

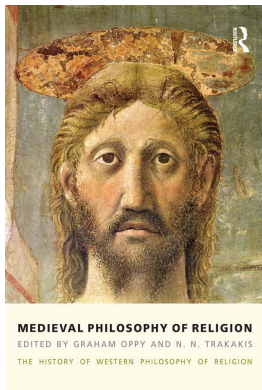
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WILLIAM OCKHAM

Gyula Klima

William Ockham (c.1287–1347) was an English Franciscan friar, famous for his *nominalism* (Klima 2006), whose name is preserved in the commonly used designation of the methodological principle called ‘Ockham’s razor’ (Adams 1987: 156–7, 281). This chapter will focus primarily on Ockham’s nominalist doctrine and its impact on his theology.

William Ockham was born around 1287 in a little village called Ockham, twenty-five miles from London. He received his elementary education in London in the convent of the Franciscan order (the Greyfriars). At the time, the London House of the Greyfriars was a distinguished intellectual centre for not only elementary but also higher education, although it was not a university. Thus, having completed his studies in grammar, logic and natural philosophy, Ockham began studying theology there around the age of twenty-three, but soon moved on to Oxford. Probably in 1317, he began lecturing on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in Oxford, which was a general requirement for getting one’s licence as a Master of Theology. However, in 1321, Ockham returned to the Franciscans in London before completing the programme at Oxford; thus he never became a Master of Theology (hence his honorific title, *Inceptor Venerabilis*, the venerable *inceptor*; that is, one who began work on, but has not received, his degree). Accordingly, it is only book I of his *Commentary on the Sentences* that exists in the form of an *ordinatio* (a text revised by the author himself for copying); the remaining three books exist only in the form of *reportationes* (unrevised lecture notes). He stayed three more years at the London Greyfriars, where he was involved in important philosophical and theological debates with his confreres, such as Walter Chatton and Adam Wodeham. It was during this period that he produced, among a number of minor theological and philosophical works and some important commentaries in logic and natural philosophy (see Spade 1999: 5–11), his groundbreaking *Summa logicae* (hereafter *SL*; c.1323), laying out his nominalist logic, and his *Quodlibetal Questions*, presenting his mature philosophical and theological views. The disputations recorded here took place in London, in the years 1322–4, but Ockham

revised and edited them in Avignon, in 1324–5, where he was summoned to the papal court to answer charges of heresy. Or so the traditional story goes.

Recently it has been questioned whether Ockham was indeed ‘summoned’ to Avignon, or whether he was assigned by his order to teach there, or whether he went voluntarily to answer the charges, in hope of a positive outcome (Shogimen 2007: 2–3). In any case, it is certain that there was a formal enquiry into his teachings, and out of fifty-six questionable propositions collected from his doctrine, fifty-one were indeed censured (i.e. deemed erroneous), although not formally condemned (Pelzer 1922). It is also quite certain that completing the *Quodlibetal Questions* was the last act of Ockham’s purely academic career. But it was not the outcome of the inquisition into his nominalist doctrine that eventually ended his academic activity. In 1327, during his stay in Avignon, the master general of his order, Michael of Cesena, was summoned to Avignon because of the ongoing controversy between the order and the pope over the idea of ‘apostolic poverty’ (the idea that Christ and the apostles owned no property and lived on alms, whence the mendicant order’s similar practice was considered as a special form of imitating Christ). In 1328, at the request of Michael of Cesena, Ockham reviewed the pope’s relevant bulls for their orthodoxy. Apparently much to his own surprise, Ockham found that John XXIII held heretical views and thus was in fact a heretic. As a result, on 26 May 1328, Ockham, along with Michael of Cesena and some other Franciscans, fled the papal court to seek the protection of Ludwig of Bavaria, who was staying at the time in Pisa. Ludwig had been excommunicated earlier, in 1324, over the issue of the succession to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. On the strength of military success, Ludwig challenged the view that the emperorship was a gift from the papacy, and, having occupied Rome in 1328, had the Roman people declare him Holy Roman Emperor. On 6 June 1328, Ockham was formally excommunicated for leaving Avignon without permission. Thus, along with the other fugitive Franciscans, he followed Ludwig to the imperial court in Munich, where he stayed for the rest of his life, being involved in political controversy over issues ranging from apostolic poverty to heresy, in particular papal heresy, and papal authority, until his death in 1347.

OCKHAM’S NOMINALISM

The term ‘nominalism’, especially in the context of medieval philosophy, is usually taken to designate a metaphysical position, consisting in the denial of the existence of universal entities or ‘real universals’, as opposed to the ‘realist’ position, endorsing the existence of such universals, and to the ‘conceptualist’ position, positing that universals exist only in the mind. Indeed, based on this sort of classification, nominalists tend to be described as *conventionalists*, for whom the only universals are words (*nomina*) and thus would take our universal terms to apply to things grouped together arbitrarily or conventionally and not on the basis of

anything inherent in the nature of things (as ‘realists’ would have it) or in the nature of our minds conceiving of them (as ‘conceptualists’ would take it to be the case). Thus, nominalists also tend to be taken to be *sceptics*, who would claim that we can never get to know the inherent natures of things, if they have anything like that at all.¹

Under these descriptions, these terms are nearly useless in classifying the much more sophisticated views of medieval thinkers, whose disagreements simply lay elsewhere. Still, with the proper clarification of their *genuine* disagreements, it will still make sense to classify Ockham as a nominalist, as opposed, say, to Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus or Walter Burley as (more or less ‘moderate’) realists, disregarding in this comparison *their* more subtle differences.

To be sure, Ockham did deny the existence of mind-independent universal entities existing in their universality in the nature of things, such as the Platonic Forms of Man or Horse ‘in itself’. But after Boethius, so did nearly everybody else. Medieval realists would rather claim that individual substances, such as rocks, trees, horses or human beings, are sorted into their natural kinds (species and genera) on account of their inherent individualized natures, which, however, can be recognized by the abstractive intellect as instances of the same common nature. That common nature itself, nevertheless, is not an entity existing on a par with its instances: the actual real entities are only the individualized instances themselves, just as copies of a book are the only actually existing entities, whereas ‘the book itself’ can only be discerned by those who are able to read the copies. Although this conception is not open to the usual objections of inconsistency marshalled against Plato’s ‘naive’ theory of Forms (such as the Third Man argument, recognized already by Plato himself in his *Parmenides*), Ockham still finds it unacceptable for several reasons.²

In the first place, he takes it to lead to several sorts of absurdities, especially in connection with Scotus’ conception of the relationship between the common nature taken in itself and what individualizes it in its instances. In the second

1. Cf. Gracia: “If the universal has only mental existence, the objectivity and scientific validity of our concepts is undermined” (1994: 23). Interestingly enough, this sort of reasoning, tying the denial of real universals to scepticism, is present already in Scotus (for whom a real universal is an entity having what he calls “less than numerical unity”):

If every real unity is numerical unity, therefore every real diversity is numerical diversity. The consequent is false. For every numerical diversity, in so far as it is numerical, is equal. And so all things would be equally distinct. In that case it follows that the intellect could not abstract something common from Socrates and Plato any more than it can from Socrates and a line. Every universal would be a pure figment of the intellect. (Quoted in Spade 1994: 62)

2. For a more detailed exposition of the medieval problem of universals, see Klima (2000). For Ockham’s detailed discussion, including a point-by-point response to Scotus’ arguments, see Spade (1994: 114–231).

place, and perhaps more importantly, he argues that there is no theoretical need whatsoever to posit such universal entities.

Ockham's arguments in favour of the first conclusion here are intended to rule out universal entities by means of *reductio ad absurdum*. For instance, he argues that if Socrates and Plato shared the same common essence without which neither could exist (which would have to be the case if there were common natures), then it would be impossible even for God to create or annihilate them independently, which is clearly absurd, since they were actually born and died independently of one another (*SL I*, 15: 51, ll. 29–38).³ But this sort of argument assumes a rather crude conception of a universal, according to which it is an entity that is numerically one in all of its distinct instances, and numerically distinct from each of them. So, in another set of arguments, Ockham addresses Scotus' much more sophisticated account, according to which universals, possessing a less-than-numerical unity, are *merely formally*, but not numerically, distinct from what individualizes them in their particular instances: their so-called *individual difference*, or 'haecceity'. In particular, he argues against what he takes to be the fundamental absurdity in Scotus' notion of a formal distinction:

[I]n creatures,^[4] there can never be any distinction outside the mind unless there are distinct things; if, therefore, there is any distinction between the nature and the difference, it is necessary that they be really distinct things. I prove my premise by the following syllogism: this nature is not formally distinct from itself; this individual difference is formally distinct from this nature; therefore, this individual difference is not this nature. (*SL I*, 16: 54)

Scotus and his followers were more than prepared to handle such and similar 'absurdities', by for instance distinguishing between different types of predication. But for Ockham, that sort of strategy would simply amount to 'adding epicycles' to save a generally useless and ill-founded doctrine. Thus, his second strategy consists in showing not so much the absurdity of the opposing position as the possibility of a consistent system of thought without any commitment to the ontological extravagances of the realist position. Based on the heuristic principle bearing his name (which nevertheless had been in use by earlier scholastics as well), he can eliminate from his ontology not only 'real universals', but all sorts of 'weird entities' posited by his realist opponents.

For according to Ockham, nearly all of the *metaphysical* troubles of the 'realist' position stem from a radically mistaken conception of the fundamental *semantic* relationships between language, mind and reality. As he wrote: "And this is the

3. This is a simplified presentation of Ockham's somewhat more complicated argument.

4. It is significant that Ockham restricts his argument to creatures; see the section on his doctrine of the Trinity below.

root (*principium*) of many errors in philosophy: to want that to a distinct word there always correspond a distinct *significate*, so that there is as much distinction between the things signified as there is between the names or words that signify.”⁵ Actually, it would be hard to find among Ockham’s genuine opponents someone who would have held such a simple-minded ‘isomorphistic’ view (however, see (Pseudo-)Campsall 1982). But it is true that the semantic conception Ockham challenges does posit several semantic values for each term of our language in various categories, which then inevitably raises the metaphysical problems of the distinctness and identity of these semantic values. Ockham’s radical solution is the simple *elimination* of many of these *metaphysical* problems by challenging the *semantic* assumptions that gave rise to them in the first place.

For instance, an obviously emerging problem for the traditional framework was whether relations are identical with or distinct from their foundations: if Socrates is equal to Plato in height, is his height the same as or distinct from his equality to Plato? Apparently both answers would lead to absurdities. If they are the same, then it would seem that if by Plato’s growth Socrates’ equality to him ceases to exist, then so should his height, which is absurd. But if they are distinct, then it would logically, and hence by divine omnipotence, be possible for Socrates and Plato to be equal even if they are not of the same height, if God preserves their equality, even if one of them outgrows the other, which is also absurd. Again, the realists Ockham criticizes had their own *metaphysical* solutions to these problems (Henninger 1989; Brower 2005). However, Ockham argues that the problem itself emerges only on the basis of a mistaken *semantic* conception, and, therefore, on the right conception it should not emerge at all.

For the reason why the question emerges for realists in the first place is that they would take the term ‘equal to’ in the predication ‘Socrates is equal to Plato’ to signify an inherent property, Socrates’ equality to Plato, the existence of which is what verifies the predication. Thus, when the predication ceases to be true on account of Plato’s change, the question as to what happened to this alleged entity is just inevitable. By contrast, on ‘the right’ account, that is, Ockham’s own, there is no need to posit such an entity at all. For on this account, just as the term ‘man’ does not signify some common nature, humanity, existing individualized in all human beings, but merely signifies human beings absolutely, yet indifferently, so the term ‘equal’ does not signify a common nature, equality, existing individualized in things that are equal, but merely signifies these things themselves indifferently, yet not absolutely, but *connoting* the things to which they are equal.⁶

5. “Et hoc est principium multorum errorum in philosophia: velle quod semper distincto vocabulo correspondeat distinctum significatum, it quod tanta sit distinctio rerum significatarum quanta est nominum vel vocabulorum significantium” (Ockham 1984: 270); cf. *SL I*, 51: 169–71.

6. Connotation is usually explained as secondary signification: a connotative term primarily signifies things it can stand for in a proposition, and secondarily signifies or connotes all

Thus, Socrates' becoming unequal to Plato on account of Plato's growth need not involve the mysterious perishing of any inherent entity in Socrates, but merely a change in the connotation of the term, on account of which it no longer applies to the thing, Socrates, to which it formerly did with this connotation. On the other hand, the absolute term 'height' still signifies Socrates' unchanged height, without any change whatsoever. Therefore, on this account, the mystery of the possible vanishing of Socrates' height with his equality to Plato, or the possible persistence of this equality without Socrates' being as tall as Plato, simply does not emerge.

Indeed, Ockham does not stop here. Applying his novel analysis to how our terms, whether absolute or connotative, apply to the things they signify, he argues that there are only two really distinct categories of entities, namely, those of substance and quality. It is only abstract terms in these two categories and concrete terms in the category of substance that are simple absolute terms, signifying singular substances and their particular qualities indifferently, yet absolutely. All other terms in the other logical categories distinguished by Aristotle (namely, quantity, relation, action, passion, time, place, position and habit), signify substances or qualities, variously connoting other substances or qualities. It is these various types of connotation, explicable in their nominal definition, that sort these terms into these different logical categories, and *not* the different types of entities they supposedly signify in the same way, as it was conceived on the realist conception.

Thus, for instance, quantity terms, whereby substances are said to be (this) big or small or tall or short or wide and so on do not apply to substances on account of signifying their distinct inherent dimensions, but rather signify these substances or their parts themselves, variously connoting their parts or other substances or their parts. Accordingly, the predication 'Plato is tall' is not rendered true because of the existence of an inherent entity, Plato's tallness, which then would have to be accounted for in one's metaphysics and physics (causing all sorts of headaches in these disciplines); rather, this predication is true because Plato is identical with one of the things signified by the predicate, namely, tall human beings (i.e. human beings who would stick out in a crowd of all other human beings). How this intuitive idea can be made more precise is a further issue, to be taken care of in Ockham's programme of 'ontological reduction' of the categories (for further details, see Klima [1999]). But those details need not detain us here. The point of this sort of analysis is that Ockham's new semantics is capable of accounting for the semantic properties of the terms we use in describing reality, yet without having to account for these *logical* properties in terms of the *ontological* properties of the peculiar entities these terms are supposed to signify. Thus, he ends up

other things, in relation to which it signifies its primary significata. For example, 'father' primarily signifies men having children in relation to their children: thus, the primary *significata* of the term are these men, and its *connotata* are their children.

with a perfectly functioning logic, yet without many of the traditional ontological problems generated by the realist framework.

OCKHAM'S NOMINALISM IN HIS THEOLOGY

The demonstrability of God's uniqueness

As was noted earlier, nominalists are often accused of scepticism on the grounds that if there are no real common natures in the things themselves, as they claim, then it seems that our grouping things together into species and genera may be completely arbitrary or at best pragmatically conventional. This charge certainly does not hold for Ockham's nominalism, or indeed for late medieval nominalism initiated by Ockham in general.⁷ For Ockham, things are mind-independently sorted into their natural kinds. However, this is not because of some common nature distinct from and inherent in them, but on account of the things themselves. For him, essential similarity of co-specific or co-generic individuals is a 'brute fact', not needing any further explanation. The same goes for the essential dependencies of things, that is, their natural causal relations.

Therefore, Ockham's nominalism does not have any direct epistemological implications concerning his natural theology. In fact, he is happy to go along with Scotus' arguments as far as he finds them plausible without begging the question. Thus, he argues that according to the two possible nominal definitions one can provide for the common term 'God', one can provide two different answers to the question of the demonstrability of the existence and uniqueness of God (Ockham 1980: I, q. 1). Using the first nominal definition, according to which the name applies to a being that is more perfect than anything else, it is easy to prove the uniqueness of God. For if we assume that there are two beings satisfying the description, then we at once arrive at the impossibility that one of them is more perfect than the other and *vice versa*. However, according to Ockham, there is no evident, non-question-begging proof that there is such a being. On the other hand, on the other nominal definition, according to which the name 'God' applies to a being than which nothing is more perfect, it is possible to prove

7. For an interesting rethinking of these customary charges, see Lee (2001). See also: Buridan was a committed Nominalist. He was, in other words, on the philosophically wrong side of the major metaphysical controversy of the Middle Ages. Like Ockham, he believed there were no universals: strictly speaking, no colours, only coloured things; no virtue, only virtuous people; no circularity, only individual circles. The rest was all just hot air (*flatus vocis*). The Nominalists ended up poisoning the well of sound philosophy with scepticism, relativism, agnosticism and even atheism. Fortunately, Realism was not sent to rout and has many exponents in present-day analytic philosophy. (Oderberg 2003)

For a discussion of this sort of charge in the case of Buridan, see Klima (2005).

that there is such a being from the impossibility of an infinite regress in the series of essentially dependent conserving (as opposed to merely productive) causes of necessarily increasing perfection. But according to Ockham, we do not have a non-question-begging proof for the uniqueness of such a being. He commends Scotus' arguments to this effect as ones that are plausible; he just cannot accept them as demonstrative. However, these considerations do not directly stem from Ockham's nominalist doctrine; they merely reflect a strict application of a high standard of scientific demonstration. Ockham's nominalism has a more direct impact on his metaphysical treatment of traditional theological topics than on his views on the natural cognition of God.⁸

Divine simplicity

In fact, there are certain parts of medieval Christian theological doctrine that are actually easier to handle in Ockham's nominalist framework than in the earlier (and also contemporary) realist framework. An obvious example is the doctrine of divine simplicity. According to this doctrine, divine perfection demands God's absolute simplicity, that is, the denial of any sort of composition in God. Thus, God cannot be composed of matter and form as material creatures are, as this involves the obvious limitations of existence in space and time, which certainly cannot apply to the creator of space and time, who has to exist both everywhere in space at every time and beyond all space and all time. He cannot be composed of substance and accident either, as this would involve mutability, and so a possible decrease or increase of perfection, which is impossible in the case of absolute perfection. There cannot be a composition of nature and *suppositum* (i.e. the thing that has this nature) in God, because that would entail the possibility of the multiplication of the same nature in several *supposita*, that is, there could be several Gods, which is impossible, because there cannot be more than one absolutely perfect being, one that is more perfect than anything else.⁹

In the realist framework opposed by Ockham, this conception inevitably posed the problem of the apparent irreconcilability of the multitude of distinct divine attributes with the simplicity of the indivisible, simple divine essence, with which each of these attributes is supposed to be identical. For instance, since God is wise, God has wisdom, and since he is powerful he has power, but on account of divine

8. Since this chapter focuses primarily on the impact of Ockham's nominalism on his theology, and not on the finer details of his natural theology or of his take on the relationship between faith and reason in general, for those details I refer the reader to Freddoso (1999).

9. Thomists would also add, most importantly, that in God, as opposed to all creatures, there is no composition of essence and existence. But that is peculiar to the Thomistic conception. Medieval 'Augustinians', such as Henry of Ghent or Scotus, would not acknowledge that sort of composition in creatures either.

simplicity both divine wisdom and divine power have to be identical with divine essence, that is, with God himself. But how is this possible? After all, wisdom and power are distinct attributes, as is testified by the existence of powerless wise and powerful stupid people.

Medieval realists, such as Aquinas, were able to claim that since we gain our concepts of perfections from creatures, in which these perfections are distinct, our concepts of these perfections are distinct as well, but to the extent that these concepts grasp anything of divine perfection they apply to the same simple divine essence. So our terms expressing these concepts are non-synonymous. The attributes considered in general, in abstraction from their instances, are not the same. Still, in the case of divine perfection they are just different, imperfect expressions of one and the same infinitely perfect reality. The idea is often illustrated by an analogy of vision: our concepts derived from the multitude of creaturely perfections provide us with imperfect representations of their single, absolutely perfect source, just as our sight of the various colours of the stained glass windows of a cathedral gives us an imperfect glimpse of their unique source, the sunlight; indeed, just as we cannot directly gaze into the sun and can get a glimpse of it only through some coloured glass, so our intellect in its natural state is incapable of directly apprehending the divine perfection, except through its natural apprehension of creaturely perfections.

However, this idea seems to cause further problems for the realist account on a 'higher level'. For our concepts, being acquired through abstraction from the forms of creatures we encounter in experience, do represent distinct forms in creatures; indeed, the concepts are distinct on account of that distinction; so how can these distinct concepts, representing by their nature distinct formal realities, represent a single formal reality in God (the divine essence)? Scotus' solution invokes his formal distinction, which allegedly does not involve any real distinction or multiplication, whence it is compatible both with divine simplicity and with the multitude of distinct creaturely forms that owe their real distinction precisely to the formal distinction of divine perfections.

But Ockham cannot accept Scotus' formal distinction in this case either, especially because he does not need it in his own account. Since on his nominalist conception a universal concept is universal *not* on account of its being the result of the intellectual grasp of some common nature existing individualized in its instances, but on account of its mere indifference of representation (not being a representation of *this* individual of a certain sort rather than *that* one), such a universal concept is capable of representing creaturely perfections and divine perfection indifferently. Of course, this representation can 'reach up' to divine perfection precisely on account of its indifference, its own imperfection in not giving a distinct, proper and adequate idea of the divine perfection itself. Still, it is a (however imperfect, indistinct and confused) representation of the divine essence itself, despite the fact that such a concept derives from the indifferent representation of some creaturely accident, such as wisdom or power. Thus, the

multitude of attributes for Ockham simply boils down to the multitude of our imperfect, abstractive concepts of perfections as we know them in creatures; this, however, is certainly compatible with the unity and simplicity of the source of all perfections, which the aforementioned concepts indifferently and confusedly represent.

Divine ideas

But similar considerations drive Ockham's account of God's cognition of his creatures, that is, Ockham's theory of divine ideas. For Augustine, divine ideas are the universal exemplars of all creation in God's mind. They are basically Platonic Forms, except that they are not the ontologically independent exemplars a Platonic demiurge would have to look up to in shaping the world; rather, they are God's universal conceptions whereby he eternally preconceives the essences of all creatures actually realized in the singular creatures instantiating these essences.

However, the plurality of these ideas, matching the multitude of creaturely essences, is obviously in conflict with divine simplicity. For divine ideas cannot be creatures, as they are the creative exemplars of all creation; therefore, since everything is either a creature or the Creator, they must be identical with God. But how can several distinct ideas be one and the same absolutely simple divine essence? On Aquinas' solution, God preconceives his creatures indirectly, in and through cognizing the worthiest object of cognition, namely, divine essence. However, since this cognition is perfect, God cognizes divinity not only as it is in itself, but also in all possible ways in which it can even imperfectly be imitated or participated in. It is the diversity and multiplicity of these possible ways that accounts for the multiplicity of divine ideas, without, however, compromising divine simplicity; for of course the multiplicity of the ways in which a single object can be conceived does not entail the multiplicity of the object itself.

Ockham rejects this solution (as well as those of Henry of Ghent and Scotus), and simply identifies divine ideas with the creatures themselves. He can do so because he no longer takes divine ideas to be the universal archetypes of creation. According to his definition, an idea is "something cognized by an effective intellectual principle, looking to which something active can produce something in real existence" (1979: Ord. I, d. 35, q. 5: 486). In using this definition, Ockham exploits an existing ambiguity in the medieval usage of 'idea', which was taken to stand either for that *by which* something is cognized or for *that which* is cognized. Taking 'idea' in the latter way, Ockham can say that there is no conflict between the multiplicity of divine ideas and the simplicity of God, since the multiplicity of ideas is just the multiplicity of creatures, cognized by God in a single intuitive act of cognition from all eternity. As a consequence, according to Ockham, God does not even have universal ideas; the only universals in God's mind are the universal concepts of human beings existing in God's mind as its objects, just as any other created singular. Given that for Ockham abstraction is not the grasp

of a common essence enabling one to have essential cognition of all singulars of a certain kind, but merely the indifferent cognition of any singular, for him the abstractive, universal cognition of any class of singulars is inferior to knowing each fully, intuitively. (Clearly, a teacher knowing each of his students personally by name knows them better than another knowing them merely as ‘a student of mine.’) Thus, this conception, in tune with Ockham’s nominalist epistemology, not only solves ‘the simplicity problem’ of divine ideas, but even provides a neat foundation for the claim of the perfection of the divine cognition of creatures.

The Trinity

But the absolutely perfect cognition, perfect not only in its mode but also in its object, is God’s self-cognition, which, coupled with self-love, was traditionally construed as constituting the Trinity of divine persons. According to the Augustine/Boethius-inspired medieval doctrine, the three divine persons, each identical with the same divine essence yet distinct from one another, are distinct on account of the relative opposition there is between them, which, however, is not there between them and the non-relational divine essence. The divine persons are the subsistent relations constituted by divine knowledge and divine love, which provides their distinction on account of the relative opposition between the knower and the known and the lover and the beloved. This is so because the knower as such, in so far as it is the knower, is not the same as the known, in so far as it is known, even if it is the same God who is both the knower and the known. That is to say, the relations of knowing and being known and loving and being loved themselves, if they are subsistent entities (which in the case of God they have to be, since their being, on account of divine simplicity, has to be the same, indivisible existence of God), have to be distinct on account of their relative opposition, even if they have to be identical with the same non-relational absolute entity, namely, the divine essence, that is, God himself.

This doctrine as it stands, and especially with its further medieval refinements, runs directly counter to Ockham’s philosophically motivated programme of ‘ontological reduction.’ For the doctrine essentially demands precisely the types of entities Ockham’s programme was designed to eliminate (among others), namely, relational entities (in this case, even subsistent, and not merely inherent ones). Ockham’s solution is simply to make an exception in the divine case: although there are no created relations signified by relative terms on top of substance and quality, there *are* such uncreated relations, namely, the divine persons, really distinct from one another, and (making *another* exception to his philosophical views) merely formally distinct from the divine essence. To be sure, Ockham may justifiably claim that supernatural relations are ‘extraordinary.’ However, this strategy soon becomes suspicious when this sort of solution becomes the rule rather than the exception, and indeed when the rule simply consists in making exceptions to otherwise universal rules.

The hypostatic union

This sort of strategy is clearest in the case of Ockham's interpretation of the hypostatic union, that is, the doctrine of the union of divine and human natures in the person of Christ. The traditional understanding of the doctrine would claim that just as in any other human being the individual human person, that is, the *suppositum* or *hypostasis* of human nature, instantiates this nature, so does the divine person of the Son in the case of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christ, the eternal Son of God, became truly a human being in the same species with us, having the same nature as we do, only in his case the hypostasis or suppositum instantiating human nature is one of the divine persons, the person of the Son, the divine Word, who, being identical with divine nature, is God himself. Thus, Christ is man and God on account of his two natures, but he, the uncreated divine suppositum of human nature, certainly cannot be identical with his created human nature, referred to by the abstract term 'humanity'.

On Ockham's logical doctrine of the relationship between concrete and abstract absolute terms, however, these terms are synonymous in their proper sense, and hence interchangeable and mutually predicable of each other, unless the abstract term is used as an abbreviation of a complex phrase (say, taking 'humanity' to mean 'man as such' or 'man in so far as man', which would falsify all accidental predications about 'humanity').¹⁰ Thus, the concrete term 'man' and its abstract correlate 'humanity' are interchangeable, whence 'A man is a humanity' is just as true as 'A man is a man' is. This, however, does not mean that 'Every man is a humanity' is true, precisely because of the theological doctrine of the hypostatic union. On Ockham's proposal, even if for Aristotle this sentence would have to be true, for theologians it cannot be, for on their understanding the nominal definition of the term 'man' would have to be "A man is a nature composed of a body and an intellective soul, not sustained by any suppositum, or is some suppositum sustaining such a nature composed of a body and an intellective soul" (*SL I*, 7: 25), where the first member of this disjunction is true of any human being other than Christ, and the second is true only of Christ.

In Ockham's discussion it is not clear whether this nominal definition would be an indication that theologians would actually have to have a different concept of human beings than Aristotle did, although according to a strong interpretation of his doctrine of nominal definitions, he would be committed to this implication. In any case, his great follower, the Parisian philosopher John Buridan, would explicitly draw a similar conclusion in connection with the theological doctrine of the Eucharist: according to Buridan, Aristotle must have had a different concept of accidents from that of Christian theologians.

10. *SL I*, 8: 30. Thus, even if 'man' and 'humanity' stand for the same things in 'A man runs' and 'A humanity runs', taking 'humanity' to mean the same as 'man as such', the second predication is false even if the first is true.

The Eucharist

On the common medieval doctrine of the Eucharist, after consecration the substance of the bread and the substance of the wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ, which of course cannot be informed by the visible accidents (dimensions, shape, colour, taste and so on) of bread and wine; therefore, those accidents have to exist there miraculously, sustained by divine power without actually inhering in any substance. The metaphysical problem this account generated for medieval Aristotelian theologians was the very possibility of the miracle understood in these terms. For on Aristotle's description in the *Categories*, an accident is a being in a subject. But the miracle would require that accidents exist miraculously not in any subject. However, if for an accident to be is for it to be in a subject, then for it *not* to be in a subject is for it *not* to be at all. Thus, the miracle, requiring the existence of accidents not in a subject, apparently requires the verification of explicit contradictories, which was generally regarded as absolutely impossible, something that cannot be done even by divine power.

Still, Ockham would not find any difficulty in accounting for the separate existence of accidents. After all, the only accidents he acknowledges are absolute qualities, which are really distinct entities from substances. The rest of the Aristotelian categories having been reduced to these two, he only needs to account for the possibility of their supernatural separability. But since any two really distinct entities can be kept in existence by God alone, separately from each other, even if one is naturally dependent on the other, the separate existence of the accidents of bread and wine in the miracle of the Eucharist does not pose a separate problem for Ockham. Of course, he does have to account for the apparent quantity that is obviously there after the conversion of the substance of the bread into the body of Christ, but since he identified quantity with *either substance or quality*, even if the quantity identical with substance is gone, the quantity identical with quality may still remain (Ockham 1986: 84–5).

CONCLUSION: THE SEPARATION OF
RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR DISCOURSE

However, as Buridan makes it clear in his own discussion alluded to above (Buridan 1964: lb. 4, q. 6; Bakker 2001), this solution requires that theologians have a concept of accidents radically different from that of Aristotle. For on the Ockhamist theory of concepts, endorsed and further developed by Buridan himself, any categorical concept is either absolute or connotative. But on his analysis, Aristotle's concept of an accident, even as conceived by means of a concept expressed by an abstract term, such as 'whiteness', must be connotative, for on Aristotle's conception any whiteness must be the whiteness *of something*. However, on the theologians' conception 'whiteness' is an absolute term, expressing an absolute concept. Thus

Ockham and the rest of Christian theologians on Buridan's Ockhamist analysis do not have the same conception of accidents in general that Aristotle himself did. Therefore, given the foundational character of the distinction between substance and accident in Aristotelian metaphysics, Aristotle and the theologians cannot be regarded as having the same conceptual idiom.

In view of this result, one may safely conclude that even if Ockham is *not* the religious heretic, philosophical sceptic or general destroyer of the scholastic synthesis that later (mostly Catholic) critics of his nominalism tend to depict him as, there is something in Ockham's nominalism that, viewed from the perspective of later developments, definitely points in the direction of these developments. In particular, Ockham's nominalism points in the direction of the modern separation of religious (theological) and secular (philosophical and scientific) discourse, the synthesis of which was one of the most important achievements of the great metaphysical theological systems of the thirteenth century, especially of the system of Thomas Aquinas.

FURTHER READING

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On THE EUCHARIST see also Vol. 3, Ch. 3. On THE TRINITY see also Chs 2, 8; Vol. 1, Chs 14, 17, 20; Vol. 3, Chs 3, 9, 17; Vol. 4, Ch. 4; Vol. 5, Chs 12, 23.