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## A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF UNIVERSALS IN NOMINALISM

### 1. Plato's and Aristotle's fundamental views on Universals.

Plato is certainly one of the earliest philosophers who attempts to offer a solution to the problem of universals. He comes in the forefront of metaphysical inquiry and tries to define the nature and the source of invariant ideas, seeking in this way to determine the relationship of concepts to perceptual data and to prove the validity of the ideas which serve as rational links. In Plato, ideas have both an ontological and logical reference, for he thinks that these references explain the nature of the external world and also our intellectual experience of this world. For Plato, human knowledge and the individual objects in this world require some objective medium to allow them to be clearly related to each other. There is not a complete divorce between an inner and an outer world, but only two ingredients in the one world. This situation forces Plato to discover the Ideas or Forms (ἰδέα, εἶδος), which are the real essences of the different kinds of objects, that is, the objective entities of the human mind. These Forms, regarded by Plato as self-revealed inner-structures of things, are the universals.

Plato distinguishes between universals and particulars, holding that the Forms give reality to the latter. The Forms, when found as concrete individuals, make the particulars actually real and also the determinate kinds of being they are. The universals, however, are independent substances (καθ' αὐτὰ ὄντα) and as perfect and ideal patterns of the individual things subsist of themselves apart from matter. They can be, and are, apprehended by the intellect alone. Plato sees a universal as nothing more than the permanent essential form of being uncovered within the flux of change. This abstract approach to universality depends upon the «eidos» or the «species», that is, the fixed form which is the fundamental principle of human intelligibility<sup>1</sup>.

1. Cf. on this point: «The Population of the World of Ideas» in W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1953.





In the *Parmenides* Plato approaches universality in a manner of mere predication, that is, «subsistent universals». In his criticism of the Forms he asserts that the universal meaning of a «common name» is a unique Form, for a common name denotes always a meaning which partakes of a form. For instance, the common word «good» in the statement: «this man is good», means that this man by his essence partakes of the Form of «Goodness». The term «good» applies universally to all things of which it is predicated, for as a common name which can be the description of all things that can partake of the Form of «Goodness», it is a universal. Therefore, this term partakes of the Form «Good», since there is nothing against one thing partaking of any number of Forms. Plato also argues that the things are allowed to develop through the Forms, because it is impossible for them to exist by themselves as individuals without participating (μετέχειν), that is, sharing in the Forms. The idea of «Good» as a universal is not identical with anything that is good, for it is only a universal meaning or essence which has application to all those particular things which are good. A universal is anything which may be shared by many particulars, and therefore it has only those characteristics which distinguish it from the actual thing. As such a universal is one and the same, and it can be at the same time in a number of particular things, which are separate and independent entities. Therefore, according to Plato, universals themselves are distinct realities such as «goodness», «justice», «beauty», and the other universal realities<sup>2</sup>.

Plato develops an objective realism in which he shows that universals are the «intelligible species» of all particular things (αἰσθητὰ ὄντα), and subsist of themselves without matter. The universals, for Plato, exist «in re», that is, independently of the human mind, which through them understands the individual things. The universal concept is not an abstract form devoid of objective contact or reference. Rather, the true universal concept, having objective references of a higher order than merely sense-perception, is one corresponding to our objective reality. Hence, only a universal can qualify as an object of our intellectual knowledge, since, as a true concept, it is a pure essence which can be intuited in its instances —whether in the data of inner experience, the data of perception, or even in the data of fancy<sup>3</sup>.

Aristotle, on the contrary, seeing Plato's inability to offer a good empirical analogy in his theory of universals, which would elucidate the mea-

2. Cf. on this point: «The Doctrine of Forms» in F. Copleston S. J., *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Co 1962.

3. Ibid.: «Theory of Knowledge».



ning of the universal, avoids positing a separate world of universals. He finds no way to explain the world of change by the operation of mere universals, for they are pure concepts of abstraction. However, Aristotle seeks to define the universal in an empirical manner, for he sees that universals are not substances existing independently of particulars: they are characters which exist only as common elements in the particular things. He defines a universal as that which is predicated of many things, while a particular is that which cannot be predicated of anything at all. Therefore, every fact of human experience is a particular which is an instance of its universal, since no universal exists apart from the individuals it predicates<sup>4</sup>.

Aristotle's theory of universals is a definitive interpretation which offers an alternative to Plato's theory, and is also more attractive to common sense. For he realizes that we experience a world of concrete individuals, which are related by some common characters, that is, they are their predicates. These characters as the common predicates of many individual things are as real and objective as the individuals, for their common character claims that mode of existence which is proper to universals. The apprehension of a universal, or the formation of its concept, cannot be given in a single experience. It is a gradual process of sense-perception and memory, conditions subsequent to perceptions, which become recognitions of what is familiar from previous perceptions. Therefore, according to Aristotle, the universals exist «in rebus», that is, they exist only as embodied in the particulars, and are independent of our thought, for they are apprehended through the apprehension of the individuals<sup>5</sup>.

Aristotle maintains that the individuals are primary substances (πρῶται οὐσίαι), while the universals are substances only in a secondary sense in that they place the individuals in their specific class. In this sense an individual is always the subject of predication, while a universal is predicable of individuals, since the latter is common to many things in which it exists as a formal or specific element. For Aristotle, the universal is superior to the individual in intelligibility, since it is the direct object of definition that the mind confronts; but in being it is inferior to the individual, since it is common to many individual things, and therefore, itself is only potentially a concrete entity. This entity is a primary substance in the sense it makes the individual a substance of this or that kind. This is the main element in the indivi-

4. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1040 b (*The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. R.P. McKeon, New York, Random House 1941).

5. Cf. on this point: W.D. Ross, *Aristotle, Metaphysics*, New York, Barnes and Noble 1966.



dual, which becomes the object of science, since it is the universal character, that is, the form of the individual thing, which the mind abstracts and conceives in a formal universality. The universal as such is real in the individual in which it exists as its character, and it is apprehended by the intellect. A universal, according to Aristotle, is an essential element or common character, which has a reality in a higher sense than a basic particular or individual. The universal exists only in basic particulars, but not as universal, since it is apprehended as such only in the manner of predication of these particulars. Therefore, universals in the Aristotelian sense exist potentially, since they are grasped by the intellect in the data of sense-perception<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Medieval Nominalists' solution to the problem of Universals.

This grasp of the universals within the perceptual level of experience implies that in Aristotle's realism the Platonic notion of separation (χωρισμός), i.e., that the universals are independent of natural things, must be abandoned. The medieval realists in failing to recognize this clarification by Aristotle are driven to develop an extreme realism. They think that a satisfactory answer to their question must be found among the alternatives which Porphyry posits in his *Introduction to Aristotle's Categories*.

I shall refuse to say concerning genera and species whether they subsist or whether they are placed in the naked understanding alone or whether subsisting they are corporeal or incorporeal, and whether they are separated from sensibles or placed in sensibles and in accord with them. Questions of this sort are most exalted business and require very great diligence of inquiry<sup>7</sup>.

This metaphysical puzzle posited by Porphyry, and their inability to reply to the critics and to justify their own realistic views, leads them to conclude arbitrarily that universals are only mental products. This extreme conclusion leads some of these critics to go even further and to hold that a universal is nothing but a name or a word. In this way they initiate the development of nominalism as a new theory for the explanation of universals. Nominalism, in its strict sense, holds that the only things that are universals are names or general words, because the things which are named as such are singular and individual. For nominalists the view that words are general

6. Cf. on this point: «The Metaphysics of Aristotle» in Copleston, op. cit., Part II.

7. Boethius, *Commentary on Porphyry's Introduction*, Trnsl. by R. P. McKeon, *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, Vol. 1, New York, Ch. Scribner's Sons 1929, p. 91.





or have meaning explains the situation without interposing concepts between words and what words stand for. It is clear to nominalists that the meaningfulness of a word can be accounted for without postulating a separate mental entity, i.e., a concept.

The first steps toward nominalism are made by Eric of Auxerre in the ninth century, who by his denial of extreme realism affirms emphatically the existence of individuals and offers a psychological explanation of universal concepts. He insists that individuals are the only objects of general names and, therefore, have general or universal objects which correspond to them. This notion is supported later in the twelfth century by Roscelin, an opponent of extreme realism. Roscelin holds that universals are mere sounds (*flatus vocis*). He pays no attention to the question whether there are ideas of species and *genera* or not, even if his actual words imply this. From his fragmentary testimony, he seems to favor nominalism, a theory which is supported by the fact that universals are mere words<sup>8</sup>.

Indeed, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) is the medieval philosopher who synthesizes the different views on universals and puts forward a solution, although not final, to the controversy over universals. Seeing the basic distinction of Aristotle between universals and particulars, Abelard finds a basis from which to start the analysis of the concept of the universal, to which he gives a different solution. He is aware that this distinction between universals and particulars is a matter of predication, since according to Boethius, Aristotle defines the universal (*universale*) as that which is by its nature fit to be predicated of many things (*quod in pluribus natum est predicari*) in contrast to the particular which is not predicated of anything at all (*singulare vero quod non*)<sup>9</sup>. Abelard, unlike Aristotle, sees that the predication of a universal is about names rather than things, since all that can be predicated of many things is a name instead of a thing. Therefore, he ascribes universality exclusively to words, since only names are predicated of things.

Following the steps of his teacher, Roscelin, Abelard ascribes a nominalistic view to universals. Laying down the main lines of nominalism and overcoming his teacher's difficulties, Abelard postulates the universal idea (*intellectus universalis*), which is expressed by a universal name (*nomen universale*), and has a logical content. He asserts that universals are not mere sounds, but rather meaningful sounds, that is, words which acquire their meaning from their use. Abelard makes a distinction between the sound

8. Copleston, op. cit., Volume II, Part I, pp. 164-65.

9. Ibid.: «The Problem of Universals», p. 171.





(*vox*) which signifies the word as a physical entity (*flatus vocis*), and the meaningful sound (*sermo*) which signifies the word which has a relation to the logical content, that is the universal idea, which is predicated about a name. Since Abelard thinks that what is predicated is not a thing but rather a name, he denies the existence of universal things and asserts the existence of universal words. He thinks that such universal nouns as «man» or «horse» have meaning by abstracting the nature and setting it free from all individuality. This universal noun bears no special relation to any particular individual, since it can be predicated of all individual men or horses which are signified by its universality<sup>10</sup>.

Abelard holds that the concept of the universal is a result of abstraction, since the formation of a concept depends on the mental conception rather than on sensory images. He assumes that the human intellect by its mental activity abstracts from things that aspect in which they are similar, and through this «likeness» on which the intellect focuses its attention the concept is formed as the resemblance of one to another. This sort of concept is of a «fictitious character», since it is formed through abstraction, and therefore it has no direct reference to understanding by means of sensory perception. The concept itself does not correspond to actual things, but it relates itself to these things, since it is a «common character», that is, a relation which belongs to them, and it therefore claims to be a universal, for it is neither «a real thing» nor «a nothing»<sup>11</sup>. Abelard, unlike the realists, shows that a universal is real in so far as it is abstracted, for its object is an abstraction rather than a distinct and concrete object of real existence. For considering the common aspects of Peter, Paul, and John in strict isolation from their individual natures, we derive the general idea of «man», that is, the concept of «rationality». This concept as abstracted from rational individuals is a universal word, which reflects an objective reality from all these forms of being. Therefore, Abelard assumes that the concept of the universal derives from abstraction:

For when I hear man or whiteness or white I do not recall from the meaning of the noun all the natures or properties which are in the subject things, but from man I have only the conception . . . of animal and rational mortal . . . Wherefore the understanding of universals is rightly spoken of as alone and naked and pure, that is, alone from the senses . . . and naked in regard to the abstraction of all and of any forms, and pure with respect to discreteness because no thing whether it be matter or form, is designated in it<sup>12</sup>.

10. Ibid., pp. 171-172.

11. Cf. on this point.: *The Glosses of Peter Abelard on Porphyry*, Trnsl. by R. P. McKeon, op. cit., Volume I.

12. Ibid., pp. 249-250.



In holding that there are no discrete things, but only universal words, Abelard understands mere words (*flatus vocis*), sentences, and statement-forms to be linguistic expressions of our perception of real things (*res*). For he thinks that such words or sentences and their relationship have meaning in so far as human reason (*ratio*) arranges for them to be associated with mental reality. For reality is conceived through the intellect (*ratio*) rather than through perception (*sensus*), since such a mental reality is involved only in «dialectic», an abstract theory which applies to reason alone. The intellect, by its mental activity, removes all sensory images and abstracts from the things that aspect which is the same in all of them since they resemble one another. This «sameness» is the common character of the things which occurs in the process of mental abstraction and forms the general concept of these things, that is, the universal. This universal concept is the concept of our «consciousness», since it is a general word, which has a meaning in so far as it is a linguistic expression. For Abelard it is the mind's intellectual power which abstracts such a «sameness» from the physical things, and forms the universal, which as a general concept is «a rationality» rather than «a nothing»<sup>13</sup>.

As the above analysis shows, Abelard's treatment of the problem of universals is thus a «nominalism», that is, a denial of extreme realism, and at the same time an assertion of the distinction between the logical and real orders. Yet it never denies the objective foundation of the universal concept. Thus Abelard, in his final solution of the doctrine of universals, believes that universals are not subsistent things, but rather exist in singular things. For instance, humanity has existence only in the particular man, and the universality which holds for humanity in the concept is a result of abstraction, and therefore, humanity itself in a sense is a subjective contribution which stands for the individual objects.

In developing his arguments against realism William of Ockham (1300 - ca. 1350) becomes the most outstanding supporter of nominalism. Ockham holds that universals are terms or signs standing for individual objects but do not themselves exist for they cannot be real entities, since a real entity has existence only as an individual. Indeed things are individuals and not universals since it is obvious that an existing thing is an individual. For Ockham, universals are terms which signify the individual things which

13. Cf. on this point: «Abelard's Thought» in *Peter Abelard: Philosophy and Christianity in the Middle Ages*, Trnsl. by C. F. Crowley, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World 1970. See also D. Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard*, New York, Cambridge Univ. Press 1969.



really do exist. He holds that the existence of a universal consists in an act of the understanding and owes its existence only to the intellect, for there is no universal reality corresponding to the concept. Universals are only ways of conceiving or knowing the individual things. Therefore, they stand for individual real things, and as such they exist as acts of the human understanding only<sup>14</sup>.

Ockham develops his nominalism in terms of a «natural sign», because he realizes that a natural sign is a concept, that is, the term considered according to its meaning. Words signifying the same thing are conventionally different in different languages; and yet their meaning is the same, since it can be discovered that the one meaning, although differently expressed, applies in the same way. The concept, for Ockham, is universal, for a mental entity is an act of understanding, which shows «what something is» (*quidditas*), that is, the direct knowledge of the thing without any presupposition or mediation of a third element. For this is the direct apprehension of whatever causes a concept of a thing in the mind. The sign signifies the existence of «something» in the way «the disk signifies wine in the tavern»<sup>15</sup>. In Ockham's nominalistic approach this sign is a mental concept which conveys an object to cognition and stands for that «thing» (*signum suppositivum*) or the unspoken words which lack a concrete signification. The unspoken word which the soul forms is a natural sign of the perceptible individuals for which it stands, and as such is distinguished from a conventional sign, which is rather a spoken or written symbol of our language. Therefore, a sign in its very apprehension is that which brings something into the sphere or realm of cognition<sup>16</sup>.

The notion of natural signification becomes Ockham's basic viewpoint in his theory of knowledge, since he thinks that a sign always causes «something» to come into knowledge and so to stand for that particular thing. However, ideas seem to be taken as «mental signs» which serve for the cognition of the things outside the human mind. For mental signs are conceptions which make possible our direct and immediate reference to the things of the external world. Indeed Ockham sees clearly a natural signification in the term «natural» (*naturalis*) which connects the human mind with the external world. This natural signification, although not definite, helps in a way

14. A. Woozley, «Universals» in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Ed. P. Edwards, New York, MacMillan Co. & Free Press 1967, p. 205.

15. S. C. Tornay, *Ockham: Studies and Selections*, «Logic», Part II, La Salle, Illinois, Open Court Publ. 1938, p. 93.

16. Ibid.: «Ockham's Nominalism», Part I, p. 7.



to give a clue to everything concerning both the conditions and the validity of human knowledge. The natural sign, that is, the universal, considered in its subjective view is psychological, for it is an intellectual act which signifies the particular objects which are predicated of it. For Ockham, although the universal is an entity embedded in a psychological act, its being is logical (*esse objectivum*) rather than psychological (*esse subjectivum*). It is this logical signification or character of the ontological status of the universal that shows that universals are not merely ideas or images but rather «mental signs», that is, universal words (*universales voces*). Such a universal word is a concept abstracted from the things, that is, a general meaning which includes all the individuals which may be involved in this abstraction. This process of abstraction is intentional, since it always ends in an «intentional sign», which, according to Ockham, as «the intention of the soul is a universal, because it is a sign which can be predicated of many»<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, in Ockham's nominalistic view universals are objective beings which have a logical status only, since their formal reality does not involve positive things. The universals reside in the soul because of their «fictional» nature—a notion which occurs in Plato—and thus they transcend the real things of the external world. This objectification of universals has an important metaphysical implication: if the universals were subjective entities, and thus had psychological being, they would claim to be real things. In that case a real existence would be ascribed to chimeras, unicorns, centaurs and Pegasus, entities which have in fact only a sort of logical being. Ockham asserts in this *Sentences*:

Propositions, syllogisms, and such other things as logic treats, have no psychological being, but only a logical being: and so their being is their being understood<sup>18</sup>.

However, universals, according to Ockham, are concepts or general terms, that is, mental entities which exist in thought and therefore their being is solely being understood (*esse eorum est eorum cognosci*), for they have no subjective being outside the soul<sup>19</sup>. Hence, in conclusion, Ockham teaches that universals are only predicates or general meanings, which have no reality. Rather they have a logical status for thought and communication of whatever could exist among individual things to which they ascribe reality.

17. S. C. Tornay, op. cit., Part. I, p. 12.

18. Ibid., p. 13.

19. R. P. McKeon, op. cit.: «William of Ockham», p. 353.





### 3. Modern and contemporary Nominalists' approach to Universals.

A modern nominalistic position is found in Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) treatment of «names». Names serve as marks or signs in our speech and conversations for the recollection and the communication of our thoughts. He argues that all common names are universal, since the term «universal» predicates of a name. Yet «universal» is not at all predicated by that individual object designated by this name. In *Leviathan I*, Hobbes recognizes the fact that there are common names which are shared by many things. Although a term such as «man», «horse», or «tree» is a single name, it is used in the same way to refer to different particular things. It is this fact which accounts for the use of the term «universal». But there are no universals in reality since only names are universals, while things are individuals. The reason why a universal name is imposed upon many things is grounded in their similitude in source or quality, or in some other accident<sup>20</sup>.

The same name is the name of many individual things, but none of these things is a universal, for there is no universal name to stand for a universal concept. The term «universal» means neither the name of a physical thing, nor the name of an idea formed in the mind; it means only the name of some word, which is common to many things and for that reason is called a «universal name». For instance, when we ascribe universality to such terms as «living creatures», what is understood is not any particular creature, such as a «man» or «horse». Rather, what should be understood is simply a universal name. For Hobbes finds no room for universal concepts or ideas; and therefore he ascribes universality to common names only. However, the critic may see that this assumption of universal names helps Hobbes to combine his nominalism with points of view which are scarcely compatible with it; but nevertheless, his theory must be taken as a serious nominalism<sup>21</sup>.

W. V. Quine observes that the solution to the classical problem of universals has been sought in realism, conceptualism, and nominalism. In twentieth century philosophy it reappears with the new names of logicism, intuitionism, and formalism. Realism regards universals as independent of the mind; logicism condones the use of «bound variables» to refer to universals. Then, since conceptualists hold that universals are mind-made

20. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan I*, Ed. R. Kirk, Chicago, Henry Regnery Company 1956, p. 32.

21. Cf. on this point: «Of Speech», *Leviathan I*, Ibid.



and are therefore mind-dependent, this school allows intuitionism to countenance the use of «bound variables» to refer to abstract entities. Thirdly, since nominalism holds that universals are general words or common names, the nominalists do not permit formalism to admit any abstract entities, not even in the sense of mind-made entities<sup>22</sup>.

Quine sides with nominalism, since he holds that universals are attributes which are common to many individual things. The term «whiteness», for example, is common to such individual entities as «white horses», «white roses», «white doves», etc., and therefore it turns out to be a «meaning», that is, a universal. Thus Quine maintains that predicates such as «is-white», and «pegasizes», or «centaurizes», are not names of attributes, but are «meanings» which, whether they are names or not, are universals, since meanings themselves are attributes or something related to them<sup>23</sup>.

Quine likewise admits that «classes» as abstract entities are universals and fulfill the needs of mathematics. He acknowledges that both numbers and relations can be defined as classes of «classes», with the result that functions too are relations. For Quine, classes are those abstract entities which include all entities other than concrete objects. This theory of classes is rather a simple device. It is a method of abstracting universals which is quite reconcilable with nominalism, a theory that insists that there are no real universals, since there are no abstract entities of any sort. Universals are regarded as mere «signs», which involve a metaphorical use of the «identity sign» for what is a «sameness of length». Thus, in abstracting universals by the «identification of indiscernables», Quine resurrects the old system of particulars. In conclusion, in attempting to find a solution to the problem of universals, Quine discovers that some realists regard the existence of an infinite universe of universals to be a dream-world. Therefore, he chooses to side with nominalism, and concludes that the infinitude of the universe consists only in particulars, since he assumes that only particulars exist in the objective world as the physicist experiences it<sup>24</sup>.

Nelson Goodman, on the contrary, holds that nominalism consists in a refusal to recognize classes. He sees nominalism as a doctrine which excludes no abstract entities, spirits, absolutes soul or mind. Nominalism is a doctrine grounded in a single rule: whatever is to be admitted as an entity must be construed as an individual. For Goodman, then, nominalism does

22. W. V. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, New York, Harper and Row 1961, pp. 14-15.

23. Cf. on this point: «On What There Is», *From a Logical Point of View*, Ibid.

24. Ibid., pp. 117-118, 128.



not dwell so much upon what it is to be an entity as upon that demand that entities, once admitted, must be treated as individuals<sup>25</sup>. He insists that the theory of nominalism stands for the description of the world as a composite of many individuals. The world is regarded as a world of individuals which does not require any personal integration. The explanation of nominalism is rooted in the description of the world as composed of individuals. To describe the world is to describe the entities of which it is made up and no two entities have exactly the same atoms. Therefore, the theory of nominalism admits no distinction of entities without distinction of content, since for a nominalist there are no two distinct things which have the same atoms. This conclusion follows from the principle of generation which holds that different things can be generated from different atoms<sup>26</sup>.

Goodman acknowledges that, in fact, what characterizes nominalism is not what its generating relations are going to be called or whether the values of its variables will be called «classes» or «individuals», but simply that they must be regarded as «entities». Any system which admits that no two distinct entities have exactly the same atoms is a nominalistic system in the strict sense of the term. The words or names in such a system name things which are singular and individual. Therefore, Goodman concludes that nominalism is a necessary condition for an acceptable philosophic system. His theory provides us with a rule of selection which will deliver us from the hopeless analogy involved in extending the application of such terms as «part», «whole», and «individual» beyond the realm of the demarcated spatio-temporally continuous lumps<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4. Nominalism in the strict sense is not a defensible theory.

The above analysis of the school of nominalism, whether as the development of medieval nominalists, as a treatment of the modern Hobbes, or as a reassertion of the contemporary Quine and Goodman, is an extreme position. Perhaps, as Woozley observes, none of the above supporters of nominalism maintains such an extreme nominalism, which holds that what is common to a given group of particulars is nothing more than the fact that they are referred to by the same name. If all that is common to the class of

25. Bochenski, Church, Goodman, *The Problem of Universals*, Notre Dame, Indiana, Notre Dame University Press 1956, pp. 16-17.

26. Ibid., pp. 20-23.

27. Cf. on this point: *The Problem of Universals*, Ibid.





«man» is the fact that its members are denoted by the same name «man», then everything could be a man simply by our arbitrary or conventional decision. However, this form of nominalism, if possible, would be a quite unwarranted leap in the dark<sup>28</sup>.

The contemporary critic may argue that nominalism, whether strict or moderate, does not offer a true solution to the problem of universals, since all of its exponents consider only individuals, and fail to utilize the concept of identity. Their nominalistic claims, whether strict or moderate, end by maintaining a strict nominalism since they use arbitrarily a conventional basis to ascribe names to individual things. For instance, they maintain that certain objects are chairs only because they are called «chairs». This is arbitrary and even absurd, because it never answers the question why certain objects are to be labeled «chairs» and others not. The fact that nominalism asserts that «nothing is universal», but only general words or names only encourages the potential nominalist to hold that nothing is common to a certain group of objects apart from their being called by the same name. The reason why nominalists insist on the universality of the words is their denial of the universality of the things which are individuals, and therefore they maintain that the properties of a thing are individual to it<sup>29</sup>.

Therefore a strict nominalism is not defensible because it has no logical status, that is, a fundamental ontology. If a contemporary critic of nominalism were to rely on the criticisms of this doctrine put forward by Russell, Pears, Wittgenstein, and Bochenski, he would find it a quite unsatisfactory system, which by itself cannot be a satisfactory theory of philosophic inquiry. The reason is that its proponents fail to see that universals are not real existents, but are predicates or meanings which possess only a logical status, which is required for both thought and communication. In fact, the proponents of nominalism are not really naming something which could possibly exist as an individual—even though this is their well known claim.

B. Russell holds that universals are apprehended by the mind but do not exist in the mind, since they are understood as universals in particulars. In the Aristotelian sense the noetic of sense-perception is universal and the act of perception is of a particular, because what is perceived is «man», not «man Socrates». Russell describes a world of universals which may substitute for the indispensable, rigid, and exact world of the mathemati-

28. Woosley, op. cit., p. 204.

29. Ibid., pp. 203-204.





cian, the logician, and the metaphysician. For Russell, the description of the world requires universal terms, which may show something about the world itself as being the ultimate conceptual constituents of reality. Therefore, universals are not «universal» realities, because they only «subsist» or have being in a timeless context, and as such are distinguished from thoughts, minds, intuitions, and the things which as individual entities have real existence<sup>30</sup>.

The universals as abstract terms are regarded by Russell as common nouns, adjectives, substantives, verbs, and even prepositions, which are related to particulars, and possess those characteristics which distinguish them from the particular acts and things. For instance, «justice» and «rationality» are universals and as such are distinguished from «just acts» and «rational beings». However, a true meaning or a state of being must be involved in a term which denotes a universal, since all truths involve universals and all knowledge of truths involves acquaintance with universals<sup>31</sup>. Russell concludes that only relations are true universals and not all qualities, since it is on the basis of qualities that we acquire knowledge of the individual things. Therefore, the individuals become real things through their relation to the apprehended universals, and not through common nouns or words, as the partisans of nominalism would assert for the justification of their theory.

I. Bocheński, in *The Problem of Universals*, points out that nominalism is not a defensible doctrine of universals because the exponents of nominalism, as well as of extreme realism, fail to state the problem of universals on the basis of a stable metaphysical principle. Bocheński recommends for this purpose the principle of identity, since he recognizes that the problem has to be stated in terms of what is common to classified things, and this «commonness» is nothing other than the identity of a certain property. Identity in itself consists in the link between classified things through the identity of certain aspects in terms of certain properties which are inherent in all the classified objects. This connection is a relation of identity which holds only between the aspects in terms of certain properties. As such it is a «symmetrical», «reflexive», and «transitive» relation. Bocheński suggests that the solution to the problem of universals must be sought in the nature of this relation, which stands as the link between classified things. In conclusion, while not offering a solution to the problem of universals, Bocheński

30. B. Russell, *The Problem of Philosophy*, New York, Oxford University Press 1968, pp. 100-101.

31. Ibid. p. 93.



rules out the nominalists' solution that only names or words are universals which stand for the singular and individual things<sup>32</sup>.

D. F. Pears holds that nominalism cannot be a defensible doctrine of universals because the visible process, which could be analogous to naming, shows only that a name is merely connected with a multitude of things and the latter are only occasionally similar. Moreover, the similarity theory cannot be stated except in terms of the identity theory because the classification of things based on similarity presupposes identity. Therefore, there is no type of similarity sufficient for a given classification. Pears sees that analogy on an observable basis is either too natural or too artificial, and so it cannot be seen that one word or name is connected with many objects all the time. These analogies as natural or artificial happenings are alien to the hypothesis of naming. The characteristic of naming is that the objects have nothing in common besides being called by one name<sup>33</sup>.

The type of nominalism which suggests that the things which are called by one name have only their name in common turns out to be extremely artificial. It holds that there is no way for a word to be used in more than one sense. On the other hand, all theories of naming except realism agree on the possibility and impossibility for a precise answer to this question. Possibly, these theories involve some truth, since we bestow common names on certain chosen groups of things which exhibit certain similarities. But it seems that they fail to go deep enough to satisfy the metaphysician, since they do not successfully show naming is founded on something else which lies even deeper. Therefore, the nominalistic solution, even though it must be taken as a great advance, is nevertheless a false solution, because naming cannot be explained by something which goes beyond a reasoned choice of usage<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, L. Wittgenstein (1889-1952) provides no possibility for the defense of the doctrine of nominalism, because the investigation of metaphysical problems must be supported not by common names or general terms, but rather by the data of sense, the data of perception, and the data of use. He observes that such mental entities as mind or intellect can in no way help toward the solution of any metaphysical problem, if there is any at all, since they dissolve into the very analysis of the metaphysical uses of the terms which stand for them. They disappear at the same time together with the meaning of the term, since the meaning of the word must be ignored for

32. Bochenski, Church, Goodman, *The Problem of Universals*, op. cit., pp. 47, 54.

33. D. F. Pears, *Universals. Logic and Language*. Ed. A. Flew, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday & Company 1965, p. 277.

34. Ibid., pp. 273-75, 278-79.



the sake of the use. In the *Investigations* he holds that there is no one standard meaning of a given word because a word can have as many meanings as it has uses, and these uses are countless. Therefore, Wittgenstein does not presuppose that such abstract entities as the universals are real existents, as Plato thought. He disposes of universals and turns his attention to the ways in which such words as «horse», «good», or «two» are used in actual discourse. For Wittgenstein, each word has different uses and each constitutes a meaning of the word; and therefore the various meanings do not have an identical entity such as «horseness» in common<sup>35</sup>.

R. B a m b r o u g h suggests that Wittgenstein overcomes the nominalistic difficulty of similarity once he uses the example of games as parallel to all terms or words which mark resemblances between the things to which they apply, as for example the word «red» to red things or the word «white» to white things. This general application of the example of games helps Wittgenstein to illustrate his contention that all things have something in common which we subsume under a general term, and therefore it cannot be admitted that such common names or words are universals found in individual objects and sets of objects, as the nominalists hold. Bambrough grounds Wittgenstein's solution of the problem of universals on the assumption that what Wittgenstein says about «games» is parallel to what he says about «reading», «expecting», «languages», «numbers», and «propositions», since in all these cases the instances that fall under each of these concepts form a family resemblance. The family resemblances have common similarities and relations and not an element or character which philosophers consider a common property, that is, a universal<sup>36</sup>.

Wittgenstein denies the claims of both nominalists and realists, but at the same time he asserts the nominalist's claim that there is no element that is common to all games. Whenever the nominalist argues that the games have nothing in common except that they are called «games», Wittgenstein answers that games have nothing in common except that t h e y a r e g a m e s. He denies the claim of the nominalist to an objective justification for the application of the word «game», since there is not an element common to all games, i.e., u n i v e r s a l e i n r e b u s, nor a common relation of all games to

35. Cf. on this point: Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Trnsl. by G. M. E. Anscombe, Oxford, Blackwell 1958<sup>2</sup>. Part I, secs. 65-77.

36. R. Bambrough, *Universals and Family Resemblances*, in L. Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, Ed. G. Pitcher, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday & Co. 1966, p. 193.



something that is not a game, i.e., a *universale ante res*, as the realist would assert. Wittgenstein observes that the nominalist, while he rightly holds that there is no such thing as a common element, concludes wrongly that there is no objective justification for the application of any general term, that is, a universal. The nominalist misses the point, for he cannot establish the fact that there are such ultimate entities as family resemblances, which Wittgenstein himself uses to solve the problem of universals. Therefore, Wittgenstein disproves the nominalist view that only common names or words, which stand for individual things alone, are universals, and so he shows that nominalism is not a defensible doctrine<sup>37</sup>.

##### 5. In Nominalism Universals are incompatible with Individuals.

The thesis that in nominalism a universal is incompatible with the concept of an individual or a basic particular will be clearly seen in the following analysis: Nominalism maintains that universals are only names. «Man», for instance, does not signify any individual man for the following reason. By abstraction the nature of man is set free from all individuality, and therefore the nature is denied any relation to particular individuals. This makes it impossible for the universal word to be applied to individuals or basic particulars, for the word itself is stripped of the same relation to individuals, and so it possesses no universality. Therefore, in the strict sense of nominalism, there is no compatibility between a universal and the concept of an individual or a basic particular.

The incompatibility of universals with individuals or basic particulars may be seen in the following three ways. First, one can see how a universal in the strict sense of nominalism is incompatible with the concept of an individual or a basic particular, because of the latter's natural consistency. A universal in the strict sense of nominalism is a mere name or a general word which stands there to be predicated of things, while the concept of an individual or basic particular is conceived in a thing which possesses a material body alone. In fact, individuals or basic particulars are not those arbitrarily admitted entities which have to be construed as individuals. Rather individuals are distinct things which possess bodies, that is, things we grasp in our familiar uses of them as historical occurrences, material objects, and people. It seems that they fit together within a single picture of the world,

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37. Cf. on this point: *Universals and Family Resemblance*, Ibid.



whose framework is a unitary spatio-temporal context. The material consistency of these individuals or basic particulars shows that they are material things, of which the particular identification rests ultimately on the possibility of locating the particular things we speak of in a single unified spatio-temporal system. A concept of an individual or a basic particular is a concrete meaning and bears a special relation to the particular, that is found within the spatio-temporal system as a material object. Therefore, the universal is not a bare name or general word, which a strict nominalism holds<sup>38</sup>.

Secondly, one can see that a universal in the strict sense of nominalism is incompatible with the concept of an individual or basic particular because of the latter's phenomenal or empirical content. An individual or a basic particular is perceived as a concrete empirical entity, since it is the public object of perception. It is a particular object which different people experience as really existing. Even more, such «private particulars» as comprise the overlapping groups of one's own sensations, mental events and sense-data —which depend on a person's private experiences— turn out to be very favorable candidates for the status of individuals or basic particulars. The principle of individuation of such experiences turns on the identities of the persons to whose histories they belong. Moreover, a large class of states, events, processes, and conditions that are neither private nor unobservable but have the minimum conditions of independent identifiability qualify as «particulars» of a certain type, since we conceive them as material bodies, states, or conditions. Only bodies, however, appear to be the most appropriate candidates for the status of individuals or basic particulars, since they fill our physical geography with the observable things of our external world. Only bodies enjoy one single, common and extendable frame of reference shared by any particular of any other type. All things possessing bodies qualify as basic particulars, because as such they are observable in time and space as exhibiting time-space relations between themselves. Therefore, the concept of an individual or basic particular is empirical, since it is conceived through perception of the material object. But a universal in the strict sense of nominalism is a mere name or word, not conceived at thing<sup>39</sup>.

P. Strawson sees thirdly that there is an incompatibility in thought between a universal in the strict sense of nominalism and the concept of an individual or basic particular. He acknowledges that the thought of a

38. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals*, London, Methuen 1959, pp. 37-41.

39. Cf. on this point: «Bodies», «Monads» in *Individuals*, Ibid.



particular is a complete thought, but the thought of a universal is not a thought at all. For the latter does not need a logical complexity or completeness in thought, although the former does need this. Strawson observes that «the particular is a construction from facts, whereas the universal is an abstraction from facts»<sup>40</sup>. Every introduction of a particular into a proposition rests on a definite fact about the world, while such an introduction of a universal into a proposition does not need to rest upon a definite prior fact.

Finally, the distinction that exists between dependent and independent particulars leads to the solution of finding a type «fact» which has to be seen as underlying the particular. It is the factual status of the independent particular which underlies any thought of this dependent particular. In this way we ultimately find facts which supply a basis for some particulars, for «sortal universals» instantiated by particulars are constituents of individual things. From this description, in which we see that a particular rests on a fact, we may conclude that the thought of a definite particular is a complete thought, but never the thought of a universal in a strict sense of nominalism. The universal concept is formed by abstraction and only through this concept do we conceive what is in the object and not the way it is thought in the object. In conclusion, the nominalists are unable to see that an individual or basic particular is a relation to a fact, that is, a thing which possesses a body as distinct from a mere name or a general word. Therefore, a universal in the strict sense of nominalism is incompatible with the concept of an individual or a basic particular<sup>41</sup>.

40. Ibid., p. 210.

41. Cf. on this point: «Logical Subjects», Part II, in *Individuals*, Ibid. On the whole subject see also the following works: Cajetan, *Commentary on Being and Essence* Trnsl. by L. Kendzierski - F. Wade, Milwaukee, Wisc. 1964, B. Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, New York (reprint 1968), R. J. Iten, *The Problem of Universals*, New York, Appleton - Century - Crofts 1970, J. M. Loux, *Universals and Particulars*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday Co 1970, J. Meiland, *Talking about Particulars*, New York, N.Y. Humanities Press 1970.



## ΚΡΙΤΙΚΗ ΘΕΩΡΗΣΗ ΤΩΝ ΚΑΘΟΛΟΥ ΣΤΗΝ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

### Περίληψη\*.

Το άρθρο επιχειρεί μιὰ εκτίμηση τῶν καθόλου στὴν Ὀνοματοκρατία (Nominalismus) μὲ τελικὴ ἐπιδίωξη τόσο νὰ τὴν ἐρμηνεύσῃ ὡς μιὰ νέα θεωρία γιὰ τὴν κατανόηση τοῦ γενικοῦ ὅσο καὶ νὰ ὑποβάλλῃ σὲ κριτικὴ τὴν εὐλογοφάνεια καὶ τὴν συνέπειά της. Στὴν ἀρχὴ ἀναλύεται ἡ πραγματοκρατική τοποθέτηση τοῦ Πλάτωνος καὶ τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους, ἀλλ' ὅπως εἶναι φυσικὸ τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον συγκεντρώνεται στὴν Ὀνοματοκρατία τῶν μεσαιωνικῶν φιλοσόφων (Abaelardus καὶ Ockham), τῶν νεωτέρων (Hobbes) καὶ τῶν συγχρόνων (Quine καὶ Goodman). Ἰδιαίτερη προσπάθεια γίνεται νὰ φωτισθῇ ἡ κριτικὴ θέση φιλοσόφων, ὅπως οἱ Russel, Pears, Wittgenstein, Bochenski, Woosley καὶ Strawson, μὲ συνέπεια τὴν ἄσκηση καὶ προσωπικῆς κριτικῆς ἀπὸ μέρους τοῦ συγγραφέως. Παρὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ κριτικὴ αὐτὴ δὲν εἶναι ἐξαντλητική, ἀποβλέπει στὸ νὰ προχωρήσῃ ἓνα βῆμα πάρα πέρα.

Ἡ ἐννοια τῶν καθόλου πρωτοεμφανίζεται στὴν πλατωνικὴ προσπάθεια νὰ βρεθῇ ὁ λογικὸς σύνδεσμος, δηλαδὴ τὸ ἀντικειμενικὸ ἐνδιάμεσο μεταξὺ ἀνθρωπίνης γνώσεως καὶ ἐπὶ μέρους πραγμάτων, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο εἶναι συνδεδεμένα μεταξὺ τους, ἀφοῦ στὸν Πλάτωνα δὲν ὑπάρχει διάσταση μεταξὺ ἐσωτερικοῦ καὶ ἐνὸς ἐξωτερικοῦ κόσμου, ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ ἀποτελοῦν δύο συστατικά τοῦ ἐνὸς κόσμου. Ἔτσι ὁ Πλάτων ἀνακαλύπτει τὶς ἰδέες ἢ τὰ εἶδη, πού, ὡς ἀντικειμενικὲς ὀντότητες γιὰ τὸν ἀνθρώπινο νοῦ, εἶναι οἱ ἀληθινὲς οὐσίαι τῶν διαφορετικῶν εἰδῶν τῶν πραγμάτων. Οἱ ἰδέες, πού ὁ Πλάτων τὶς βλέπει νὰ αὐτοαποκαλύπτονται ὡς ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ δομὴ τῶν πραγμάτων, εἶναι τὰ καθόλου, πού προσδίδουν ὑπαρξὴ στὰ ἐπὶ μέρους, ἐπειδὴ τὰ καθιστοῦν ἐνεργεῖα πραγματικὰ ὄντα καὶ τοὺς προσδιορίζουν τὴν μορφή τῆς ὑπαρξέως των. Ὁ Πλάτων δέχεται ὅτι τὰ καθόλου εἶναι ὄντα καθ' ἑαυτά, πού ὡς τέλεια καὶ ἰδεατὰ πρότυπα τῶν πραγμάτων ὑπάρχουν ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὴν ὕλη, καθὼς ὑπάρχουν «in se», πού σημαίνει ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὸ γνωστικὸ ὑποκείμενο, πού μὲ τὴ μεσολάβησή τους κατανοεῖ τὰ ἐπὶ μέρους πράγματα.

Ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης βλέπει ὅτι ὁ Πλάτων μὲ τὴ θεωρία του γιὰ τὰ καθόλου δὲν δίνει τὴ σωστὴ θέση στὴν ἐμπειρία καὶ γι' αὐτὸ διδάσκει ὅτι τὰ καθόλου δὲν εἶναι οὐσίαι μὲ χωριστὴ ἀπὸ τὰ καθ' ἑκαστον ὑπαρξή, ἀλλ' ἀποτελοῦν μᾶλλον ιδιότητες πού ὑπάρχουν μόνον ὡς τὰ κοινὰ στοιχεῖα ἰδῶν ἐπὶ μέρους πραγμάτων. Παρατηρεῖ ὅτι ἡ σύλληψη τοῦ καθόλου, δηλαδὴ ὁ σχηματισμὸς

\* Μετάφραση ἀπὸ τὸ ἀγγλικὸ Λ. Μπενάκη.





μιάς έννοίας, γεννᾶται σέ μιᾶ σταδιακή πορεία τῆς αἰσθητῆς ἀντιλήψεως καί τῆς μνήμης, πού ὡς παρεπόμενος ὅρος τῆς ἀντιλήψεως προσφέρει τήν ἀναγνώριση αὐτοῦ πού εἶναι οἰκεῖο ἀπό προηγούμενες ἀντιλήψεις. Τά καθόλου ἐν τούτοις συλλαμβάνονται ἀπό τήν διάνοια μέσα στά δεδομένα τῶν αἰσθητικῶν ἀντιλήψεων καί μέ αὐτή τήν έννοια ὑπάρχουν δυνάμει· ἀντικείμενα τῆς ἐπιστημονικῆς γνώσεως γίνονται ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς συλλαμβάνει ἀφαιρετικά μέ μιᾶ τυπική καθολικότητα τὸν γενικό χαρακτήρα τους. Γι' αὐτὸ τὰ καθόλου γιὰ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλη ὑπάρχουν «in rebus», δηλαδή ἔχουν ὕπαρξη μόνο ἐνσωματωμένα στά καθ' ἕκαστον, γιὰτὶ εἶναι ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπό τήν ἀνθρώπινη νόηση καί συλλαμβάνονται μέ τήν κατανόηση τῶν ἐπὶ μέρους.

Τὸ πρόβλημα τῶν καθόλου γίνεται μεταφυσική θεωρία στήν Ὀνοματοκρατία ὡς ἐπακόλουθο τοῦ ὅτι ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης ἀρνήθηκε τὸν πλατωνικό «χωρισμό», δηλαδή τήν ὕπαρξη ἰδεῶν χωριστῶν ἀπὸ τὰ αἰσθητὰ ὄντα, ἐπειδὴ οἱ πραγματοκρατικοὶ φιλόσοφοι τοῦ Μεσαίωνα δὲν κατῴρθωσαν νὰ διακρίνουν τὸν χαρακτήρα αὐτῆς τῆς ἀριστοτελικῆς διασαφήσεως καί διεμόρφωσαν ἔτσι μιὰν ἄκρατη Πραγματοκρατία (Realismus). Ἡ ἀδυναμία τους αὐτή, μαζί μέ τήν μεταφυσική ἀμνηστία τοῦ Πορφυρίου γιὰ τὴ φύση τῶν γενῶν καί τῶν εἰδῶν, τοὺς ὀδηγεῖ σὲ αὐθαίρετο συμπέρασμα, ὅτι τὰ καθόλου εἶναι προϊόντα τοῦ νοῦ, πού ὡς ὀνόματα ἢ λέξεις μέ γενικό περιεχόμενο ἀντιπροσωπεύουν τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον καί τὰ ἐπὶ μέρους πράγματα. Τὰ πρῶτα βήματα πρὸς τήν ὀνοματοκρατικὴ ἐρμηνεία τῶν καθόλου ἔγιναν τὸν 9ο αἰ. ἀπὸ τὸν Heiricus, πού ἀντιτάχθηκε στήν ἀπόλυτη ἐκείνη Πραγματοκρατία, πού ὑποστήριζε τήν ὕπαρξη μόνο τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα καί πρόσφερε μιᾶ ψυχολογικὴ ἐξήγηση γιὰ τὶς γενικὲς έννοιες. Ἡ θεωρία αὐτὴ ἀναζωπυρώθηκε τὸν 12ο αἰ. ἀπὸ τὸν Roscelinus, πού ὑποστήριζε ὅτι τὰ καθόλου εἶναι ἀπλὲς φωνές (flatus vocis), πού ὡς ἀπλᾶ ὀνόματα ἀντιστοιχοῦν στά καθ' ἕκαστα.

Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως πού ἐχάραξε τήν κύρια κατεύθυνση τῆς Ὀνοματοκρατίας εἶναι ὁ Abaelardus, πού διδάσκει ὅτι ἡ γενικὴ ἰδέα (intellectus universalis) ἐκφράζεται μέ ἓνα γενικό ὄνομα (nomen universale) καί ἔχει ἐπομένως μόνο λογικό περιεχόμενο. Μιᾶ τέτοια γενικὴ ἰδέα, ὅπως «ἄνθρωπος», κατηγορεῖται σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἐπὶ μέρους ἀνθρώπους, ἀφοῦ ἡ έννοιά της εἶναι προϊόν ἀφαιρέσεως, πού ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ τὴ νοητικὴ ἀντίληψη παρὰ ἀπὸ τὶς αἰσθητὲς εἰκόνας. Καί τοῦτο ἐπειδὴ ὁ νοῦς ἀφαιρεῖ ὅλες τὶς αἰσθητὲς εἰκόνας καί συνάγει ἀπὸ τὰ πράγματα τὰ κοινὰ στοιχεῖα, πού (ὡς τὸ κοινὸ χαρακτηριστικό) εἶναι ἡ «ὁμοιότητα», αὐτὴ πού ἐμφανίζεται στὴ διαδικασία τῆς νοητικῆς ἀφαιρέσεως καί πού διαμορφώνει μιᾶ γενικὴ έννοια· αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ «μιᾶ λογικότητα», πού συνεπάγεται τὸ καθόλου.

Ὁ δεύτερος ἰσχυρὸς ὑπέρμαχος τῆς Ὀνοματοκρατίας εἶναι ὁ Ockham,



πού δέχεται ότι τὰ καθόλου εἶναι ὅροι ἢ σημεῖα πού ἀντιπροσωπεύουν τὰ καθ' ἑκάστον, ἀλλὰ αὐτὰ τὰ ἴδια δὲν ἔχουν αὐθυπαρξία, ἐπειδὴ μιὰ πραγματική οὐσία ἔχει ὕπαρξη μόνο ὡς ἐπὶ μέρους ἢ καθ' ἑκάστον πρᾶγμα. Τὰ καθόλου ὁμῶς εἶναι ὅροι, πού σημαίνουν ἐπὶ μέρους πράγματα μὲ πραγματική ὕπαρξη, ἐπειδὴ συγκροτοῦνται ὡς γνωστική πράξη καὶ ὀφείλουν τὴν ὕπαρξή τους στὴ διάνοια καὶ μόνο, ἀφοῦ δὲν ὑπάρχει μιὰ πραγματικότητα καθολικῶν ἐννοιῶν. Ἔτσι γιὰ τὸν Ockham τὸ καθόλου εἶναι ἔννοια, πού ὡς νοητική οὐσία ἀποτελεῖ τὴν γνωστική πράξη καὶ δείχνει «τί εἶναι κάτι» (quidditas), εἶναι δηλαδή ἡ ἄμεση γνώση τοῦ πράγματος χωρὶς τὴν προϋπόθεση ἢ τὴν μεσολάβηση τρίτου στοιχείου. Γι' αὐτὸ τὰ καθόλου εἶναι ἀντικειμενικά ὄντα μιᾶς λογικῆς τάξεως, ἀφοῦ ἡ τυπικὴ ἀλήθειά τους δὲν συνεπάγεται ἀντικείμενα μὲ θετική ὕπαρξη.

Στὴ νεώτερη ἐποχὴ ὁ φιλόσοφος πού ὑποστήριξε τὴν Ὀνοματοκρατία εἶναι ὁ Hobbes, ἐκεῖνος πού ἐδίδαξε ὅτι ὅλα τὰ κοινὰ ὀνόματα εἶναι καθολικὲς ἐννοιες, ἐπειδὴ ὁ ὅρος καθόλου κατηγορεῖται μόνον ἐπὶ ὀνομάτων καὶ πολλὰ πράγματα μετέχουν στὰ κοινὰ ὀνόματα. Ἔτσι ἓνας κοινὸς ὅρος, ὅπως «ἄνθρωπος» ἢ «ἵππος», ἐνῶ εἶναι ἀπλὸ ὄνομα, χρησιμοποιεῖται μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο ἀναφορικά μὲ πολλὰ ἐπὶ μέρους πράγματα. Γιὰ τὸν Hobbes ὁ ὅρος «καθόλου» ὡς ὄνομα ἰσχύει γιὰ πολλὰ πράγματα, ἐφ' ὅσον ἔχουν κοινὴ γενετική ἢ ποιοτικὴ ὁμοιότητα. Ἐνας καθολικὸς ὅρος κατὰ τὸν Hobbes εἶναι ἓνα κοινὸ ὄνομα, δηλαδή τὸ ὄνομα πού ἔχει τὴν ἴδια ἐφαρμογὴ σὲ πολλὰ ἐπὶ μέρους πράγματα, ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα κανένα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι καθολικό, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ὑπάρχει γενικὸ ὄνομα πού νὰ ἀντιπροσωπεύῃ μιὰ καθολικὴ ἐννοια. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Hobbes, βλέποντας ὅτι τὸ καθόλου δὲν σημαίνει οὔτε τὸ ὄνομα ἑνὸς φυσικοῦ πράγματος οὔτε μιᾶς ιδέας, ἀποδίδει καθολικότητα μόνο σὲ κοινὰ ὀνόματα καὶ δὲν βλέπει νὰ ὑπάρχῃ θέση γιὰ γενικὲς ἐννοιες.

Ἡ Ὀνοματοκρατία στὴ σύγχρονη φιλοσοφία ἀναβιώνει μὲ τὸν Quine καὶ τὸν Goodman, πού στὴν προσπάθεια νὰ βροῦν λύση στὸ πρόβλημα τῶν καθόλου φθάνουν σὲ προσωπικὲς λύσεις. Ὁ Quine δέχεται τὴν ἐννοια τῶν «τάξεων» ὡς ἀφηρημένων οὐσιῶν ἢ καθόλου, πού ἱκανοποιοῦν τὶς ἀνάγκες τῶν Μαθηματικῶν, ἐνῶ ὁ Goodman ἀρνεῖται νὰ τὶς δεχθῇ, ἐπειδὴ γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ κάτι δεκτὸ ὡς οὐσία πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἐξατομικευμένο καθ' ἑκάστον. Ἔτσι ὁ πρῶτος δέχεται ὅτι οἱ τάξεις εἶναι ἀφηρημένες οὐσίες, πού περιλαμβάνουν ὅλες τὶς οὐσίες πέρα ἀπὸ τὰ συγκεκριμένα ἀντικείμενα, ἐνῶ ὁ δεύτερος πιστεύει ὅτι ἡ Ὀνοματοκρατία συνίσταται στὴ δημιουργία σχέσεων καὶ ἀξιῶν τῶν μεταβλητῶν πού ἀπλῶς θεωροῦνται ὡς «οὐσίες». Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Quine συμπεραίνει ὅτι τὸ ἄπειρον τοῦ σύμπαντος ὑφίσταται μόνο στὰ ἐπὶ μέρους, ἐνῶ ὁ Goodman δὲν δέχεται ὅτι ὁ κόσμος στὴν τελικὴ του περιγραφή εἶναι σύνθεση πολλῶν ἐπὶ μέρους.



Ἡ Ὀνοματοκρατία στὴν αὐστηρὴ σημασία της δὲν εἶναι θεωρία ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ ὑποστηριχθῇ, γιατί δὲν ὑπάρχει καμμιά τόσο ἀκραία μορφή της, ποὺ νὰ δέχεται πὼς ὅ,τι εἶναι κοινὸ στὰ ἐπὶ μέρους δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ ἡ κοινὴ ἀναφορά τους μὲ τὸ ἴδιο ὄνομα. Ἡ ἐπιδίωξη τῶν Ὀνοματοκρατῶν καταλήγει στὸ νὰ ὑποστηρίζεται μιὰ μᾶλλον αὐστηρὴ θεωρία, ποὺ ἀποδίδει ὀνόματα στὰ ἐπὶ μέρους πράγματα αὐθαίρετα καὶ μὲ τρόπο συμβατικὸ καὶ ἐρμηνεύει ἔτσι μιὰ ὁμάδα πραγμάτων ὡς ἀνήκουσα σὲ ἓνα ὁποιοδήποτε ἴδιο εἶδος, μόνον ἐφ' ὅσον ἔχουν τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ μέρους οὐσιῶν, ὅπως «ἄνθρωπος», «ἵππος» κλπ. Οἱ ἴδιοι ὥστόσο, τονίζοντας τὴν καθολικότητα τῶν λέξεων, ἀρνοῦνται τὸν καθολικὸ χαρακτήρα τῶν ἐπὶ μέρους πραγμάτων καὶ γι' αὐτὸ μιὰ ἀπόλυτη ἢ ἔστω μετριοπαθὴς Ὀνοματοκρατία δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ βρῇ ὑποστήριξη, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἔχει λογικὴ βάση, δηλαδή μιὰ θεμελιακὴ γι' αὐτὴν Ὀντολογία.

Τέλος, τὰ καθόλου στὴν ἀπόλυτη ἔννοια τῆς Ὀνοματοκρατίας εἶναι ἀσυμβίβαστα μὲ τὴν ἔννοια τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα ἢ τῶν βασικῶν ἐπὶ μέρους, ἀφοῦ ἓνα καθόλου οὐδέποτε σημαίνει ὁποιοδήποτε καθ' ἕκαστον, ἐφ' ὅσον ὡς μὴ-φυσικὴ ιδιότητα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ διεκδικῇ ὁποιαδήποτε ἀληθινὴ σχέση μὲ τὰ ἐπὶ μέρους. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἀσυμβίβαστο τοῦ καθόλου καὶ τοῦ ἐπὶ μέρους φαίνεται στὴ φυσικὴ συνοχή, στὸ περιεχόμενο τῶν φαινομένων καὶ στὴν ἐννοιολογικὴ ἀντίληψη τοῦ τελευταίου, ἐπειδὴ γιὰ τὰ πράγματα ἔχομε συγκεκριμένες ἔννοιες, ἐνῶ τὰ καθόλου εἶναι ἀπλᾶ νοήματα καθ' ἕκαστον πραγμάτων. Καὶ τοῦτο ἐπειδὴ τὰ καθόλου στὴν ἀπόλυτη ὀνοματοκρατικὴ ἔννοια εἶναι ἀπλᾶ ὀνόματα ἢ λέξεις μὲ γενικὸ καὶ μόνο περιεχόμενο, μὲ προορισμὸ νὰ προσδιορίζουν τὰ πράγματα χωρὶς νὰ περιέχουν οἱ ἴδιες ὁποιοδήποτε νόημα, ἀφοῦ εἶναι ἀφαιρέσεις ἀπὸ τὰ δεδομένα, γιατί δὲν γίνονται ἀντιληπτές ὡς ἀτομικὲς ὀντότητες· ἐνῶ, ἀντίθετα, τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον, ποὺ συγκροτοῦνται ἀπὸ τὰ δεδομένα τῆς πραγματικότητος, εἶναι διακεκριμένα πράγματα μὲ σωματικὴ ὕπαρξη καὶ ἀποτελοῦν τὰ κοινὰ ἀντικείμενα τῆς ἀντιλήψεως, ποὺ συλλέγομε ὡς ἱστορικὰ φαινόμενα ἢ ὡς ὑλικά ἀντικείμενα ἢ ὡς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ζῶα, καὶ ποὺ συνθέτουν ὅλα μαζὶ τὴν μία ἐνιαία εἰκόνα τοῦ κόσμου.

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