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# A History of Philosophy

VOLUME III

## Late Mediaeval and Renaissance Philosophy

PART I

### Ockham to the Speculative Mystics

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of Auxerre and Nicholas of Paris. But the most popular and influential work on logic was the *Summulae logicales* of Peter of Spain, a native of Lisbon, who taught at Paris and later became Pope John XXI. He died in 1277. At the beginning of this work we read that 'dialectic is the art of arts and the science of sciences' which opens the way to the knowledge of the principles of all methods.<sup>1</sup> A similar statement of the fundamental importance of dialectic was made by Lambert of Auxerre. Peter of Spain goes on to say that dialectic is carried on only by means of language, and that language involves the use of words. One must begin, then, by considering the word, first as a physical entity, secondly as a significant term. This emphasis on language was characteristic of the logicians and grammarians of the faculty of arts.

When Peter of Spain emphasized the importance of dialectic, he meant by 'dialectic' the art of probable reasoning; and in view of the fact that some other thirteenth-century logicians shared this tendency to concentrate on probable reasoning as distinct from demonstrative science on the one hand and sophistical reasoning on the other, it is tempting to see in their works the source of the fourteenth-century emphasis on probable arguments. No doubt there may have been a connection; but one must remember that a thinker like Peter of Spain did not abandon the idea that metaphysical arguments can give certainty. In other words, Ockham was doubtless influenced by the emphasis placed by the preceding logicians on dialectic or syllogistic reasoning leading to probable conclusions; but that does not mean that one can father on his predecessors his own tendency to look on arguments in philosophy, as distinct from logic, as probable rather than demonstrative arguments.

A number of the treatises in Peter of Spain's *Summulae logicales* deal with the Aristotelian logic; but others deal with the 'modern logic' or logic of terms. Thus in the treatise headed *De suppositionibus* he distinguishes the *significatio* from the *suppositio* of terms. The former function of a term consists in the relation of a sign to the thing signified. Thus in the English language the term 'man' is a sign, while in the French language the term 'homme' has the same sign-function. But in the sentence 'the man is running' the term 'man', which already possesses its *significatio*, acquires the function of standing for (*supponere pro*) a definite man, whereas in the sentence 'man dies' it stands for all men. One must thus,

says Peter, distinguish between *significatio* and *suppositio*, inasmuch as the latter presupposes the former.

Now, this logic of terms, with its doctrine of signs and of 'standing-for', undoubtedly influenced William of Ockham, who took from his predecessors much of what one might call his technical equipment. But it does not follow, of course, that Ockham did not develop the terminist logic very considerably. Nor does it follow that Ockham's philosophical views and the use to which he put the terminist logic were borrowed from a thinker like Peter of Spain. On the contrary, Peter was a conservative in philosophy and was very far from showing any tendency to anticipate Ockham's 'nominalism'. To find the antecedents of the terminist logic in the thirteenth century is not the same thing as attempting to push back the whole Ockhamist philosophy into that century: such an attempt would be futile.

The theory of supposition was, however, only one of the features of fourteenth-century logic. I have given it special mention here because of the use made of it by Ockham in his discussion of the problem of universals. But in any history of mediaeval logic prominence would have to be given to the theory of consequences or of the inferential operations between propositions. In his *Summa Logicae*<sup>2</sup> Ockham deals with this subject after treating in turn of terms, propositions and syllogisms. But in the *De puritate artis logicae*<sup>3</sup> of Walter Burleigh the theory of consequences is given great prominence, and the author's remarks on syllogistics form a kind of appendix to it. Again, Albert of Saxony in his *Perutilis Logica* treats syllogistics as part of the general theory of consequences, though he follows Ockham in starting his treatise with a consideration of terms. The importance of this development of the theory of consequences in the fourteenth century is the witness it bears to the growing conception of logic as formalistic in character. For this feature of the later mediaeval logic reveals an affinity, which was for long disregarded or even unsuspected, between mediaeval and modern logic. Research into the history of mediaeval logic has not indeed yet reached the point at which an adequate account of the subject becomes possible. But further lines for reflection and research are indicated in Father Boehner's little work, *Mediaeval Logic*, which is mentioned in the Bibliography. And the reader is referred to this work for further information.

3. I turn now to Ockham's logic, with special attention to his attack on all realist theories of universals. What has been

said in the preceding section will suffice to show that the ascription to Ockham of various logical words and notions should not necessarily be taken to imply that he invented them.

(i) There are various kinds of terms, traditionally distinguished from one another. For example, some terms refer directly to a reality and have a meaning even when they stand by themselves. These terms ('butter', for instance) are called categorematic terms. Other terms, however, like 'no' and 'every' acquire a definite reference only when standing in relation to categorematic terms, as in the phrases 'no man' and 'every house'. These are called syncategorematic terms. Again, some terms are absolute, in the sense that they signify a thing without reference to any other thing, while other terms are called connotative terms, because, like 'son' or 'father', they signify an object considered only in relation to some other thing.

(ii) If we consider the word 'man', we shall recognize that it is a conventional sign: it signifies something or has a meaning, but that this particular word has that particular meaning or exercises that particular sign-function is a matter of convention. This is easily seen to be the case if we bear in mind the fact that in other languages 'homme' and 'homo' are used with the same meaning. Now, the grammarian can reason about words as words, of course; but the real material of our reasoning is not the conventional but the natural sign. The natural sign is the concept. Whether we are English and use the word 'man' or whether we are French and use the word 'homme', the concept or logical significance of the term is the same. The words are different, but their meaning is the same. Ockham distinguished, therefore, both the spoken word (*terminus prolatus*) and the written word (*terminus scriptus*) from the concept (*terminus conceptus* or *intentio animae*), that is, the term considered according to its meaning or logical significance.

Ockham called the concept or *terminus conceptus* a 'natural sign' because he thought that the direct apprehension of anything causes naturally in the human mind a concept of that thing. Both brutes and men utter some sounds as a natural reaction to a stimulus; and these sounds are natural signs. But 'brutes and men utter sounds of this kind only to signify some feelings or some accidents present in themselves', whereas the intellect 'can elicit qualities to signify any sort of thing naturally'.<sup>4</sup> Perceiving a cow results in the

formation of the same idea or 'natural sign' (*terminus conceptus*) in the mind of the Englishman and of the Frenchman though the former will express this concept in word or writing by means of one conventional sign, 'cow', while the latter will express it by means of another conventional sign, 'vache'. This treatment of signs was an improvement on that given by Peter of Spain, who does not seem to give sufficient explicit recognition to the identity of logical significance which may attach to corresponding words in different languages.

To anticipate for a moment, one may point out that when Ockham is called a 'nominalist', it is not meant, or should not be meant, that he ascribed universality to words considered precisely as *termini prolati* or *scripti*, that is, to terms considered as conventional signs: it was the natural sign, the *terminus conceptus*, of which he was thinking.

(iii) Terms are elements of propositions, the term standing to the proposition as *incomplexum* to *complexum*; and it is only in the proposition that a term acquires the function of 'standing for' (*suppositio*). For example, in the statement 'the man is running' the term 'man' stands for a precise individual. This is an instance of *suppositio personalis*. But in the statement 'man is a species' the term 'man' stands for all men. This is *suppositio simplex*. Finally, in the statement 'Man is a noun' one is speaking of the word itself. This is *suppositio materialis*. Taken in itself the term 'man' is capable of exercising any of these functions; but it is only in a proposition that it actually acquires a determinate type of the functions in question. *Suppositio*, then, is 'a property belonging to a term, but only in a proposition'.<sup>5</sup>

(iv) In the statement 'man is mortal' the term 'man', which is, as we have seen, a sign, stands for things, that is, men, which are not themselves signs. It is, therefore, a term of 'first intention' (*primae intentionis*). But in the statement 'species are subdivisions of genera' the term 'species' does not stand immediately for things which are not themselves signs: it stands for class-names, like 'man', 'horse', 'dog', which are themselves signs. The term 'species' is thus a term of second intention (*secundae intentionis*). In other words, terms of second intention stand for terms of first intention and are predicated of them, as when it is said that 'man' and 'horse' are species.

In a broad sense of 'first intention' syncategorematic terms may be called first intentions. Taken in themselves, they do

not signify things; but when conjoined with other terms they make those other terms stand for things in a determinate manner. For example, the term 'every' cannot by itself stand for definite things; but as qualifying the term 'man' in the sentence 'every man is mortal' it makes the term 'man' stand for a definite set of things. In the strict sense of 'first intention', however, a term of first intention is an 'extreme term' in a proposition, one, that is, which stands for a thing which is not a sign or for things which are not signs. In the sentence 'arsenic is poisonous', the term 'arsenic' is both an 'extreme term' and one which stands in the proposition for something which is not itself a sign. A term of second intention, strictly understood, will thus be a term which naturally signifies first intentions and which can stand for them in a proposition. 'Genus', 'species' and 'difference' are examples of terms of second intention.<sup>6</sup>

(v) Ockham's answer to the problem of universals has been already indicated in effect: universals are terms (*termini concepti*) which signify individual things and which stand for them in propositions. Only individual things exist; and by the very fact that a thing exists it is individual. There are not and cannot be existent universals. To assert the extramental existence of universals is to commit the folly of asserting a contradiction; for if the universal exists, it must be individual. And that there is no common reality existing at the same time in two members of a species can be shown in several ways. For example, if God were to create a man out of nothing, this would not affect any other man, as far as his essence is concerned. Again, one individual thing can be annihilated without the annihilation or destruction of another individual thing. 'One man can be annihilated by God without any other man being annihilated or destroyed. Therefore there is not anything common to both, because (if there were) it would be annihilated, and consequently no other man would retain his essential nature.'<sup>7</sup> As to the opinion of Scotus that there is a formal distinction between the common nature and the individuality, it is true that he 'excelled others in subtlety of judgment';<sup>8</sup> but if the alleged distinction is an objective and not purely mental distinction, it must be real. The opinion of Scotus is thus subject to the same difficulties which were encountered by older theories of realism.

Whether the universal concept is a quality distinct from the act of the intellect or whether it is that act itself is a

question of but secondary importance: the important point is that 'no universal is anything existing in any way outside the soul; but everything which is predicable of many things is of its nature in the mind, whether subjectively or objectively; and no universal belongs to the essence or quiddity of any substance whatever'.<sup>9</sup> Ockham does not appear to have attached very great weight to the question whether the universal concept is an accident distinct from the intellect as such or whether it is simply the intellect itself in its activity: he was more concerned with the analysis of the meaning of terms and propositions than with psychological questions. But it is fairly clear that he did not think that the universal has any existence in the soul except as an act of the understanding. The existence of the universal consists in an act of the understanding and it exists only as such. It owes its existence simply to the intellect: there is no universal reality corresponding to the concept. It is not, however, a fiction in the sense that it does not stand for anything real: it stands for individual real things, though it does not stand for any universal thing. It is, in short, a way of conceiving or knowing individual things.

(vi) Ockham may sometimes imply that the universal is a confused or indistinct image of distinct individual things; but he was not concerned to identify the universal concept with the image or phantasm. His main point was always that there is no need to postulate any factors other than the mind and individual things in order to explain the universal. The universal concept arises simply because there are varying degrees of similarity between individual things. Socrates and Plato are more similar to one another than either is to an ass; and this fact of experience is reflected in the formation of the specific concept of man. But we have to be careful of our way of speaking. We ought not to say that 'Plato and Socrates agree (share) in something or in some things, but that they agree (are alike) by some things, that is, by themselves and that Socrates agrees with (*convenit cum*) Plato, not in something, but by something, namely himself'.<sup>10</sup> In other words, there is no nature common to Socrates and Plato, in which they come together or share or agree; but the nature which is Socrates and the nature which is Plato are alike. The foundation of generic concepts can be explained in a similar manner.

(vii) The question might well be raised how this conceptualism differs from the position of St. Thomas. After all,

when Ockham says that the notion that there are universal things corresponding to universal terms is absurd and destructive of the whole philosophy of Aristotle and of all science,<sup>11</sup> St. Thomas would agree. And it was certainly St. Thomas's opinion that while the natures of men, for example, are alike there is no common nature considered as a thing in which all individual men have a share. But it must be remembered that St. Thomas gave a metaphysical explanation of the similarity of natures; for he held that God creates things belonging to the same species, things, that is, with similar natures, according to an idea of human nature in the divine mind. Ockham, however, discarded this theory of divine ideas. The consequence was that for him the similarities which give rise to universal concepts are simply similarities, so to speak, of fact: there is no metaphysical reason for these similarities except the divine choice, which is not dependent on any divine ideas. In other words, although St. Thomas and William of Ockham were fundamentally at one in denying that there is any *universale in re*, the former combined his rejection of ultra-realism with the Augustinian doctrine of the *universale ante rem*, whereas the latter did not.<sup>12</sup>

Another, though less important, difference concerns the way of speaking about universal concepts. Ockham, as we have seen, held that the universal concept is an act of the understanding. 'I say that the first intention as well as the second intention is truly an act of the understanding, for whatever is saved by the fiction can be saved by the act.'<sup>13</sup> Ockham appears to be referring to the theory of Petrus Aureoli, according to which the concept, which is the object appearing to the mind, is a 'fiction'. Ockham prefers to say that the concept is simply the act of the understanding. 'The first intention is an act of the understanding signifying things which are not signs. The second intention is the act signifying first intentions.'<sup>14</sup> And Ockham proceeds to say that both first and second intentions are truly real entities, and that they are truly qualities subjectively existent in the soul. That they are real entities, if they are acts of the understanding, is clear; but it seems rather odd perhaps to find Ockham calling them qualities. However, if his various utterances are to be interpreted as consistent with one another, he cannot be supposed to mean that universal concepts are qualities really distinct from the acts of understanding. 'Everything which is explained through positing something distinct from the act of understanding can be explained without positing

such a distinct thing.'<sup>15</sup> In other words, Ockham is content to talk simply about the act of the understanding; and he applies the principle of economy to get rid of the apparatus of abstracting *species intelligibiles*. But though there is certainly a difference between the theory of Aquinas and that of Ockham in this respect, it must be remembered that Aquinas insisted strongly that the *species intelligibiles* is not the object of knowledge: it is *id quo intelligitur* and not *id quod intelligitur*.<sup>16</sup>

4. We are now in a position to consider briefly Ockham's theory of science. He divides science into two main types, real science and rational science. The former (*scientia realis*) is concerned with real things, in a sense to be discussed presently, while the latter (*scientia rationalis*) is concerned with terms which do not stand immediately for real things. Thus logic, which deals with terms of second intention, like 'species' and 'genus', is a rational science. It is important to maintain the distinction between these two types of science: otherwise concepts or terms will be confused with things. For example, if one does not realize that Aristotle's intention in the *Categories* was to treat of words and concepts and not of things, one will interpret him in a sense quite foreign to his thought. Logic is concerned with terms of second intention, which cannot exist *sine ratione*, that is, without the mind's activity; it deals, therefore, with mental 'fabrications'. I said earlier that Ockham did not much like speaking of universal concepts as fictions or fictive entities; but the point I then had in mind was that Ockham objected to the implication that what we know by means of a universal concept is a fiction and not a real thing. He was quite ready to speak of terms of second intention, which enter into the propositions of logic, as 'fabrications', because these terms do not refer directly to real things. But logic, which is rational science, presupposes real science; for terms of second intention presuppose terms of first intention.

Real science is concerned with things, that is, with individual things. But Ockham also says that 'real science is not always of things as the objects which are immediately known'.<sup>17</sup> This might seem to be a contradiction; but Ockham proceeds to explain that any science, whether real or rational, is only of propositions.<sup>18</sup> In other words, when he says that real science is concerned with things, Ockham does not mean to deny the Aristotelian doctrine that science is of the universal; but he is determined to hold to the other