OCKHAM'S PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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Ockham's pre-Avignon writings fill 18 volumes in the modern edition and there is an extensive secondary literature growing all the time. The following is a sketch, ***mainly of his theses or conclusions,*** generally without much discussion of his reasons, with some references to the work of scholars in this field. The purpose of this summary is to help readers unfamiliar with Ockham's work decide whether it is worth studying.

This sketch gives more detail and will provide further documentation for material included in the Introduction to Ockham, *On Heretics, Books 1-5, and Against John,* Chapters 5-16, pages 13-23.[1]

Contents

Universals

A universal is a term any occurrence[2] of which can be predicated[3] of any member or members of a set of similar things.[4] Examples: "human being", "horse", "animal", "living being", "planet", "chair", "individual", "universal".

Does the use of such a term presuppose or imply that the members of the class share something real? E.g. is "human nature" a reality shared by all human beings?

According to Plato, the individual members of a class share an "Idea" or "Form". According to him, the Form of humanity is something real — more real than any individual human being — which exists separately from the individuals which share the Form.[5] Aristotle rejected the thesis that Forms exist separately from the individuals that share in them.[6] Medieval thinkers followed him in this, but many of them still attributed some kind or degree of reality to shared natures. A common medieval view can be set out as follows[7].

> (1) Each member of a class of similar things (e.g. human beings) has as one of its constituents something which is in some way real (human nature) which is present in every member.

> (3) This constituent, the nature, does not exist separately from the individuals.

> (2) It is in some way a unity (e.g. human nature is *one and the same* in every human being).

> (4) It is in some way *distinct* from each individual.[8]

> (5) The mind forms a universal concept by "abstracting" (i.e. "drawing out") the nature from one or more of the individuals in which it exists and giving it mental existence as a universal; the same nature thus has two kinds of existence, one in individuals outside the mind and the other in the mind.[9]

> (6) When an individual comes into existence, the common nature is somehow individuated to this particular instance (e.g. by being received into a quantum of matter).[10]

Against all such theories Ockham maintains that every thing, right through, in

all its components, is individual "of itself" and therefore does not need to be individuated, and that no part of one individual is also a part of another individual.[11]

Ockham's alternative account of universality is in terms of signs and likenesses. A universal term is *an individual thing* that can be used as a sign standing for other individuals that resemble one another.[12] Universal terms include written signs, vocal utterances and concepts.[13] A written word or phrase, e.g. "human being", is an individual, namely a collection of particles of ink on paper, which can stand for you or me or some or all of the individuals that resemble us. The spoken term "human being" is an individual disturbance in the air. A concept is also an individual. Ockham hesitated over what kind of individual a concept is, but, convinced by the arguments of his Franciscan colleague Walter Chatton,[14] he eventually decided that a concept is an individual act of understanding.[15]

A spoken or written sign signifies whatever thing the concept signifies, so if the concept changes, the signification of the spoken or written word will change.[16] Spoken and written signs are conventional, i.e. they are given meaning by some process of agreement among members of a language community; but the mental act *and its standing for things outside the mind* is *natural*, in the sense that it arises in a way we cannot control, without any act of will, and it is what it is irrespective of the language community we belong to.

The thing and the mind jointly cause naturally an understanding of the individual thing and leave an effect in the mind, a "habit";[17] this and other similar knowledges of other resembling things naturally (i.e. without any human decision) cause a universal concept.[18]

Individuals are really (i.e. truly, i.e. it is true to say they are) alike and unlike, apart from human interests and human thought, so universal concepts are not arbitrary.[19] Though some signs may not resemble the thing signified (e.g. the verbal utterance "human being" does not resemble a human being), a concept, according to Ockham, does (in some way) resemble the thing it signifies.[20]

In short: there is nothing real that different things share as part of their make-up, yet they do truly resemble one another, and in our thought, speech and writing there are signs that can stand for any or all of the resembling individuals.[21]

Ockham's account has some puzzling aspects. What does it mean for one thing to "stand for" another? How can an act of understanding be also a sign? And how can an act of understanding resemble a thing?[22]

Distinctions

According to point (4) of the common theory sketched above,[23] there is some sort of distinction between the nature that is present in the individual and that individual (e.g. between your human nature and you). According to Duns Scotus, the nature is an entity with a "less-than-numerical" unity[24] present in all the individuals, which is "contracted" to a given individual by a numerically unique individuating entity (which Scotus sometimes calls its "thisness", *haecceitas*); between the nature as it exists in the individual and the individuating entity there is a "formal distinction" or "formal non-identity", meaning that though these two entities cannot exist separately (i.e. a human nature cannot exist separately from any human individual, and a "thisness" cannot exist by itself), nevertheless the nature and the individuating entity are not simply identical, because neither is mentioned in the essential definition of the other.[25] A formal distinction or non-identity is a "real" distinction, in the sense that it is not fabricated by our minds, but it is not a distinction between separately existing things. Formal distinctions figured in several parts of Scotus's philosophy and theology.[26]

According to Ockham there are no formal distinctions in creatures. The only distinctions in creatures[27] are (1) between thing and thing (between *res* and *res*, a "*re*al" distinction), (2) between concept and concept (a "distinction of reason", of *ratio*), (3) between thing and concept, or (4) between an aggregate of thing and concept from a thing or a concept.[28]

The only way to prove a *real* distinction between X and Y is to show the truth of "X is Z" and "Y is not Z". If such an argument ever proved a merely formal distinction, there would be no way to prove a real distinction.[29]

Relations

Ockham's account of a universal (as a sign standing for individuals that *resemble* one another) uses the notion of resemblance, which is a relation. Some of his contemporaries (notably Duns Scotus) regarded a relation as a reality or entity or thing, additional to the things related.[30] As Ockham sometimes puts it, they regarded a relation as a *res parva* ("little thing") or *res media* ("intermediate thing").[31] If you are looking at a white wall, and someone in Rome is painting a wall white, then as you look at your wall another entity imperceptibly comes upon it, namely a likeness with the wall in Rome.[32]

According to Ockham, however, anyone following the principles of Aristotle's

philosophy would reject that opinion.[33] Only absolute things exist, namely substances and their qualities — in case of the white walls, the two walls and their qualities of whiteness. To say that the two walls are alike in being white is just another way of saying that the two walls are both white.[34]

Aristotle's account does not mean that relationships are invented by the human mind and are in that sense not "real". Things *really* are related, i.e. it is true to say that things are related: even if no mind existed, things would still truly be similar and dissimilar, there would still be unity and order in the universe.[35] The reality (in this sense) of relations is why complexes count as things: a complex is unified by the order of its parts.[36]

However, Ockham believes that Aristotle's position is at some points wrong,[37] i.e. that some relations are indeed relative things additional to the absolute things related. These include relations in the divinity and the relation between the divine and human nature in Christ — see the sections on the Trinity and the Incarnation below (pp.22, 23).

In addition, Ockham seems to recognise philosophical reasons for accepting the thinghood of some relations.[38]

As Adams remarks, "On examination, Ockham's concessions to the thing-theory of real relation are quite substantial".[39]

Intuitive and abstractive cognition

Factual knowledge of individuals is caused by what Ockham calls "intuitive" cognition.[40] Intuitive cognitions give us immediately (i.e. not by any process of inference) evident knowledge of present-tense statements about an individual's existence or non-existence and other contingent facts about it.[41] Intuitive cognition can cause evident knowledge[42] of an affirmative or negative contingent proposition characterising a subject ("S is P", or "S is not P"), and it can cause evident knowledge of the subject's existence or non-existence ("S exists" or "S does not exist"), though intuitive cognition of something that does *not* exist cannot happen naturally, without a miracle.[43] Since a cognition is itself an individual mental act distinct from the thing cognised, God could create or conserve an intuitive cognition without the existence or presence of the thing;[44] in that case we would know evidently that the thing did *not* exist or is *not* present[45] (otherwise the cognition would not be true and would therefore not be intuitive — only true cognition counts as intuitive).[46] However, God has power to deceive us; he could cause in us an (abstractive) cognition by which we

would believe that a thing exists when it does not.[47]

Besides intuitive cognitions, Ockham posits abstractive cognitions, that is, cognitions that "abstract from" (meaning "do not relate to") contingent facts.[48] Abstractive cognitions are sufficient to cause knowledge of necessary propositions, i.e. propositions that are true no matter what contingent propositions may be true or false.[49] There are also "imperfect" intuitive or "recordative" cognitions (which are kinds of abstractive cognitions),[50] which enable us to assert (though not evidently — memories can be wrong) that some contingent proposition *was* true.[51] Every intuitive cognition is accompanied by (because it causes)[52] an abstractive cognition, which generates a habit[53] that enables us to think about the object afterwards when it no longer exists or is no longer present.[54] An intuitive cognition does not generate any habit that would facilitate a future intuitive cognition: seeing now will not help you see later.[55]

Species in medio

Intuitive cognition is direct perception of a thing, according to Ockham. Many of his contemporaries held that we perceive external objects through an intermediary — that when we see something there is a chain of effects from the thing through the medium to the eye. The intermediate effects were called *species in medio* ("likenesses in the medium", not to be confused with *species* as a sub-class of a genus).[56] According to Ockham such intermediaries would not facilitate, but would obstruct, intuitive cognition — we would intuit the species, not the object; sensible and intelligible species should therefore not be posited.[57] Perception involves "action at a distance": the object acts on our cognitive faculties directly from a distance, provided the distance is not too great.[58] There is however an effect on the sense organ — not a *species* but some other quality — which may persist after the object changes or is removed. If the persistence of this quality makes us think we see what is not really there (e.g. when a burning stick whirled around seems to make a fiery circle), it is because we make a faulty inference, which further experience and thought may correct.[59]

Science

Knowledge, including science, begins with intuitive cognitions.[60] According to Aristotle, science is of universals.[61] That means, for Ockham (since universals are terms, i.e. parts of statements), that science is of *terms* that may *stand for* things; science is not directly of things. Science is knowledge of propositions,

which are complexes of terms including universals. The terms of a science may stand for other terms (as in grammar or logic, which are *scientie sermocinales*), but in the "real" sciences (e.g. physics) they stand for individual things outside the mind.[62] A science is an ordered collection of statements, arguments, explanations etc., unified not by its concern with a certain nature but by the occurrence in its statements of a set of interrelated terms.[63] These collections may overlap; the same truth may belong to more than one science.[64] One science may be "subalternate" (subordinate) to another (e.g. optics to geometry).[65]

According to some theologians, theology is a science; Thomas Aquinas, for example, held that theology is a subalternate science "because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the knowledge had by God and the blessed".[66] Ockham rejects this. "No one ever knows those conclusions evidently unless he knows them through experience or through premises evidently known. Hence it is nothing to say that *I* know some conclusions because *you* know principles that I believe on your say-so. Similarly it is childish to say that I know theological conclusions because God knows principles that I believe because he reveals them".[67] According to Ockham, evident knowledge of contingent truths is given only by intuitive cognition, and in this life we cannot (at least, not without a miracle)[68] have intuitive knowledge of God. Therefore contingent propositions of theology (e.g. that God became a human being) cannot be evident to us (without miracle) in this life; they are beliefs, not items of scientific knowledge.[69] In 1 Dial. 1 Ockham sometimes refers to the science of theology and the science of the canonists, and says that the science of the canonists is subalternate to theology; but these are sciences only in a broad sense.[70]

Motion, Time and Place[71]

Ockham believed that many moderns[72] were too ready to posit (i.e. assert the existence of) "things" — little things, realities, formalities, entities. They seemed to suppose that to every term there must correspond some entity; this led them, he thought, to mistakes about motion, time and place.[73] Some moderns regarded the nouns "motion", "time", "the instant", "place", etc. as names of things,[74] whereas in fact the purported things are not things. He argues[75] in reference to each of the terms "motion", "time", etc., that it is not the name of "a thing totally distinct" from a substance or quality.[76] Such a term signifies not any of these these pseudo-things, but a substance or a quality, and in addition conveys some information about it. Ockham calls a term of this kind

"connotative":[77] it "consignifies" or "gives to understand" or "imports" or "signifies secondarily" something about the substance or quality that it primarily signifies.[78]

Many abstract terms have been introduced for decoration or brevity of speech.[79] To understand statements in which they are included, we may need to spell out a "brief expression" (*brevis oratio*) into a "long expression" (*longa oratio*). Some words in the short expression may need to be replaced by definitions or descriptions, and single statements may need to be "resolved" (or "expounded", i.e. laid out) into sets of several statements.[80] It will then be possible to accept or reject the short expression by considering whether the statements that make up the long expression are all true.[81] Ockham does not propose that we never use the short version,[82] and he does not insist that there is just one correct resolution.[83]

The only *things*, according to Ockham, are individual substances and their individual qualities, for example Socrates and Socrates' whiteness.[84] Some substances are bodies (including bodies of air and bodies of water). A bodily substance or quality is one that has "part outside of part".[85] Whatever causes a bodily substances and its qualities to come into being causes them to come into being with part outside of part[86] and causes them to be in a place (if they have a place).

Space or place is not there waiting empty until something is produced into it; space is produced in the production of bodies. A body's place is the inner surface of the bodies (which may be air or water) that touch it. The world, i.e. the totality of bodies, is not in any place, since there are no bodies outside it.[87] Causes make some bodies move. The world as a whole does not move into new places, since there is no outside place, but the *primum mobile*, i.e. the outermost sphere of the world, does move,[88] rotating with the swiftest and most uniform of all motions.

"Motion" (*motus*) in a broad sense includes both successive change (which is motion in the strict sense) and sudden or instantaneous change; successive change includes acquisition or loss of a quality (e.g. warming, cooling) and local motion, i.e. change from one place to another passing through all intermediate places.[89] Motion is not an extra reality or thing that comes upon something for the (perhaps brief) time of its movement. Ockham argues that motion is no such transient thing, that the only things involved in motion are permanent,[90] namely the thing that causes the change, the thing that changes, the quality it acquires or loses, or (in local motion) the places it successively occupies. For continuous

local motion, the "long expression" is that something causes X, which at a certain time is in a certain place, to be immediately afterwards in the immediately adjacent place, and so on without pause while the motion lasts.[91] He offers resolutions for various statements about motion.[92]

The local motion of a body can be perceived only because there are minds that can know where the body is from instant to instant. Moving body X *was* there then, it is here now, it *will be* somewhere else in the future. Movement involves past, present and future; past and future do not exist but can be known by mind. A mind can remember the earlier state of a moving body and it can anticipate its later state, and thus it can comprehend motion.[93] If mind could not exist, things would still move, but their motion would not be perceived.

Time is doubly dependent on mind: time is the motion against which a mind measures other motions.[94] The definition of motion does not refer to mind, but the definition of time does: "Time is the motion by which *the soul* knows how great another motion is."[95] A mind perceives time when it measures one motion against another, for example against the movement of a clock or the movement of the sun, or (in the last analysis) against the movement of the *primum mobile*, the outermost heavenly sphere.[96] If mind could not exist, there could be no time. The *primum mobile* would move even if no mind were possible, but its motion would not be perceived, and its motion would not be time because no mind would use it to measure other motions.[97] The motion of the *primum mobile* is time because of mind, though time is not caused by mind.[98]

Statements about time are to be resolved into a "long story" by substituting references to the motion of the *primum mobile*:

> If anyone is in doubt about a proposition in which the noun 'time' appears, let them put in its place this whole locution (*oratio*), 'Something [i.e. the *primum mobile*] moves most swiftly and uniformly, considering which the intellect can ascertain how much or how long something [else] moves, lasts, or rests', or something similar. And sometimes in place of another term another locution should be put (or sometimes various locutions according to the variety of the other), as in place of 'Time is continuous' should be put this whole locution 'Something moves without rest uniformly and most swiftly'. And so concerning similar cases it must be understood that we use the noun 'time' for a long locution, and similarly sometimes we use a short proposition for a long one composed of other terms than those put in the short proposition.[99]

Some held that the instant ("now") is one and the same thing passing rapidly through time (*res raptim transiens*), others held that every new instant is a new

thing that exists just at that instant (*res statim desinens*).[100] In Ockham's view neither opinion is true, because "now" is not a *res* (thing) at all.[101] "Now" refers to a definite position of the continuously moving *primum mobile,* defined by the relation of its parts to other bodies.[102]

Though time and the perception of motion require minds, this does not mean that if there were no minds there would be no motion: bodies would move, some swiftly, some slowly, just as they do now; only no one would know their movement.

Ockham is not trying to get rid of the language of time and space. He uses "outside", "now", "here", "swift" and similar terms. He is trying to get rid of the extra entities.

None of this is mysterious, in his view. Uneducated people are not puzzled by time, space and motion. Philosophers, or rather inadequately-trained philosophers, have been misled by the language that has become customary in their discipline.[103]

For Ockham space and time were not — as they were after Newton for almost everyone[104] until recently — infinite and eternal and prior to things that come to exist in space and time. For Ockham there is no sense in asking why the world was created when it was and not sooner or later, or where it was and not somewhere else. According to Ockham, space and time are not entities. Bodies that are caused by God and by secondary causes are caused with "part outside part" and thereby occupy and constitute places or space; some bodies are caused to move; minds perceive motion, and when mind measures motion, the motion that is the ultimate standard by which motion is measured is time.

Quantity

Ockham's treatment of motion, time and place is part of his treatment of terms belonging to the category of quantity. He rejects the opinion that quantity, number, point, line, surface, and body are things distinct from substances and qualities.[105] Ockham argues that each of these terms signifies some substance or quality and connotes some additional information about the thing signified.[106]

On quantity Ockham expresses himself circumspectly, "reciting" what he believes was Aristotle's opinion without asserting it,[107] because the opinion he rejects had been used by many theologians in formulating the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. This made his account of the eucharist controversial.[108]

Categories

Relation and quantity are among Aristotle's categories or "predicaments", which are: substance, quality, quantity, relation, action, passion, time, place, position and habit.[109] These are abstract nouns, but Ockham points out that Aristotle used other parts of speech also.[110] The list of categories is often interpreted as an attempt to list the kinds of things there are. Ockham instead adopts the suggestion of Averroes that the categories classify anwers to the various questions that can be asked about something.[111] The answers are terms, so according to Ockham the list of categories is a classification not of things but of terms, only some of which directly stand for things: "It must not be imagined that the ten categories are so many things really and totally distinct among themselves".[112] Terms of substance and quality (though not all qualities),[113] and also a few relations, are the only category terms that directly stand for things. Others stand for some substance or quality and convey some information about it, e.g. how big it is, where it is, what it resembles, and so on. *repetition* A term that stands for something and conveys extra information about it is "connotative", and statements including connotative terms are "exponible", i.e. equivalent to a set of statements in which those terms do not occur.[114]

Unnecessary entities not to be posited

Ockham sometimes argues like this: "Some moderns posit such-and-such an entity. Aristotle does not; it does not fit into the framework of Aristotle's philosophy; positing it has inconvenient or absurd implications; and anyway we don't need it, since there is an alternative account (namely...) that explains whatever the former account explains. *No unnecessary entities should be posited.* Therefore this entity should not be posited."[115]

"Posit" means "to assert the existence of". "*Not* to posit" means "not to assert the existence of", which does not mean "to *deny* the existence of":[116] sometimes we should not assert the existence of something that does, in fact, exist. There may be more things in heaven and earth than we know about.

The dictum that no unnecessary entities should be posited is sometimes called (inappropriately) "Ockham's razor".[117]

One version reads:

  It is pointless to do by many what could be done by fewer (*Frustra fit per*

plura quod potest fieri per pauciora). This is a principle that should not be denied, because no plurality should be posited unless it can be proved [1] by reason, or [2] by experience, or [3] by the authority of Him who cannot be deceived or err.[118]

Point 3 means: by God's revelation, found in the Bible and the teaching of the Church. (Perhaps we should add: "or by the report of some trustworthy person who is likely to know" — such reports of course being fallible.)[119]

Another version:

> When a proposition is verified of things, if two things are sufficient for its truth, it is superfluous to posit a third.[120]

Sometimes the idea is expressed in terms of "saving" something: we should not posit anything more than is sufficient to "save" (i.e. explain or satisfy) this or that.[121] This last version figures in Ockham's discussion of the Church: Christ's promise to be with the Church all days (Matthew 28:20) will be "saved" (satisfied) if even one Christian avoids falling into heresy.[122]

This should not be described as a "principle of parsimony". According to Ockham, the universe may not be as simple as it could be:

> God does many things by many that he could do by fewer, and no other reason [besides his will] need be sought; and from the fact that he wills, it is done suitably and not pointlessly.[123]

God's freedom is the reason why we may have to recognise some realities which, were it not for (2) experience or (3) divine revelation, there would have been no (1) reason to posit. We find out what God has created by experience or revelation.

Perhaps the point is not that *unnecessary* entities should not be posited, but rather that entities should not be posited without certain kinds of justification.

To attempt a summary: I should not assert that X exists unless I observe it, or someone (God, or someone else who knows) tells me that it does, or its existence can be proved by reasoning, or it is needed to explain some fact; but even if I should not assert its existence, it may nevertheless exist.

Nominalism

Did Ockham have a "nominalist program" of reducing the catalogue of entities to a minimum? Did he have *any* overall program?[124] This is a matter for

conjecture. Perhaps he did not have any grand philosophical project but simply tried to answer the various questions that academic tradition and his own reflection put before him. But in doing that job he seems to have come to the opinion that many of his contemporaries and predecessors had misunderstood Aristotle on certain points on which, in his opinion, Aristotle was right. The attempt to correct these mistakes led him to eliminate many entities postulated by his contemporaries and predecessors (especially by Duns Scotus). Perhaps this developed into a general campaign to eliminate as many entities as possible, or perhaps it did not. In any case his philosophical techniques have been of interest to later philosophers who have been interested in the construction of nominalist and minimalist theories.[125] Some fifteenth century scholastics who called themselves nominalists (Ockham did not use the term) regarded Ockham as the founder of their school.[126]

Causes

If some things cannot be asserted to exist unless their existence can be proved, we need to ask what can be proved. On efficient causes (i.e. causes that bring things into existence) Ockham holds that it cannot be proved that one particular thing is the efficient cause of another thing. God could have ordained (perhaps he did, for all we know!) that God himself alone would cause combustion to happen whenever fire is near a combustible, without the fire having that effect. We can never prove from an effect that something is a man, because an angel could produce the same effect.[127] From experience all we know is that when one thing is found some other thing is found that otherwise is not found.[128] It is not true that every change must have an efficient cause distinct from the thing changing.[129] On ends or final causes, Ockham held that it cannot be proved that every effect has a final cause; it cannot be proved that an agent that always acts in the same way acts for an end.[130]

Existence of God

In some places Ockham says that God's existence can be proved,[131] but in fact his opinion seems to be that the existence of the being Christians call God cannot be demonstrated, though perhaps there are persuasive arguments. "The proposition 'God exists' is not self-evident; it cannot be proved from self-evident premises, because every argument assumes something doubtful or some *creditum* [a matter of belief]; nor is it known by experience."[132]

Philosophers since Plato had tried to prove the existence of a god by way of causation.[133] According to Ockham such proofs fall short of demonstration. It is difficult or impossible to prove that there cannot be a regress to infinity in causes of the same kind one of which can exist without the other (as, for example, a child may continue to exist after its parents die), or that such a series must have a cause external to the series.[134] Conserving causes might seem to offer a stronger argument for God's existence: if something is produced it needs to be conserved; conserving causes must exist at the same time as the thing conserved, and (if they form a chain) they must exist at the same time as one another; and (according to Aristotle) there cannot be a simultaneous infinity; therefore there must be at least one unproduced cause at the head of any such finite series.[135] But perhaps there is nothing that is (in the relevant sense) produced or conserved, there may be only permanent things that are moved or changed, i.e. there may not be any effects besides the things caused by celestial bodies or separated substances (that is, the moving causes posited in Aristotle's account of the machinery of the solar system).[136] And even if some things are produced and conserved, it still could not be sufficiently proved that there is *only one* unproduced conserving cause.[137] There may not be a single cause of the totality of things.[138]

An argument like Anselm's to prove the existence of a nature than which none is nobler or better cannot prove that there is only one such being.[139]

An argument from the apparent purposiveness of nature[140] will not succeed since we have no reason to think that an agent that always acts in the same way acts for an end, or that a non-intelligent agent acts for a purpose appointed by an intelligence.[141]

God as Cause

If, however, we accept by faith that God does exist, still it cannot be philosophically demonstrated that God's causation of things is contingent and free.[142] It cannot be demonstrated that God is the cause, mediate or immediate, total or partial, of *any* effect, or that he is able to cause directly, without any co-cause, anything any other cause can cause.[143] It cannot be demonstrated that he knows or wills anything other than himself.[144] These propositions that cannot be philosophically demonstrated are, like God's existence, held by faith.

God's Ideas

According to Augustine, adapting Plato, God creates individuals in accordance with the Ideas in his mind of their natures.[145] Since according to Ockham's account of Universals there are no natures, a different account is needed. "Almost all doctors agree in a common conclusion, namely that an idea is the divine essence really and differs from it only conceptually [*ratione*]".[146] Ockham rejects this. Nothing real differs from something real by a distinction of reason.[147] According to him the ideas are not God. Neither are they the natures of the species or genera of creatures, since natures are not realities. According to Ockham, God creates each individual in accordance with his knowledge of *the very individual* to be created. The ideas are the infinity[148] of individual things he could create, which are known by God as individuals before they exist (if they ever do)[149] — he knows them by intuitive knowledge when they are nothing.[150] A human being could have intuitive knowledge of a non-existent thing only by miracle:[151] God has such knowledge as a matter of course.

God's attributes, faculties

According to Scotus, God's attributes (power, goodness, knowledge, wisdom, etc.) are formally distinct from the divine essence and from one another. Ockham once again rejects a "formal distinction".[152] God is absolutely simple, without parts of any kind.[153] The attributes are terms. What each of these terms *stands for* is in no way distinct from God himself or from another attribute. God's justice is himself, his wisdom is himself, his justice is his wisdom.[154] Likewise terms referring to God's will, volitions, intellect, cognitions, etc., are many but stand for the one simple being, namely God himself.[155]

Attributal and other terms applied to God are not synonyms because they have application also to creatures, in which the realities they stand for are not identical.[156] The wisdom of Socrates and the justice of Socrates are not Socrates himself.

God's power and freedom

Ockham believes, though he does not think it can be proved, that God's attributes include omnipotence and freedom: that is, God can do anything doable, and he freely choses to do only some of the things he can do.[157] The Christian creed begins with the affirmation, "I believe in God the father

almighty". Ockham takes "almighty" (*omnipotens*, "all powerful") to mean that God is able to do everything the doing of which does not include a contradiction.[158] From that article follows the "famous proposition of the theologians", that whatever God produces by means of secondary causes he can (since he can do anything that is doable) produce and conserve immediately without them.[159] It follows also that "every absolute thing distinct in place and subject from another absolute thing can by God's power exist with the second thing destroyed";[160] for example, there can be an intuitive cognition of something even after it ceases to exist.[161]

Like Duns Scotus and others,[162] Ockham distinguishes between God's "ordinate" and "absolute" power. God's power can be considered "absolutely", i.e. without reference to any decision he has actually made, or "ordinately", i.e. with reference to the decisions (ordinances) he *has* made. Ockham explains:

> This distinction is not to be understood as meaning that in God there are really two powers, one ordinate and the other absolute, because in God there is just one power *ad extra* [i.e. in respect of things other than himself], which is in every way God himself.[163] Nor is it to be understood that God can do some things ordinately and others absolutely and not ordinately, because God can do nothing inordinately. But it is to be understood that 'to be able to do something' is sometimes taken in accordance with laws[164] ordained and established by God, and God is said to be able to do those things by ordinate power (*de potentia ordinata)*; in another way 'to be able' is taken for to be able to do everything the doing of which does not include a contradiction, whether God ordains that he will do it or not (because God *can* do many things he does not will to do)… and these things God is said 'to be able' [to do] by his absolute power (*de potentia absoluta*).[165]

So whatever God actually does is done in accordance with his ordinances. (Of course things done *de potentia ordinata* are also possible *de potentia absoluta*.) A miracle is an exception to the "common course" of nature,[166] but it is not an exception to God's ordinances, which allow for miracles. God's power is not narrowed by what he has done in the past.[167] He cannot cause the past not to have happened,[168] but what he did he still has power never to have done.[169]

Must God keep his promises? Do his ordinances put him under obligation?[170] Can he change his ordinances, as apparently he did when the Old Testament was superseded by the New, and if so might the present religious, moral and natural order be replaced? Such questions occur to Ockham's modern readers,[171] but they do not seem to have occurred to Ockham himself. It has been suggested that the loving nature that has been revealed in God's actions gives assurance that he will not give us any unpleasant surprises, but it seems to me that in

Ockham's theology there are no constraints upon his treatment of creatures.[172]

The soul

Ockham rejects Thomas Aquinas's thesis that the intellective soul is the one and only substantial form of a human being.[173] According to Ockham, a living human being is informed by three forms that are distinct from one another as thing from thing, namely the intellective soul, the sensitive soul and the form of bodily existence.[174] However, there is no real distinction between the intellective soul and its powers, viz. intellect and will (though an intellection is not a volition**).[175] Likewise there are no real distinctions among the powers of the sensitive soul.[176] Whereas the sensitive soul is corruptible and extended, with various parts of it in different parts of the body, the intellective soul is an immaterial and incorruptible form existing as a whole in the whole body and as a whole in each part.[177] According to Ockham it cannot be proved that such an intellective soul exists or that we have acts proper to such a soul; Christians believe these things by faith.[178]

Morality

According to Ockham, morality is partly "positive", i.e. "put there" or "laid down" (*positum*) by authority, and partly non-positive, i.e. not based on any command.[179] Non-positive moral science includes self-evident propositions[180] and also propositions based on experience.[181] Non-positive morality requires that God be loved and obeyed,[182] which is the basis of the positive morality determined by divine laws. Non-positive morality also requires that agreements be kept, which is the basis of the positive morality determined by human law and custom.[183] Non-positive morality and divine positive law are mutually reinforcing: natural reason enjoins us to love and obey God,[184] and God commands us to follow reason (even erroneous reason).[185] God's particular command, however, can override any general rule of morality;[186] such a command could justify particular acts of hate, theft, or adultery (though they should not then be called by those names).[187] Hatred of God could be a right act if God commanded it.[188] Sin does not consist in anything in the sinful act itself[189] but in its being done contrary to one's obligation.[190] Actual performance of a willed act adds nothing of moral goodness or evil, which belong only to acts of will.[191]

Ockham's opinion that God's command overrides moral rules and statements

that obligations hold "while the divine precept stands (*stante divino precepto*)"[192] may suggest that Ockham holds a "divine command" theory of moral obligation, i.e. that something is morally right only because God commands or permits it, and wrong only because God forbids it.[193] But to say that God's command can override any moral rule does not mean that moral rules hold, when they do hold, only because they are imposed by God's command. Like Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and other Christian theologians, Ockham knew that *transfer to n.148* in some Bible passages God commanded things that would normally be regarded as immoral,[194] but all three held a "natural law" theory of morality, which bases morality on "right reason". According to Scotus, moral propositions which "are true by reason of their terms . . . would be true even if, to assume the impossible, no act of willing existed".[195] According to Gregory of Rimini, "if, to assume the impossible, the divine reason or God himself did not exist, or his reason was in error, still, if someone acted against angelic or human right reason or any other (if there were any), he would sin. And *if there existed absolutely no right reason,* still, if someone acted against what some right reason, if it existed, *would* say should be done, he would sin".[196] Natural morality does not hold only by God's command, but God's command can override natural law because natural law dictates that God must always be obeyed.[197]

More on moral theory: virtue; external action.

Human free choice

According to Ockham, praise and blame assume free choice,[198] and experience shows that we have it.[199] Free will, according to Ockham, following Duns Scotus, is the capacity to choose either X or not-X without being determined one way or the other by any cause other than the will itself.[200] According to Scotus this "power of opposites" exists at an instant; according to Ockham there must be some passage of time.[201] Our choice is free in the sense that we can choose X, and then at a later time not-X, even if otherwise nothing in the universe changes.[202] One choice can constrain another, but only while the former lasts.[203] Habits incline a person to make certain choices, but not inescapably.[204]

According to Ockham freedom of choice is wider in scope than many others (e.g. Thomas Aquinas) believed. According to Ockham, we can not-will (*nolle*) happiness, the good, our ultimate end, we can reject God even intuitively seen,

we can choose to hate God; we can will evil *qua* evil.[205]

God's foreknowledge of human choices

Though our choices are free, God knows with certainty what they will be. How this is possible we cannot understand. That he has such knowledge is a matter of faith.[206] Ockham rejects Aristotle's view that statements about future events that depend on free choice are neither true nor false.[207] Such propositions can be true and God knows them certainly beforehand, though they remain contingent and God's knowledge of them is contingent.[208] "Howevermuch this is true, 'God knows that this side of the contradiction will be true', it is nevertheless *possible* that it never was true."[209] Prophecies inspired by God regarding future contingents are always true, but they are always conditional (even if not explicitly so).[210]

Predestination and Grace

*See McGrath

Ockham rejects the theory of Peter Aureole that a quality God creates in the soul, called "grace", is necessary and sufficient for salvation. According to Ockham, no quality, natural or supernatural, can require God to confer eternal life on any creature (so grace is not sufficient), and he can (*de potentia absoluta*) confer eternal life in the absence of any quality (so grace is not necessary).[211] However, God has *ordained* that salvation *does* require a quality that God creates in the soul, grace (or charity[212]), and according this ordinance no one can enter heaven unless he or she is in the state of grace at the moment of death. So Peter Auriole's position is correct, not *de potentia dei absoluta*, but *de potentia ordinata*.

On grace and predestination the western Church generally followed Augustine. Augustine attacked Pelagius[213] for preaching that we can all be good and attain salvation if only we choose rightly, which anyone can do. According to Augustine no one can choose rightly without the aid of God's grace, which he does not give to everyone and no one can earn; God gives final grace (i.e. grace possessed at the end of life) to those he has predestined to eternal salvation, and we cannot know who they are or why God has chosen them. Theologians at various times have tried to amend this doctrine to allow more scope for human initiative and to make it seem fairer, and others have attacked such

modifications as Pelagian or semi-Pelagian.[214]

An amendment made by some was expressed in the saying "God does not deny grace to those who do what is in them" ("*Facientibus quod in se est deus non denegat gratiam*"), meaning that God will give grace — not as something earned but gratuitously — to those who at every stage do their best, so that they will in the end achieve salvation.[215] If this is so, then Pelagius was right in saying that by consistently doing our best we can all attain salvation, and Augustine was also right in saying that to attain salvation we need grace that cannot be earned. As far as I know, Ockham never adopted the *facientibus* idea, though some have attributed it to him.[216]

According to Ockham, following the Bible,[217] God owes nothing to any creature. Nothing God does can be unjust or unfair or morally bad.[218] God could, without injustice, annihilate any person without giving them eternal life;[219] he could give eternal life to those who live a naturally good life, without faith or grace;[220] he could send good persons to eternal punishment (though "punishment" would not be the appropriate word);[221] he could ordain that someone found good on Tuesday will have eternal life but not someone found good on Wednesday.[222] Absolutely speaking (i.e. *de potentia absoluta*) he *could* do such things, i.e. there would be nothing contradictory if he did;[223] but Christians believe that in accordance with his freely-chosen ordinances God will give eternal life to all who die in a state of grace.[224]

Only by God's gracious acceptance does a morally good act merit eternal life. But even without grace a person can do morally good acts. An act necessarily and intrinsically virtuous is one chosen out of love of God above all things and for God's own sake.[225] Such love is possible for pagans as well as for Christians; it does not require infused faith or grace.[226] Persons not in a state of grace must do good acts as a preparation for grace, but — though they are in some way the reason why God gives them grace — their acts do not *earn* grace,[227] i.e. there would be no injustice if grace were withheld. The reason for predestination is (in most cases) that God foresees that the person will be in charity at the time of death.[228]

Bringing every understanding into captivity to Christ

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul writes of "bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ", 2 Corinthians 10:5.[229]

In Ockham's view, a Christian's understanding owes no obedience to anyone

but Christ, but must accept as true whatever God communicates through the Bible or the teaching of the Church.[230] Human judgment must therefore defer to divine revelation. Whatever God tells us is true, is true.

Hence at various points Ockham modifies positions that seem to be established by philosophical (or theological) argument to conform to the teaching of the Church, even when that seems "more difficult to hold" or even "repugnant to reason".[231] This will be seen at various points in the following sections.[232]

Trinity

The Church teaches (i) that there is **only one** God, (ii) that there are **three persons** — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — **each of whom is God,** and (iii) that the persons are really distinct, i.e. **none of the three is either of the others** (so, for example, "The Son is the Father" is *false*.)[233] The obvious question is whether this set of propositions is self-consistent.

Ockham often refers to God as "the Divine Essence". Like other medieval theologians, he holds that the Divine Essence is numerically singular and absolutely simple, i.e. without parts. He holds (following theological tradition) that the three Persons are constituted by relations, the Father by paternity, the Son by filiation, the Spirit by passive spiration (i.e. by being "breathed" by Father and Son).[234] The difficulty in the doctrine of the Trinity is to reconcile the plurality of really distinct Persons each of whom is God with the numerical singularity and simplicity of the Divine Essence.[235] To deal with this difficulty, Ockham gave limited acceptance to two things he had elsewhere argued against, namely, **(1)** the formal distinction,[236] and **(2)** the reality of relations.[237]

(1) Consider this syllogism: "The Divine Essence is the Father; the Divine Essence is the Son; therefore the Son is the Father". This seems to be an expository syllogism (i.e. a third-figure syllogism in which the terms are all singular) arguing validly from premisses Christians hold as true to a conclusion they regard as false, viz. that the Son is the Father. According to Ockham this syllogism is not valid, and it is not an expository syllogism,[238] because the divine essence is *numerically one unique simple thing that is really several things* distinguished by a formal distinction.[239] A formal distinction is not merely a distinction of reason, because it does not depend on any mind, and it is not a fully *real* distinction, since God is numerically one, unique and simple. Positing a formal distinction does not mean that there are several "formalities" in God.[240] The things formally distinct are numerically one and simple.

Ockham's understanding of the "formal distinction" is this. If *X and Y are really the same thing*, call it W, but X is Z and Y is *not* Z (Z being a thing), then X and Y are formally distinct and W is two things (viz. X and Y). The paradox in this (or singularity, as Ockham calls it — though perhaps it is a contradiction!) is that W is both one thing and two things.[241]

Compare this with his understanding of how a real distinction is proved:[242] If X is Z and Y is not Z, then X and Y are distinct *as one thing from another*. For a formal distinction two conditions must be met: (i) that X and Y are one thing, and (ii) that X is, and Y is not, some other thing. Because of (ii), a formal distinction is real (*ex natura rei*).[243]

Positing a formal distinction is not an explanation; it just restates the problematic doctrine: "I do not believe that a formal distinction is easier to hold than a trinity of Persons with unity of Essence".[244]

(2) The Persons are constituted by three relations. Normally a relation cannot constitute a subsistent being; a relation presupposes the existence of the *relata*, and relational actions (such as begetting) presuppose the existence of the thing acting. (This is true whether or not relations are additional entities.) In the case of the Trinity this is not so. Despite these difficulties, it must be held that the divine Persons are constituted by relations, because (as Ockham understood it) this was the teaching of the Church.[245] In the case of the divinity it must be conceded that relations are realities distinct (formally) from the things related.

Duns Scotus had suggested that the divine intellect was the principle of filiation (the relative property constituting the Son) and the divine will of spiration (constituting the Spirit). According to Scotus there is a formal distinction between God's will and his intellect; according to Ockham there is not.[246] The position of Scotus is tenable only if intellect and will are taken as terms standing for the Divine Essence in its simplicity.[247]

Incarnation

this section needs rewriting

The Church teaches that one of the divine Persons, namely the Son or Word, while remaining God, became a man, Jesus Christ, who was crucified and rose from the dead; and that, though Christ has two natures, divine and human, he is only one person, namely the divine person.[248] The person is *who acts*, so both acts done according to the divine nature and acts done according to human

nature can be attributed to Jesus Christ.[249] The thesis of Nestorius, that in Christ there are two persons, one human and one divine, was rejected by the Council of Chalcedon as a heresy.

In his book "On Christ's person and two natures against Eutyches and Nestorius", Boethius defined a *person* as a rational substance.[250] Medieval theologians added a number of negations to this definition, to exclude from personhood some entities that might qualify under the definition of Boethius.[251] Ockham builds such negations into his definition of "*suppositum"*, the more general concept covering person: "A supposit is a complete being, not constituting any being,[252] not apt to inhere in another, nor to be sustained by another".[253] His definition of "person": "A person is an intellectual supposit."[254] His definition of "a nature": "By a nature I understand an absolute positive thing apt to exist outside the soul."[255]

In Ockham's terminology, the teaching of the Church is that Christ unites two natures, divine and human, in one person or rational *suppositum*, that person being the person of the Son, Christ's humanity not being another *suppositum*.

As a faithful Catholic Ockham accepted this teaching and tried to fit it into his philosophy, to which he made some adjustments.[256] First, he made an exception (another exception) to his ordinary position that relations are not entities really distinct from the absolute things related. Since the union of the Son with a human nature took place at a particular time and was not a mere spatial juxtaposition, there must have been at that time the production of some new entity[257] distinct from the Son and Christ's humanity — not an absolute entity[258] but a relative entity. This relative entity must have come into being in the humanity, since the divine nature is eternally perfect and therefore does not receive new modifications.[259]

Another adjustment was needed to accommodate the point that Christ's humanity was not itself a person, a *suppositum*.[260] The humanity of Socrates is a man, namely Socrates. But the humanity of Christ is not a man, because Christ's person is divine and there is in Christ no human person. In this case, Ockham says, the humanity is "sustained" by the divinity somewhat as an accident is sustained by a substance.[261] (Being sustained is apparently not the same as inhering, but the idea is not clearly explained.)

This para needs rewriting This leads him to make another adjustment to the understanding of *suppositum*. For Aristotle (as Ockham interprets him), the nature of Socrates is Socrates, Socrates and Socrates' humanity are the same.

For Aristotle, a substance is something that *is not* sustained by anything else, whereas something that exists in or is sustained by something else is an accident. Because Christ is a divine person sustaining a human nature that is not a person, Ockham revises Aristotle's account by eliminating from the notion of a substance the implication that it is not sustained — it becomes an open question. According to Ockham, to say that something is a substance does not imply either that it *is* sustained, or that it *is not*.[262] The humanity of Socrates is *not* sustained and is a person, the humanity of Christ *is* sustained by the divine person and is a substance but not a person. Aristotle's conception holds in every case except that of Christ. By divine power both a substance and an accident can be sustained in existence by something else.[263] Though in this special case Christ's humanity is sustained by his divine Person, it is nevertheless in the same category (substance) and the same species (human being) as other men: Christ is a man.

Ockham adds some some observations of his own, not required by the teaching of the Church. Since human nature includes prime matter, sensitive form and intellective form, there are three corresponding unions with the divine Person.[264] Each of the three divine persons could sustain the same human nature[265] — indeed any other nature, e.g. a stone or an ass[266] — just as the second person now sustains a human nature. The Son could lay aside the human nature he has assumed, though we can be certain he will not.[267]

The Eucharist[268]

Ockham affirms the Catholic Church's doctrine of transubstantiation.[269] According to Ockham, transubstantiation is the annihilation of the substance of the bread or wine and, by God's power, its immediate replacement by Christ, the accidents of bread and wine remaining (but not inhering in Christ); God has power to effect this.[270] When the bread is consecrated, the formal object of the action is to substitute Christ's body for the bread,[271] and when the wine is consecrated the formal object is to substitute Christ's blood for the wine; but in both bread and wine the whole Christ becomes present.[272]

Ockham distinguishes between two ways of being in a place, namely "circumscriptively" and "definitively". To say that bread is in a place **circumscriptively** means that *each distinct part* of the bread occupies *its own distinct part* of the place.[273] When Christ replaces the bread, he is in its place **definitively**, meaning that the *whole* Christ is present to *each and every part* of

the place previously occupied by the bread.[274] It is not contradictory, and therefore possible to God, to make two bodies exist in the same place, and therefore it is likewise possible to make all the parts of one body to exist in all the parts of a place, i.e. definitively.[275] Christ continues to be present in heaven circumscriptively while he exists on the many altars definitively.[276] The sensible qualities of the bread and wine continue to exist circumscriptively, with whatever quantity they had before consecration.

When Christ comes to exist on the altar, it is true to say that by consecration Christ is moved, even that he is moved locally; but this is not local motion in the usual sense, since he does not leave heaven and does not pass through successive places on the way to the location of the bread and wine.[277]

When the substance of the bread and wine is annihilated, their accidents remain; these (the "species", meaning "appearances") are what we see, taste and feel. Ockham thinks that it would have been simpler to suppose that the bread and wine are not annihilated but continue to exist in the same place as Christ in the sacrament,[278] but he rejects this view because it has been rejected by the Church; the Church teaches transubstantiation.[279] He holds that by God's power the accidents continue to exist without inhering in any substance; they do not inhere in Christ.[280] According to Thomas Aquinas, the sensible qualities of the bread and wine inhere in the *quantity* of the bread and wine.[281] According to Ockham, quantity is not a thing[282] and qualities never inhere in it: after transubstantiation the qualities of the bread and wine, quantified as before, are sustained, without inhering in any subject, by the power of God.[283]

Since Christ is really present in the Eucharist, he should have effects on our sense organs and we should be able to perceive him. We do not perceive him, however, because God withholds his concurrence in the production by Christ's body of any sense effects; we perceive only the qualities of the bread and wine.[284] Christ in the Eucharist knows where he is and perceives things around him.[285]

When the consecrated host is moved (e.g. when the priest carries the host) Christ is moved.[286] However, the priest carrying the host does not feel Christ's weight because the priest exerts no force: he does not cause Christ to move. No created cause can move Christ's body.[287] When the host is moved, Christ moves voluntarily, or God moves him.[288]

The various actions ascribed to God in this account of the Eucharist do not involve any contradiction, so they are within God's absolute power.[289] Whatever

God does is done *de potentia ordinata*: if something can be done without contradiction and is therefore within God's absolute power, it is also within his ordinate power if he chooses to do it. The Eucharist and other sacraments are among God's ordinances.[290]

Relations Again

According to Ockham there are no philosophical reasons to prove that all relations *must* be things,[291] which leaves open the possibility that some may be. For theological reasons connected with the doctrines of Trinity[292] and Incarnation[293] he acknowledges that some relations are realities additional to the things related.[294]

As Adams remarks, "On examination, Ockham's concessions to the thing-theory of real relation are quite substantial".[295]

Logic

Ockham constantly used the techniques of medieval logic, to which he himself contributed, to disentangle issues in every area of philosophy and theology. However, I will not attempt to give any account of his logic.[296]

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