Ch. 14: On the Universal

1. 2 kinds of terms: Those of (1) first intention, and of (2) second intention.
2. Belonging to (2) are such terms as “universal,” “genus,” and “species.”
   a. The common term “universal” is examined. It is predicated of every universal and is opposed to the notion of a particular.
      i. 2 senses of ‘particular’: (1) That which is numerically one, not many. In this sense, a universal is a quality in the mind that is predicable of many. But in this sense, all universals are particulars, as they are numerically one. (As a word, though common by convention, and signifying many things, is a particular.) (2) That which is one and not many and that cannot stand as a sign of many. In this sense, no universal is a particular, since every universal can signify man and is predicable of many.
   b. From (ai), Ockham says that nothing is a universal if anyone says that they are many in number. He adds: “One could…abuse the expression and say that a population is a single universal because it is not one but many. But that would be puerile.” He doesn’t say it, but he will argue for this in the next chapter.
3. From (2), Ockham says that every universal is a particular, and they are universal only in virtue of signifying many or being predicable of many.
   a. Thus, universals are called particular in the first sense ((1) in (2ai) above), not the second.
   b. Universals thus can be called intentions of the soul, Ockham agrees with Avicenna, in that qua form merely existing in the intellect, a universal is a particular, while qua sign predicable of many things, which is a relation imposed by the mind, they are universals.
      i. Ockham likens this result to the sun: the sun is called a universal cause of all the things that are “generable and corruptible,” even though it is a particular cause, not many.
4. Ockham concludes this chapter by introducing the topic of the following chapters: there are two kinds of universals: those that are universal by nature, and those that aren’t. A universal may be a universal by nature, as smoke is by nature a sign of fire, or weeping a sign of grief. That is, by nature, it is a sign predicable of many. The intention of the soul is a universal by nature, and “thus no substance outside the soul, nor any accident outside the soul, is a universal by of this sort.” Ockham will argue for this in the following chapters.
5. Universals that are so by convention are such things as spoken words, which are numerically one, but stand for many. But they do so by convention, not nature.

Ch. 15: That the Universal Is Not a Thing Outside the Mind

1. Ockham argues that no particular substance is a universal in the sense allowable by (2b) that he calls “puerile,” since every substance is (a) numerically one (a particular in the first sense) and (b) a particular (in the second sense). The crucial assumption that he makes in stipulating (b) is reached by a reductio: that if we allowed particular substances to be universals, there would be no principled basis for deciding which ones we let become universals. Socrates would have to be made a universal, as all other substances. (He also gives additional arguments for this assumption at the end of this chapter – cf.
(6b) here.) Then he tries to block the other way in which a substance might be a universal (by being an aggregate composed of many things, as in a population – the puerile sense, that is), by arguing that it leads to a regress.

2. It goes like this:
   a. Every substance is either one thing and not many, or many.
      i. If a substance is one thing and not many, it is numerically one, and hence not a universal, but a particular. (By definition)
      ii. If it is many, then it is either many particular things, or many universal things.
         1. If it is many particular things, then while the universal would be distinguished from a single particular composing it, it would not be distinguishable from several particulars (that is, a mere collection consisting of identical constituents). So it is not many particular things.
         2. If it is many universal things, then we must ask the same question regarding its constituents, whether each of these universal things is many things, or one thing.
            a. If each of those is one thing, then it is a particular, not a universal. (By definition)
            b. But if it is many, we must ask the same question regarding its constituents we started out with (in 2aii): whether it is composed of many particular things, or many universal things. Then (2aii1 & 2) would iterate to infinity.
   b. From this, Ockham says it follows that no substance, particular in the ordinary sense, or in the sense of being a single aggregate, is a universal thing.

3. Ockham now argues that universals, considered as individual substances outside the mind, lead to the following absurdity.
   a. If a universal was a single substance existing in particular substances, yet distinct from them, it would follow that it could exist independent of them, since “everything that is naturally prior to something else can, by God’s power, exist without that thing; but the consequence is absurd.” The consequence is this:
      i. But if this were true, no individual would be able to be created; something of any individual will have always pre-existed it. This follows from the assumption that the single substance existing in particular substances, i.e., the universal, already exists in some thing else (since the universal does not exist apart from particular substances – assumption in 3a).
      ii. Additionally, no individual substance could be annihilated by God without all the other individual substances of the same kind also being destroyed, since the whole that is annihilated is essentially that individual, and by destroying the whole, God would destroy the universal that is in that substance’s whole, and which all other substances of the kind share in common as part of their essence.
         1. Such a universal cannot be construed as something “completely extrinsic to the essence” in order to save one from this consequence, or there would be no sense in which the universal belongs to the essence. But if an individual’s essence consists of his universals, “the individual would not be any more a particular than a universal.”
2. And from the preceding, “it follows that something of the essence of Christ would be miserable and damned, since that common nature really existing in Christ would be damned in the damned individual; for surely that essence is also in Judas. But this is absurd.”

4. Ockham appeals to authority: he says that Aristotle thought that “although universals can supposit for substances, no universal is a substance.” He concludes: “Using these and many other authorities, the general point emerges [which Ockham says we should grant]: no universal is a substance regardless of the viewpoint from which we consider the matter. Thus, the viewpoint from which we consider the matter is irrelevant to the question of whether something is a substance.”

5. Universals are intentions of the mind, which “on the most probable account, is identical with the act of understanding.”
   a. This is observed by the fact that the act of understanding by which we grasp, say, men, is identical to our natural (mental) sign for men, through which we refer to them in mental propositions. This is analogous to, say, how weeping is a natural sign of grief.

6. So, universals are just intentions of the soul capable of being predicated of many, because:
   a. “[E]very one agrees that a universal is something predicable of many, but only an intention of the soul or a conventional sign is predicated.”
   b. No substance can function as a predicate, because:
      i. If it could, then a proposition would be composed of particular substances; and consequently, the subject would be in Rome and the predicate in England, which is absurd.
      ii. Further, since propositions exist only in the mind, in speech, or in writing, their parts can only exist therein. Particular substances, however, cannot exist only therein. So since propositions consist of parts that exist only in the mind, in speech, or in writing, and universals are parts of propositions, it follows that universals “cannot conceivably” be substances.

7. NB: In all the above, he is speaking only of natural signs, not conventional signs. (E.g., a substance, such as a stop sign, can be a “universal” for stopping. Ockham argues only that natural universals cannot be substances.)

Ch. 16: Against Scotus’ Account of the Universal

1. Despite the preceding, some still want to say that although the universal is not really a substance outside the mind and distinct from particulars, it is formally distinct from them. Thus, they say that there is some individual difference “contracted” in, say, Socrates’ human nature, that though not really distinct from his nature, is formally distinct from it.

2. Ockham argues that this is untenable. If there is any distinction in something outside the mind, it must be because there are distinct things (call this his “Indiscernibility of Identicals, or Ind, principle). Thus, it must be that the nature and the difference are distinct things, if we suppose that there is a distinction:
   a. The nature is not formally distinct from itself.
   b. The difference is formally distinct from the nature.
   c. Therefore, the nature is not the individual difference.

3. Ockham argues, from Ind, that the individual difference is distinct from the universal.
   a. No common attribution of opposite properties:
i. The same thing cannot both be “proper” (formal) and common, which are opposite properties.

ii. Individual differences are said to be proper and universals are common.

iii. Individual differences are distinct from universals.

b. From Ind, also, it follows that if the individual difference was the same thing as the common nature, then for every individual difference, there would be a common nature, since they are identical. Then none of these common natures would be common “each but each peculiar to the difference with which it is identical.”

i. But if the common nature is identical to the individual difference, then these common natures could not be predicated of many. But then it is not a universal.

c. These all consequences of the principle that distinct things differ in respect of themselves, not of some difference added to it. The humanity of Socrates differs from the humanity of Plato. These are distinguished by themselves without adding any difference to them.

4. According to Aristotle, things differing in species also differ in number, but the natures of, say, a man, and that of a donkey, differ in species of and by themselves. Thus, we ought to say the nature of each man and each donkey is numerically one of and by itself.

5. Again, that which cannot belong to many cannot be predicated of many, a criterion of being a universal. So if this nature is identical to the individual difference, then it cannot be predicated of many, since it can’t belong to many. But then it is not a universal.

6. So, either the common nature is or isn’t identical to the individual difference. The only option is that they are really the same though formally distinct, the other option, that they are really distinct, having been eliminated in Ch. 15. If the nature is the difference, then the common nature is proper and not common. But this is “what I set out to prove.” (That is, that there is no formal distinction between a difference and a nature in virtue of which we say that one is distinct from the other.)

a. Likewise, Ockham says we can argue this way: the individual difference is not formally distinct from the individual difference. The individual difference is the nature. Therefore, the nature is not formally distinct from the individual difference.

b. Ockham says: “but if it be said that the individual difference is not the nature, my point has been proved; for it follows that if the individual difference is not the nature, the individual difference is not really the nature.”

7. Therefore, Ockham concludes that “one should grant that in created things there is no such thing as a formal distinction.” All things that are distinct in creatures are really distinct, and therefore, different things.

a. All reasonings, with respect to creatures, of the following form should never be denied: This is A, this is B. Therefore B is A; this is not A, this is B. Therefore, B is not A.

8. We ought to say, thus, that there is not in, say, Socrates, a humanity or human nature that is distinct from Socrates, and to which an individual difference is contracted. Rather, we ought to acknowledge that in a particular substance, there is nothing substantial except:

a. The particular form,

b. The particular matter,

c. Or their combination

Ch. 17: Responses to Objections
Ockham will handle objections as a sign of the truth of his theory. He lists 5 objections and responds to them individually.

1. With respect to there being individual differences: Plato and Socrates really agree and differ. Therefore, they must have agree and differ with respect to different things. They agree with respect to humanity, matter, and form, and so also include and entity above and beyond these things in terms of which they are distinguished. These things are called *individual differences*.
   a. Response: Ockham says while Plato and Socrates do agree specifically and differ numerically, it is in terms of the same thing that they do so. The objection is that the same thing cannot be both the cause of agreement and of a difference that is opposed to it. Ockham says that this is true, but “beside the point,” since specific identity and numerical difference are not “intrinsically opposed.” He adds that this is not a controversial principle, as even his opponents who appeal to formal distinctions suppose it by saying that “it is in terms of the same thing that the individual difference is both really the same and formally distinct from the nature.”

2. With respect to there being common natures: Plato and Socrates agree more than Plato and a donkey. Thus, there is something in which P & S agree, but something in which P & the donkey don’t agree. Thus, this something in which they agree is not a particular, but something common.
   a. Response: The same response in (1) applies here. We say that Plato agrees more with Socrates in virtue of his intellective soul, and to Socrates too more than the donkey in respect to his whole being. So we shouldn’t say that they agree with respect to some one thing that is their essence, but that they agree in many things, “for they agree in their forms and in themselves taken as wholes.”

3. Aristotle says that in a genus, there is some one thing in respect of which all the members of that genus agree. But a fortiori, no particular can fill that role, since there isn’t even a member of a species that is the measure of all the individuals in that species. (Family $\rightarrow$ Genus $\rightarrow$ Species.)
   a. Response: While no one particular can be the measure of an entire genus or species, nonetheless, one and the same individual can be the measure of members from another genus or of many individuals of the same species (presumably by noting their differences – Ockham doesn’t say). “This is all that is needed to preserve Aristotle’s view.”

4. (A) Every common notion belongs to the essence of what is subsumed under it. So, universals belong to the essence of substances that are subsumed under them. But the universal “non-substantiality” cannot belong to the essence of any substance. Therefore, some universal must be a substance. (B) Someone might object further to Ockham’s response to (A) by appealing to ordinary language. We use terms like “man” and “animal” to signify substantial entities, not particulars. If the opposite was true, than “man” would signify all men in language, but this is clearly untrue.
   a. Response: Ockham denies the first premise. “[P]roperly speaking, no universal belongs to the essence of any substance, for every universal is an intention of the soul or a conventional sign and nothing of either sort can belong to the essence of substance.” SO, properly speaking, no genus or species “belongs” to the essence of any substance. What we can say, strictly, is that a universal “expresses” the nature of a substance.
   b. Ockham pleads the opposite. Common names do signify only particulars. He grants that the term “man” signifies “indifferently all particular men,” but it doesn’t follow that the term is “equivocal.” The reason is that while it signifies
many individuals indifferently, it “signifies them all by one convention.” (Cf. Ch. 15, no. 5)

5. All universals form categories. So if no universal was a substance, then all universals would be accidents, and consequently, all categories would be accidents. Then the category of substance itself would be an accident. Then “one and the same thing would be more general than itself,” and there would be something more general than the category of substance (namely, the “the accident which is a sign only of substances”). This is because if universals are accidents, then they are placed under the genus of quality, which then all universals would share in common. But universals are themselves the category of quality, so the same thing is more general than itself.

a. Response: Ockham concedes that those who, like him, say that universals are intentions of the soul have to claim that universals are accidents, but not all universals are signs of accidents. Some are signs of substances only, which category they constitute, just as other universals constitute other categories. So the category of substance is an accident, even though it signifies substances, not accidents. “This is not more perplexing than the claim that some word is a name of many substances.”

i. And further, it isn’t even the case that the same thing is more general than itself. This appears so only because we sometimes take categories “materially,” not “significatively.” That is, when we are talking about the things themselves or our intentions. In this sense, say, “quality” is a word’ and ‘ “substance’ is a word’ is true, and so there is a term more general than them. But if we take the words significatively, i.e., as signs, then the category of quality is not per se more general than that of universals, since the universals are just the category of quality.

1. Similar difficulty is resolved if we distinguish between suppositing something significatively and materially. Take the name ‘expression’, which is subsumed under the notion ‘name’, as expression is a name but not every name is named ‘expression’. In this sense, ‘expression’ is less general than name. But in another sense, the name ‘expression’ is more general than all names, more general even than the term ‘name’. This is because every name is an expression, but not every expression is a name. The former is a case of suppositing significatively, the latter materially.