "Universals in the Early Fourteenth Century" in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 424)

if something of the newly created thing preexisted it, the creation of this new being could not be from nothing. The reverse is true for annihilation, and so if universal natures existed in reality prior to individuals, Ockham thinks God could not create or annihilate anything:

If that opinion were true [universals existing outside the soul] no individual could be created, but something of the individual would pre-exist; for it would not get its entire being from nothing, if the universal in it has existed before in another individual. For the same reason it would follow that God could not annihilate one individual of a substance, if he did not destroy other individuals. For if He annihilated one individual, He would destroy the whole of the essence of the individual, and consequently he would destroy the that universal which is in it and in others; consequently, the other individuals do not remain, since they cannot remain without a part of themselves, such as the universal is held to be.⁶

The Contrary Properties Argument

Every substance is susceptible of contraries, thus if there is some substance that is a universal, it too is susceptible of contraries. But no universal is susceptible of contraries, e.g., the universal “whiteness” is not able to become black. Nor can the same substance be in different places at once,⁷ nor can the same substance have contrary properties at the same time. For example, if Christ took on a common “human nature” then Ockham says an absurdity results:

Furthermore, it follows that something of the essence of Christ would be miserable and damned; since that common nature which really exists in Christ, really exists in Judas also and is damned. Therefore, something is both in Christ and in one who is damned, namely in Judas. That, however, is absurd.⁸

Supposition

Before we go further, it is useful to grasp what Ockham means by *supposition* (that is, the substitution value of a term). Ockham holds the supposition can be in one of three ways; material, simple, and personal. Take the term ‘man’ for instance. In the proposition, “‘Man’ is a monosyllabic word” the term there is used with material supposition because there the word ‘man’ stands and supposits for itself. In the proposition, “man is a species” the word ‘man’ supposits simply for something common and in the mind only. Personal supposition is about individuals and only individuals, “Man runs” supposits personally for “the men themselves, not for the word, for the word cannot run”.⁹ So material supposition is when the term stands for itself, simple supposition supposits for something common in the mind, and personal supposition stands for and signifies the things themselves. So if Ockham says, “Every man is rational” the subject there is just referring

⁶ Boehner, p. 36 (*Summa Totius Logicae*) See Spade, p. 124 for the same argument in the *Ordinatio*

⁷ *Ord.* d.2 q. 4; Spade 128. This is quite a significant admission, as we will later see, for contemporary philosophers have termed this the “axiom of localization”. Nothing can be in two or more places at once. For the realist, this axiom only applies to particulars; universal natures are repeatable entities that are capable of multiple instantiation, i.e., the same color “white” can be in snow, a picket fence, and a piece of paper all at the same time.

⁸ Boehner, p. 36. It is not clear why the relevant proposition could not be expressed reduplicatively, e.g., “human nature, *qua* Judas, is damned” and “human nature, *qua* Peter, is blessed.

⁹ *Ord.* d.2 q. 4 (Spade, 137)

to each and every individual man, not a common nature. If “man is a rational animal,” supposit for anything other than an individual man, the proposition would be false.¹⁰ By the same token, “Every color is visible” is not true except for singular colors, because “color” is not a real thing outside the soul.¹¹ Ockham thinks an enumeration of singulars is sufficient to verify universal propositions and thus making common natures superfluous. In “every man is risible” Ockham says, “it suffices for the truth of this proposition precisely that ‘risible’ is truly predicable of each particular man. It is not required that it be predicated of any universal thing.”¹² This point regarding personal supposition is important, for this is how Ockham thinks his universal terms can acquire a meaning sufficient to constitute science:

For it is irrelevant to “real” science whether the terms of the known proposition are things outside the soul or are only in the soul, provided they stand and supposit for the external things themselves. Hence, one does not have to posit any such universal things really distinct from singular things to account for real science.¹³

Arguments Against Moderate or In Re Realism

Having shown, successfully to his mind, that there are no universal natures existing in reality distinct from individuals, questions 5-7 address the various possibilities of a common nature being “in a thing” as multiplied or individuated. Ockham does not think that such a common nature can, in any way, be particularized. Distinction 2, q. 5 of the *Ordinatio* deals with the question of the universal being a true thing outside the soul distinct from the individual, really in it, and really multiplied. Some have attributed this position to Scotus, but regardless if this be Scotus’ true position, Ockham does not think this position holds anyway and argues vigorously against any common element like “humanity” multiplied in both Socrates and Plato. The argument runs like this; if humanity is a specific species, then it will be either (1) Socrates’ and Plato’s humanity or (2) something over and above these individuals. If a realist says (1), then there are two most specific species, “Socrates’ humanity” and “Plato’s humanity”, not a common humanity, which would mean Socrates and Plato are of different species. If a realist claims (2) and if this nature is supposed to be something outside the soul, then all of the arguments against natures existing as distinct from singulars above from question 4 come back into play.¹⁴ As far as individuation goes, the nature has to be an essential part of the individual and when it comes to singularity and universality, it’s either all or nothing. Ockham does not think a universal can be a part of a particular, because one part cannot

¹⁰ Which as we will see, is an entirely different position from that of Aquinas. Aquinas thinks “man is rational” is *necessarily* true, and *hence is even true if there are no individual men* (see n. 36 below).

¹¹ *Ibid*, Spade p. 141

¹² *Ibid*, Spade, p. 142

¹³ *Ibid*, Spade p. 138 and again “Properly speaking, the science of nature is about mental contents which are common to such things, and which stand precisely for such things in many propositions... This is what the Philosopher means when he says that knowledge is not about singular things, but about universals which stand for the individual things themselves.” (*Expositio super viii libros Physicorum*, Boehner p. 11)

¹⁴ *Ord.* d. 2 q. 5; Spade, pp. 150-1. As we will see, this argument does not affect Aquinas’ position, who can reject Ockham’s false disjunctive premise and instead hold both disjuncts (they are not mutually exclusive when the nature is understood as indifferent to individual and universal modes of existence). The *ante rem* nature or form is the divine idea, which is instantiated and multiplied by matter and thus is in both Socrates and Plato.

be more singular than another part, which means either the whole is completely singular or none of it is:

There is no universal nature really distinct from a contracting difference. Such a nature could not be posited there unless it were an essential part of the individual itself. *But there is always a relation between a whole and a part such that, if the whole is singular and not common, then analogously each part in the same way is singular.*¹⁵

In question 6, Ockham addresses Scotus' position, viz., the possibility of something universal and univocal being really outside the soul, distinct from the individual, but not by a real distinction. Here the universal is only incompletely universal in the thing and completely universal in the intellect. So in addition to a numerical unity that is the individual, there is also a real formal unity that is less than numerical, making the nature formally distinct from the individual. In this view, individuals could be numerically many and still formally the same. Ockham denies that such a formal unity exists outside the mind.¹⁶ If the nature is truly "particularized" and one, it cannot also be common. If the humanity in Socrates is actually Socrates' denominatively, that is, the humanity is actually particular, it cannot be the case that it is also actually the same as Plato's humanity. To say a nature is actually particular and actually universal is a contradiction. Scotus can't have it both ways.¹⁷

We see here the linchpin of Ockham's entire assault on universals outside the mind. *The individual cannot be common.* It is wholly impossible, under pain of contradiction, that one particular thing be common, for that is to be particular and not-particular. Ockham says propositions such as these are evident, "No thing is really common to several things" and that "no really singular thing is common to several things," so Ockham holds there can be no such thing as a common but individuated human nature:

Likewise, if some thing conveyed by the term 'man' is common to several, either it will be the nature in Socrates, or the nature in Plato, or some third nature other than these. It is not Socrates' nature, because that by which Socrates is really singular cannot be in Plato. Neither is it Plato's nature, for the same reason. Neither is it some third nature, because there is no such nature outside the mind.¹⁸

The human nature in Socrates is not Plato's human nature nor is it some third common human nature because it is impossible that such a common nature exists. There is nothing over and above "Socrates' humanity" and "Plato's humanity" and these two distinct natures cannot be the same since, "nature cannot without contradiction allow in itself a

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Spade p. 152. Emphasis added

¹⁶ *Ordinatio* I, d.2, q.6

¹⁷ Ockham also goes after Scotus' formal distinction itself. If Scotus' individuating principle is proper to the individual, and the common nature is not, then it follows that the nature cannot be the individual difference at all and therefore the nonidentity is real not formal. Or put differently "The nature necessarily is communicable; the contracting difference necessarily is not communicable; therefore, the contracting difference is not the nature." (*Ibid*, Spade p. 157) We must be talking about two really distinct things and there is no such thing as a formal distinction. Either they are really distinct or they are the same and no middle ground is possible. That the doctrine of the Trinity seems to hold a less than numerical distinction does not bother Ockham, for "that unique peculiarity should not be maintained except where the authority of Holy Scripture compels us to do so." (*Ibid*, p. 158)

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Spade p. 160

numerical multitude”¹⁹ Since the notion of extramental commonality involves a contradiction, we are not surprised to read Ockham saying that not even God can make something outside the mind common:

What cannot be communicated to several, *even by divine power*, is not really common. But (pointing to *anything* whatever) that thing cannot be communicated to several, even by divine power, because it is really singular. Therefore, *no thing is really and positively common.*²⁰

Since nothing is in fact common outside the mind, Ockham denies the need or existence of any principle of individuation. What is not common to begin with doesn't need to be individualized, so Ockham does not need an additional principle of signate matter or a “haecceitas” to account for why things are individual. On the contrary, for Ockham individuals are individual *de se haec*, not by some other principle. Each individual is primarily diverse (*primo diversa*):

Because nothing is one and the same in both places, but whatever is in one simply and absolutely of itself is not something which is in another; and with that manner I submit that all individuals are themselves primarily diverse of themselves.²¹

and again:

From these arguments it follows that each thing outside the soul is singular by itself, so that by itself, without anything added, is what it is immediately denominated by the notion of singularity. Neither are any items whatever possible on the part of reality, distinct in any way at all, one if which is more indifferent than another, or one of which is more numerically one than another...*Hence each thing outside the soul will be by itself a this. One does not have to look for a cause of individuation* (except perhaps the extrinsic and intrinsic causes, when the individual is composite). Rather one has to look more a cause why it is possible for something to be common and universal.²²

The different “humanities” of Plato and Socrates are different by and through themselves and this is an essential distinction. “The humanity in Socrates and the humanity in Plato are really distinguished. Therefore, each of them really is numerically one. Consequently neither is common... the humanity in Socrates is essentially distinguished from the humanity in Plato.”²³ So we should make no mistake about the radical claim Ockham is making here. The humanity of one person is different from the humanity of another by itself and not because of some external difference, “Therefore if these humanities – say Socrates’ and Plato’s – are really distinguished they are really distinguished by their own

¹⁹ *Ord.* d.2 q.6 (Spade, p. 160)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Spade pp. 160-1 emphasis added

²¹ [Q]uia nihil est unum et idem in utroque, sed quidquid est in uno simpliciter et absolute de se non est aliquid quod est in alio; et isto modo concedo quod omnia individua sunt se ipsis primo diversa (*Ord.* 1.2.6) Note this is the “axiom of localization” again. Compare with Aquinas’ position that whiteness can be multiply instantiated.

²² *Ordinatio* I d.2, q.6; Spade 172 emphasis added

²³ *Ord.* d.2 q.6; Spade p. 163. This is reiterated in the *Summa Totius Logicae* I where Ockham says “...the humanity of Plato is one thing and the humanity of Socrates another; therefore they are distinguished of themselves; therefore not by having differences added to them.” (Boehner, p. 38) and “Hence we must not imagine that in Socrates we have human nature of humanity distinct in any way from Socrates, to which is added an individual difference that ‘contracts’ this nature.” (*Ibid.*, p. 40)

formal notions and by nothing added on. Consequently each of these of itself, without anything added, is really distinguished from the other.”²⁴ The same of course could be said for the nature of colors or anything else. A single color then is not common between two things and made individual thorough something else but is *single by itself and individuals are incommunicable*. And this goes for anything outside the soul, Ockham is emphatic in holding that both “Everything outside the soul is really singular and numerically one” and “Every singular thing is singular by itself”.²⁵ Hence each thing outside the soul will be *by itself* a “this”:

“Therefore, just as what is singular cannot become universal or common through anything added to it, so what is common cannot become singular through anything added to it. Therefore, whatever is singular is not singular through anything added to it, but by itself.”²⁶

But no sooner do we see the picture Ockham paints for us here than we realize this is an ontology of extreme utter discreteness. No two things are really common or share the same property *in any way shape or form outside the mind*. Yet in spite of all of this, Ockham still holds that things can be “similar” and have a “resemblance”, and so it is not a stretch to say that Ockham literally thinks things can have nothing in common yet still be similar. Real similarity does not entail the existence of something common. Things are similar in themselves and not by means of some third thing.²⁷ This similarity relation is not some third entity over and above the individuals nor do two things agree *in* something else but only by themselves:

There is greater agreement between Socrates and Plato than there is between Socrates and an ass, *but not on account of anything in any way distinct from them*. Instead they agree more by themselves.²⁸

Finally in question 7 Ockham addresses the issue of whether there is anything univocally universal and common *in any way at all* outside the soul? And here again Ockham rejects every notion of some common thing being united with an individuating principle:

I ask: How are the nature and the designation [the individuating principle] of the nature distinguished? If they are not distinguished at all, then the nature is no more universal than the designated nature is. If they are distinguished somehow, then it will be either according to reality or according to reason. If the former [in reality] that was disproven earlier [qq. 4-6]...²⁹

Ockham’s concluding remarks on the investigation are quite telling:

Therefore, I say otherwise to the question: *No thing outside the soul is universal, either through itself or through anything real or rational added on, no matter how it is considered or understood. Thus it is just as great an impossibility that some thing outside*

²⁴ *Ord.* d.2 q.6; Spade p. 165

²⁵ *Ord.* d.2 q.6 (Spade p. 171)

²⁶ *Ord.* d.2 q.6 (Spade p. 171)

²⁷ As summarized by Adams, “Ockham joins [Henry of] Harclay in denying that real similarity between things requires the existence of something common to and existing in both.” Adams, 435

²⁸ Spade p. 188

²⁹ Spade p. 199

*the soul be in any way universal (except perhaps through a voluntary institution, as the word 'man' which is a singular word, is universal) as it is an impossibility that a man be an ass through any consideration or according to any kind of being whatever.*³⁰

Through a methodical process of elimination Ockham claims to have whittled the possibility of extramental commonality down to literally nothing. Not the more extreme realism of Burley, not an individualized common nature like in Scotus or Aquinas, not even the smallest sliver of reality attributed to natures by Henry of Harclay pass Ockham's scrutiny. There is no extramental commonality in any way shape or form "*something outside the soul cannot be in any way universal*", "*no matter how it is considered or understood.*" To suppose an individual can be common is as absurd and impossible as saying "*that a man be an ass*". Individuals are distinct in and of themselves, and "*not on account of anything in any way distinct from them*" and "*no thing is really and positively common*" and cannot possibly be so "*even by divine power*" nor is there even any room for degrees, "*for between the particular and the universal there is no middle ground*".³¹

Ockham's Solution

In question 8 Ockham gives his own solution to the problem. While several conceptualist theories here are mentioned, Ockham later adopts the "act of intellection" theory as his preferred option. Universals are only in the mind. The concept is the act of intellection itself, so that a universal would be nothing but a confused intellection (*confusa intelliguntur*) of a singular thing; "so insofar as it would be more confused or less confused, it would be more universal or less universal."³² This universal is natural and not conventional, and though originating from a singular, the confused concept can stand for many:

...by such a common or confused intellection [*confusa intelliguntur*], singular things outside the mind are known. For instance, to say that we have a confused intellection of man, means that we have a cognition by which we do not understand one man rather than another, but that by such a cognition we have cognition of a man rather than a donkey. And this amounts to saying that such a cognition, by some kind of assimilation, bears a greater resemblance to a man than to a donkey, but does not resemble one man rather than another. In consequence of the aforesaid, it seems necessary to say that an infinity of objects can be known by such a confused cognition.³³

The knee-jerk critique that Ockham's concept has no meaning or reference is erroneous. It is not the case, at least initially, that his universal concepts refer to nothing whatsoever. Ockham's universal concepts do refer to the very same object as the senses, the individual or individuals. Nor does this mean there is no difference between sensation and intellectual awareness. The difference is in the *mode* of representation. The senses

³⁰ *Ord. d.2. q. 7*, Spade p. 204, emphasis added

³¹ *Ibid*, Spade p. 206. As put by Maurer, "These arguments throw significant light on Ockham's notion of the individual and its relation to existence or being. His reasoning is dominated by the notion of a thing (res) as individual of itself and by its essence. A thing is so radically individual in his view that it has nothing in common with any other thing." Armand Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in Light of His Principles* (Toronto: PIMS, 199) p. 81

³² *Ord. d.2. q. 8*, Spade p. 216

³³ Boehner, pp. 44-5

represent a singular *qua* singular, while the concept represents the singular *qua* “indistinct”. So although the universal concept has meaning in the singular, still it does not refer more to one thing than to another in a given genus or species, and this mental content is the subject of science:

A real science is not about things, but about mental concepts standing for things; for the terms of scientifically known propositions stand for things. Hence in the following scientifically known proposition, “All fire is warming”, the subject is a mental content common to every fire, and stands for every fire. This is the reason why the proposition is called real knowledge... The real sciences are about mental contents which stand for things; for even though they are mental contents, they still stand for things.³⁴

Contrast with Aquinas

It is perhaps helpful to contrast Ockham’s position with a realist view such as that of Aquinas to get a clear understanding of precisely what is being disputed.³⁵ Aquinas agrees that *omni res extra animam est singularis*, but this is not taken in such a way that it eliminates real commonality and this is for two reasons. First common natures are grounded in the exemplar causality of God. Secondly, Aquinas accepts the subtle distinction of the indifference of the nature to modes of existence. The nature absolutely considered is neither universal nor singular and it is because of this indifference that the nature can be *per accidens* individuated without distortion. Since there is no distortion in the nature, sameness in kind is preserved even when numerical identity is not. Unlike angels, human beings are not differentiated by form. They receive numerical distinction from matter leaving a real identity in kind that unites things otherwise numerically distinct.³⁶ Plato and Socrates are complete individuals, yet instances of the same kind of

³⁴ Ockham *Prologue to the Expositio super libros Physicorum* in Ockham: Philosophical Writings, ed. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1990) p.12

³⁵ I do not for a moment intend the following to be the position of all Thomists; especially since some of them seem to me to be based on an interpretation of Aristotle that ironically borders on conceptualism. While admittedly this is perhaps a more Neoplatonic reading of Aquinas, I only maintain it is a possible interpretation given the texts and space simply does not allow for a more elaborate defense of such.

³⁶ If it is objected that, per Aristotle, there is no common humanity outside of the particulars that can be multiplied and divided, Aquinas would counter by noting that the nature is triplex and attribute this *ante rem* nature to the Divine Ideas: “[...] that which is prior, is always the reason of the posterior; and the posterior having been removed the prior remains, but not the converse; and thence it is because this which applies to the nature absolutely considered, is the reason why it may apply to one or another nature according to the existence which it has in the singular, but not from the converse. *Therefore for instance Socrates is rational, because man is rational, and not the converse; whence by having granted that Socrates and Plato would not exist; still rationality would apply to human nature. Similarly, the divine intellect is the reason for the nature absolutely considered, and in singulars, and the nature itself absolutely considered and in singulars is the reason of the human intellect, and in a certain way the measure of itself.*” (*Quodlibet* VIII, q. 1 a. 1) In this regard, Aquinas implicitly has the same answer explicitly made by Albert the Great on the preconditions necessary for ontological commonality. The divine ideas of forms are like rays radiating from God, which are multiplied in matter, “And if it may be asked why it [the universal] is one, because it must be said it may make itself exist in these three, it is good that a similarity has been introduced about light and color. And it must be said because that which makes it to be one in three itself, is the power of the first intelligence, which is the universal cause of existence in all things: even whose simple nature itself (which because it is a universal is this or that) is a producing ray. And because the contracting is such it is multiple according to the diverse natures to which it pertains, therefore there are many universals, reducible yet by some mode to one, because it has been caused by the first cause.” (*Liber de Praedicabilibus* Tr. II ch. VI). Both Aquinas and Albert are adopting a long tradition here that goes at least as far back as the Neoplatonists. The one is prior to the many. Plotinus noticed that an Aristotelian

thing because the individuating principle makes for multiple individuals of the same kind as, “it is clear that common nature becomes distinct and multiplied by reason of the individuating principles which come from the matter”.³⁷ In other words it can be said that the same nature “has a multiple existence according to the multiplicity of singulars.”³⁸ Thus while it is true that Socrates’ humanity is not repeatable *qua individuated*, nevertheless human nature itself is indifferent to either universal or individual modes of existence and is capable of instantiation in another locus of matter in Plato. The same is true for accidental natures, viz., the color white is only accidentally and numerically different in two white things, because “one whiteness does not differ from another except as in this or that subject.”³⁹ In Aquinas’ view, material things can “participate in”, “exemplify” or “instantiate” a single quality such as whiteness or a substantial nature such as humanity, and in this way the many can be one, “In those things, however, that differ materially, nothing prevents many being found equal to one another, for in substances the individuals of one species equally participate the nature of the species. Likewise in accidents it is possible for diverse subjects to participate whiteness equally.”⁴⁰

So it is important to keep in mind that the dispute is not over the communicability of what is numerically distinct but rather over the possibility of an identity in kind. Take the earlier example of color. For Aquinas, whiteness does not differ except insofar as it is individuated in this or that subject. Ockham however, rejects extramental commonality and any need for a principle of individuation and holds instead that this quality is individual in itself. So Ockham’s position may be summarized:

Nothing individual in itself can be identified with something else
The quality of whiteness in Socrates is individual in itself

universal and the individual nature from which it is derived is not the whole story, for a coherent *in re* and *post rem* realism presupposes some form of *ante rem* realism, “Besides, the more general is by nature prior; hence, the Form-Idea is prior to the individual: but what is prior by nature is prior unconditionally. How then can the Form take a lower rank? The individual, it is true, is prior in the sense of being more readily accessible to our cognizance; this fact, however, entails no objective difference.” (Plotinus, *Enneads* VI 3, 9). It is debatable whether or not this was actually the position of Aristotle. Gerson notes well that, “The very fact that Aristotle recognizes the possibility of knowing thing universally obliges him to accept some account of the grounds for the possibility of universal knowledge, an account that the universality of thought itself does not provide. Forms are not universals, and universals do not do the job that Forms must do to make universal knowledge possible. Hence no theory of universals serves as a substitute for a theory of Forms.” (Lloyd Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* London: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 21) It is perhaps arguable that *if* Aristotle was open to exemplarism, then Ockham’s interpretation of him is wrong, however, *if* Aristotle was *not* open to exemplarism, then this fact may go far in substantiating Ockham’s claim to be the true Aristotelian!

³⁷ *Ibid*, ad 3

³⁸ *De Ente* III, and again, the nature is able to be multiply instantiated because of its indifference, giving us many different things of the same kind, “If plurality were in the concept of this nature, it could never be one, but nevertheless it is one as it exists in Socrates. Similarly, if unity were in the notion of this nature, then it would be one and the same in Socrates and Plato, and it could not be made many in the many individuals.” (*ibid*)

³⁹ ST I.75.7

⁴⁰ *Super Librum De Causis Expositio* prop. 4, translation taken from St Thomas Aquinas: *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, tr. Vincent Guagliardo, Charles Hess, and Richard Taylor (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996) p. 34

The quality of whiteness in Socrates cannot be identified with something else

As we have seen, a moderate realist like Aquinas agrees with the major, (two white things are not numerically identical in color because the quality inheres in different subjects), but Aquinas disagrees with the minor. The quality of whiteness in Socrates is not individual in itself; rather it is a common color apart from the principle of individuation that multiplies it. *But Ockham has no need for a principle of individuation.* If Ockham held the two “whites” to be the same color he would need to account for why one and the same color is in two subjects, but of course for Ockham, the whiteness in Socrates doesn’t need to be individuated because it is not a common nature to begin with. There are only bare individuals, and they are as bare as bare can be.⁴¹

Critical Appraisal

While sometimes it is difficult to interpret texts, this does not seem to be the case here. I see no ambiguity in what Ockham’s position is. It would be an injustice to his position to suppose there were any extramental sameness or to turn him into some sort of moderate realist in regards to some natures and not others. We should take him at his word in which it seems he couldn’t have expressed himself more clearly. No two things are common in any way whatsoever. The following critique is directed at this position.

That the Conceptualist’s Concept is Either Meaningless or Imaginary

As I have mentioned above, it has been commonly suggested that Ockham’s concepts have no meaning,⁴² and again as I said, this critique seems on the face of it to commit a straw man fallacy. Ockham responds to objections that his notion of the concept destroys science and says on the contrary that concepts do have meaning. As expressed, the meaning depends upon the type of supposition intended. If we are talking about the concept “man” with personal supposition, we are talking about each and every individual man. “Man” corresponds with each and every individual taken indeterminately. The concept’s meaning is the coexisting confused knowledge of singular things, and Ockham says this is sufficient to ground science:

Yet if we press this, problems arise. It is the indifference in representation that allows a singular act of conceiving Socrates to apply to other men. But think for a moment as to how this indifference in the concept is supposed to work. What is left of the singular cognition of Socrates thought of indifferently, when there is nothing at all about Socrates that is indifferent? In other words, *just how is it* that we can conceive a thing as indiscrete when it cannot possibly *be* indiscrete in any way? If this concept of Socrates has any accurate content left over after this *confusa* process, whatever remains is still restricted to the individual Socrates. It is still Socrates’ humanity, Socrates’ white, etc. In spite of Ockham’s protestations to the contrary, this remains true as long as the concept has any accurate content at all. Aristotle’s agent intellect (*nous poietikos*) disregards whatever it is in the constitution of things that distinguishes individuals, but if Ockham’s act of the

⁴¹ To put matters in contemporary analytic parlance, Aquinas can say that although there is not a numerical identity between *tokens* (individual instances of a property), there is however an identity in *type* (real commonality in kind apart from individual considerations). Ockham accepts the former but not the latter.

⁴² E.g., Joseph Gredt, *Elementia Philosophiae Aristotelico – Thomisticae*, v. I (Freiburg, B. Herder Book Co. 1937) p. 96

intellect really did that, there would be nothing left over, for there is nothing in the thing that is not individually distinguished in itself. So it seems that any content Ockham's universal has is either going to be particular or nothing at all. If nothing at all, then the concept is meaningless. If there is content, then it is the content proper to an individual, not many.⁴³

Suppose however that Ockham holds that this act of the intellect can excise the individual-specific "Socrates white" from Socrates and apply it to Plato. But Plato's white is specific to Plato and individual *in itself*. If Socrates-white is said to mentally substitute for Plato-white we are certainly now in the mix and match domain of the imagination, and if that is what Ockham means for a concept to be universal, then one may very well wonder if knowledge could be better had by just leaving the singular concept alone. The nature of the Ockhamist universal is achieved by imaginatively creating *confusa* with a perceived particular. The fancifully manufactured indistinction doesn't subsist in any extramental mode at all. Hence, it is not a stretch to say that the *universality* of Ockham's concept is manufactured *in toto* by the imagination of the knowing subject and then put to use in the form of science, a tenuous and shaky foundation for science indeed.

So it seems the charge that the Ockhamist concept destroys science is back on. If Ockham's conceptualism is true, either the individual concept is without content, or if it retains any content, that content is individual specific and can only be applied to something else imaginatively. Science then, is based either on the meaningless or the imaginary.

That Conceptualism Suffers the Problem of Induction

But suppose Ockham can somehow avoid this charge. After all, it is at least possible that somehow a confused concept created by the knowing subject might imaginatively be blurred to a degree that accurately corresponds to the utterly discrete yet similarity existing in individuals. Yet this does not rescue the Ockhamist epistemology, for no sooner does the conceptualist clear this hurdle, then he finds Humean arguments against induction lurking in wait. The problem is well known, viz., how to justify inferences from observed instances to unobserved instances. To reject common natures individuated in things that serve as the ground for knowledge, the conceptualist is challenged to provide a plausible account about how universal concepts are applicable to previously unobserved singulars.

The realist notion of induction moves from the sensible to the intelligible plane. After experiencing a sufficient amount of particulars, the intellect grasps the nature common to all observed and unobserved singulars of the same nature. On this basis, the realist can claim legitimate knowledge in advance of unperceived particulars of the same nature. To use an analogy, if I have read Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, I do not need to go and read other extant copies to know something about them also. This is true even if there are

⁴³ Which means that conceptualism is a chimera and nominalism is the more consistent position to hold regarding the mind's awareness of an utterly discrete ontology. (See n.1)

accidental differences to the copies (hardbacks vs. paperbacks, larger vs. smaller, etc.). They are after all, the *same story* and if you've read one you've read them all.

But the conceptualist cannot take this same tack, for he claims that we know from the outset that no two things can be the same kind. In the Ockhamist ontology, there are no copies of anything; everything is a completely different story. Things may be similar, but never the same kind. The conceptualist may know from experience that Socrates, Plato, and Alcibiades can be said to be "mortal", but how can it be justified to say in advance, that the next possible candidate for the predicate "man" must also be "mortal"? This new entity is of a new essence, primarily diverse, distinct in and of itself, it cannot be the same kind of any previously experienced entity "no matter how it is considered or understood". Its not even the case that Ockham can be open to saying the new thing *might* be the same kind of thing as an experienced thing. The best Ockham can say is that a set of similar things *were* mortal, but he cannot justifiably claim that a new entirely unexperienced essence will also be similar to this earlier set of different yet similar essences. Nor could an appeal to having the same properties work, because no two properties can be of the same kind for the same reasons that no two substantial essences can be. Intellectual contact with old particulars cannot serve as the basis for acquaintance with new particulars of a different kind. There simply is no metaphysical foundation sufficient to justify such a generalization and so any such claim must remain perpetually hasty.

So even if the subjectively manufactured universality in the Ockhamist epistemology can be effected to somehow correspond to utterly discreet yet similar individuals, nevertheless it cannot account for the predictability of knowledge. But the Aristotelian view of science (one to which Ockham wants to hold) is not only epistemologically real in the sense that we may predicate one of many, *but that this knowledge also has the character of stability and predictability*. Both elements are the *sine qua non* of Aristotelian science and knocking out one supporting column is enough to bring down the whole structure.

That Conceptualism is Ontologically Absurd and Bloated

Putting these epistemological difficulties aside, we move now to consider some other oddities of Ockham's view. Taking Ockham at his word, just visualize for a moment that it is really the case that every blade of grass in every field, every individual leaf located in every bush or tree in every jungle, forest, or backyard, existing right now is a different color of green. Every molecule of H₂O in every drop of rain or fragment of water in every bathtub, faucet, pipe, dishwasher, swimming pool, public fountain, car wash, municipal water facility, lake, river, and ocean on the planet is a different kind of "water". Surely this scenario is overwhelmingly counterintuitive and strikes one as *prima facie* bizarre to a degree in which a man of common sense can be well within his epistemic rights to confidently reject. Unquestionably, the proponent of such a view shoulders a massive burden of proof for such a claim. If what Ockham says is true then every black letter on every page of every book or paper, contained in all the newspapers, libraries, bookstores, recycling bins, trashcans, and landfills, is a *different color of black*. Are we really supposed to believe that there are that many different hues of black, not to mention all the black pieces of coal, sand, dirt, old tires, crayons, etc., there must be billions upon billions of "blacks". Sure, there are some different shades of black, but

nothing like what would have to be true if Ockham is correct. It is as if Ockham's explicit position amounts to its own *reductio ad absurdum*.

What is also often missed is the ontological complexity of this picture. It is only when one myopically looks at one individual does one get the mistaken impression that Ockham's position is more parsimonious. That way, sure, there is only one individual, not an individual *plus* a common nature. But when we transcend this narrow consideration by taking two or more individuals, the purported simplicity vaporizes. Take our example of Socrates and Plato. You have the individual itself and its *individual* properties; "Socrates-humanity" and "Socrates-white". With Plato we have another individual with an entirely new set of properties; namely "Plato-humanity" and "Plato-white", and the same is true for each and every instance of "human". We not only have multiplied individuals here but also multiplied *types*. With the realist view on the other hand, things are much simpler. You have two individuals, just as in the conceptualist view, *yet with the same kind of nature and properties*. Socrates and Plato are multiplied instances of the same nature humanity and the same color white. The realist position has the advantage of parsimony because *the property of humanity or white is not a new type of property with each individual occurrence*. So ironically in an effort to achieve simplicity, Ockham pushes one lump down in the carpet only to have new ones pop up in umpteen other places. The quest for simplicity in the *via moderna* framework does away with the need for a principle of individuation and an extra common nature, only to have this effort vitiated by a countless multiplication of entities in other areas. In fact, it doesn't seem possible that one could have a more bloated ontology. Not even Scotus, in all his subtle and distinctive wisdom, would dream of such. Ironically then, it is the realist who holds the simpler position and who can now disarm Ockham of his beloved razor and turn it against him. *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*.

But we are not finished with the counterintuitive peculiarities of Ockham's ontology. Take a piece of blue construction paper. It seems Ockham would say this whole is the same color, and that means one part of it is the same color as another part. As long as there is spatial continuity, I take it Ockham thinks the paper is the same identical color. Yet, suppose a small child cuts a one-inch snip in the paper, leaving the majority intact. It certainly seems that no color change has occurred at all. As the child cuts further into the paper, there is still no apparent color change occurring, but of course quantitative continuity is still maintained down to the very last thread. But if this is true what happens then? Does Ockham really want us to believe that this paper remains the same color all along until the child snips that very last mm of thread? Such a claim would seem as preposterous as if the paper were not blue at all but rather red. But perhaps Ockham may want to avoid this absurdity by saying the different portions of the blue paper were not the same color to begin with. But then we ask *just where then is the color?* All extension is divisible *ex hypothesi* and all surfaces are extensions. "Blue" must have surface and thus parts. So either the paper changes colors when cut (which is absurd) or the spatially separated parts of the paper are different colors to begin with, which means there is no one color anywhere, which is also absurd.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For a similar argument see G. Dawes-Hicks "Are the Characteristics of Particular Things Universal or Particular?" *Aristotelian Society Supplementary* v. 3 (1923), p. 172

Nevertheless, suppose a defender of conceptualism wishes, *mutatis mutandis*, to say that there are only bare individuals without properties like color.⁴⁵ This is not Ockham's position however, nor would it avoid its own problems, for even individuals without qualities such as color still have the property of being "one", "individual", a "being", a "substance" etc., and these of course are universals that seem to be univocally true of each instance. In fact Ockham's univocal use of the term "individual" belies his claim that no strict commonality exists between things. The only way out is to plummet into the Eleatic camp, for a thorough and consistent nominalistic ontology leads to monism.⁴⁶ If what Ockham says is true then either his philosophy is excessively bloated (which he didn't want) or, if adjusted, it is excessively simple (which he also didn't want).

Given all of this, it seems to me it would be quite reasonable for one to simply respond to Ockham that they are vastly more certain that two blades of grass are the same kind of color than they are of Ockham's abstract reasoning. In fact, one could make a stronger claim and say they are just as certain of two things being the same color as they are of their experience of the external world itself. Denying the obvious in one instance seems as vicious as the next. It is no wonder then that a thinker like McNerny comments on Ockham thusly:

A world where each thing is only itself and no other, where its very otherness is said to be its similarity with others -- well, this is a confused and paradoxical terrain. If we excuse ourselves from any consideration of Ockham's discussions of proofs of God's existence and proofs that God has certain attributes, we do so because his apparently affirmative results are such only when terms bear the peculiar Pickwickian sense

⁴⁵ Some modern nominalists such as W.V. Quine want to deny that there are such things as properties to avoid this problem, but it doesn't seem Ockham would do so, since he is at least open real accidents of quality. Ockham thinks some accidents are identical to the substance (i.e. quantity) and some not, but affective qualities such as whiteness or "hotness" are really distinct from substance because the same substance can lose or acquire these sorts of properties. See Maurer pp. 42-3 for a summary of Ockham's understanding of the category of quality. But of course, Quine's denial of properties gets him nowhere because once one denies the existence of properties, one cannot now account for obvious, necessary truths about higher order universals such as (1) "Red is more like orange than it is yellow". If properties are abolished, then these truths *cannot* be reduced to statements about particular things, e.g., (2) "red things are more like orange things than yellow things". Why? Suppose we are talking about a red ball, a yellow ball of precisely the same size, shape, material, and weight, and an orange football stadium. Without bringing in the notion of properties, one cannot now reduce (1) to (2) in regard to these things. In such a case (1) would be false. In the same way, one could not acknowledge that, "red is a color" without the notion of properties because it is also true that each red thing is an extended thing and redness is not an extension – it is a color. For more on the irreducibility of propositions regarding higher order universals, see D.M. Armstrong's *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989) pp. 32-6

⁴⁶ An argument attributable to Zeno, the power of which is indicative as to why Socrates answers with an appeal to Forms (*Parmenides* 129a). As Gerson glosses the point, "If a plurality of things exists, they must be the same and not the same; the same because each is one and not the same because each is not the other, that is, because each has its own individual identity. If part of what something is entails its being the same as something else – in this case, its being one – then its identification as this existent does not exhaust all that it is, where identity is supposed to guarantee unqualified uniqueness. Conversely, if identity does exhaust all that it is, then it cannot be the same as something else. We could not in this case even say that there are two things – two "ones" of whatever sort – meaning that these are the same insofar as each is one so-and-so. Thus, a rigorous or even a consistent nominalism collapses into Eleaticism." (Lloyd Gerson, "Plato on Identity, Sameness, and Difference" forthcoming in *Review of Metaphysics*)

according to which Ockham can predicate the same term of two entities while denying that he is doing anything other than pointing to two utterly different things. It is only when we forget Ockham's nominalism -- as he on occasion was prone to do himself -- that the results of his inquiries amount to something other than the melancholy one just stated.⁴⁷

A Wrong Turn

We would be remiss if we did not at least ask what could possibly have come over Ockham to latch on to and defend such a counter intuitive notion of reality? Apparently its because he clearly thinks he has refuted any platonic realism, and that all moderate *in re* realism either is just individualized natures and universal in the mind only (thus Ockham's point is made) or it reduces to a platonic realism. But has he shown this conclusively? I think not, for Ockham oversimplifies the issue and does not adequately consider that which other thinkers such as various Neoplatonists, Bonaventure, Albert the Great and Aquinas have all held.⁴⁸ Ontological unity is grounded by participation in the Divine exemplarity, while the indifference of the nature to individual or universalized conditions saves the *in re* and *post rem* dimensions. The nature undergoes no corruption in any of the three modes. Thus, a realist like Aquinas agrees that individual things are not the absolute ground for commonality,⁴⁹ and the many cannot be prior to the one. A moment's reflection will show that this *ante rem* universality in the divine mind is not only immune to Ockham's attacks against forms existing prior to individuals,⁵⁰ but it also shows Ockham major dichotomy to be false. It is not the case that the nature exists either in singulars or apart from them, the divine exemplarity position holds both, and the individualized natures continue to participate in the exemplar at every moment of their

⁴⁷ Ralph McInerny, *History of West. Philosophy* v. II p. 376

⁴⁸ I leave aside the question of whether or not the historical Aristotle himself held to such a view. Nevertheless, according to Klima ("The Medieval Problem of Universals", available online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/universals-medieval/>, n. 5), Ockham *denies* universal exemplars in the divine mind (*Ordinatio* I, d. 35, q. 5). God has knowledge of *our* confused concepts, and so in this indirect sense, God has knowledge of universals, but these are not exemplars. Properly speaking, God knows only individuals.

⁴⁹ No particular or group of particular horses can be the ultimate cause of equinity, "Again, a given nature or form has a two-fold cause: one, which is essentially and absolutely the cause of such a nature or form; the other, which is the cause of such a nature or form in such a being. The necessity of this distinction is apparent to anyone considering the causes of things which are generated. For when a horse is generated, the generating horse is indeed the reason why the nature of horse begins to exist in this being, but it is not the essential cause of equinity. For that which is essentially the cause of a certain specific nature must be the cause of that nature of all the beings that have that species. Since, then, the generating horse has the same nature, it would have to be its own cause, which is impossible. It remains, therefore, that above all those participating in equinity, there must be some universal cause of the whole species." (Aquinas, *Tractatus De Substantiis Separatis*, IX)

⁵⁰ Aquinas says Aristotle's arguments against Plato do not militate against the divine ideas; "even though this argument [of Aristotle's] does away with separate exemplars posited by Plato, it still does not do away with the fact that God's knowledge is the exemplar of all things. For since things in the physical world are naturally inclined to induce their likeness in things that are generated, this inclination must be traced back to some directing principle which ordains each thing to its own end... But it is not necessary that this likeness should be traced back to any other separate forms; because in order to have the above mentioned likeness this direction of things to their end, according to which natural powers are directed by the first intellect, is sufficient". *Comm. On Meta.* I l. 15 (translation taken from Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*; South Bend: Dumb Ox Books, 1995, pp. 89-90)

existence. In fact, a very interesting point emerges when we consider the following argument from Albert the Great:

For this [universals existing apart from particulars] is proven thus, the existence of universals is a common existence adapted to coming into existence in many and communicable to many. Moreover this [universal] is not able to have existence from the singular: *because the singulars are discrete and incommunicable*. To communicate existence therefore is that which is the existence of universals, [which] the universal does not have from the singular.⁵¹

This is a point worthy of reflection, for notice Albert takes the same starting point of Ockham, to wit, that the singulars are discrete and incommunicable, to look beyond the singular for an explanation for ontological commonality. Albert is unwilling to surrender the common sense that two men are of the same nature or that three blades of grass can be the same color, and yet with the insufficiency of particulars to account for the data, is adequately justified in looking to another entity for an explanation of what is better known.⁵² Ockham, on the other hand, while taking this same starting point, goes the other direction by rejecting ontological commonality (and common sense) in one fell swoop. Given this same starting point, Ockham's critique is quite instructive for realism. For Ockham's critique is correct as far as it goes, diversity can never be the ultimate reason for unity, and thus the denial of a nominalistic ontology *ipso facto* commits one to some form of *ante rem* realism. A multiplicity in reality is *not* a sufficient foundation for the unity of the universal. If the individual cannot be common (something to which all parties agree) then if one holds to extramental commonality, one is forced to provide some account for the prerequisite conditions for the community of nature prior to the individual.⁵³

⁵¹ "Hoc etiam sic probatur, Esse universalis est esse commune aptum natum esse in pluribus & multis communicabile. Hoc autem esse non potest habere a singulari: quia singularia sunt discreta & incommunicabilia. Communicabile ergo esse quod est esse universalis universale non habet a singulari." (Albert the Great, *Liber de praedicabilibus*, tr. II, ch. V) A line of reasoning that would also account for eternal truths like "man is an animal" and about which later commentators such as Banez would have no misgivings with saying "Si dictio, est, dicat veritatem propositionis, hominem esse animal, non est ab aeterno, nisi in intellectu divino. Haec probatur: nam verum est in intellectu: sed ab aeterno non est alius intellectus, nisi divinus, ergo. Ex his conclusionibus sequitur, *quod essentiae rerum, antequam existant, sunt entia realia*, ut ens reale distinguitur contra ens rationis seu fictitium; non tamen in secundo sensu." (Banez, *Comm. Prima Pars* q. X a. 3, cf., John of St. Thomas, *Logica* q.3 a.2, and Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature* v. I (St Louis, Herder Books, 1934) pp. 325-331)

⁵² Which perhaps can be said to be foreshadowing the later "anti-razor" principle of Ockham's critic Walter Chatton, "if three things are not enough to verify an affirmative proposition, a fourth must be added, and so on. (Walter Chatton, *Reportatio* 1, d.30, q.1, a.4; cited in Maurer, p. 127) It is certainly ironic that employing the anti-razor in the beginning leads to a more parsimonious position than using the razor all the way through.

⁵³ And so I think Gerson may be quite right in that an Aristotelianism without some form of Platonism is nominalistic and unworkable for Aristotle's apparent intentions of holding real commonality, "if one rigorously and honestly sought to remove these [Platonic] assumptions, the 'Aristotelianism' that would remain would be indefensible and incoherent. A comprehensive and scientifically grounded anti-Platonic Aristotelianism is, I suspect, a chimera." (Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, p. 290) This is similarly well stated by Little, "If on the other hand, the universal derives its unity only from the mind then it will be impossible for a plurality to have any characteristics in common. For the unity of the universal signifies precisely the common character of the notes signified. If that unity is a pure fiction of the mind ungrounded in reality so too will be the common character signified by it... Conceptualism is inevitable therefore unless

So we must conclude, as right as Ockham is on this point, he goes the wrong direction with his answer to the problem. Not only is Ockham's position counterintuitive and epistemologically problematic; it is also unnecessarily bloated and unable to account for a fact as simple as a piece of blue construction paper. Since a realist position such as Aquinas' can avoid the conceptualist critique, and is more intuitive and economical than its conceptualist counterpart, it is therefore the preferable option. In light of this, defenders of Ockham ought to shoulder a massive burden of proof if they wish to show otherwise. Until then, it seems to me that one is amply justified in holding to common sense and universal realism.

we can answer the question: from what source does the universal derive its unity?" (Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950) p. 47)