OCKHAM'S NOMINALISM AND UNREAL ENTITIES[1]

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A BELIEF that there *are* entities that do not really exist is not normally associated with William Ockham. On the contrary, he is remembered for his ontological parsimony: for his denunciation of realism about universals as "the worst error in philosophy,"[2] and for his insistence that only particular substances and qualities—not quantities and relations—are distinct real things. Nevertheless, a careful examination of Ockham's own theory of universals shows it not to be so ontologically innocent as the label "nominalism" would suggest. According to Ockham, the primary names with which universals are to be identified are not the spoken or written words of any conventional language, but concepts that signify naturally by means of relations that obtain or not independently of the human will.[3] And he began by holding that concepts have a nonreal mode of existence as objects of thought. (I shall label this the "objective-existence theory," because Ockham usually dubs the nonreal mode of existence "objective existence.")

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[2] Ockham uses this phrase in his *Commentary to the Perihermenias*, ch. 1 N (edited by Philotheus Boehner in his article "The Realistic Conceptualism of William Ockham," *Traditio*, vol. 4 (1946), pp. 320–35. I translate from Boehner's edition.

[3] Philotheus Boehner, "The Realistic Conceptualism of William Ockham" and "Ockham's Theory of Signification," reprinted as #13 and #15 in *Collected Articles on Ockham*, edited by Eligius Buytaert, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1958.

So far as we can tell from his writings,[4] Ockham changed his mind about the ontological status of concepts. Early, he came to believe it equally probable that concepts were some kind of really existent mental qualities. Partly because of his own developing reservations and partly under the influence of criticisms from his contemporary and fellow Franciscan Walter Chatton, Ockham eventually abandoned the objective-existence theory in favor of the view that concepts are really existent acts of intellect (*intellectiones*) (hence labelled the "mental-act theory").[5] Since these theories involve rather different ontologies, Ockham's change of

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[4] It has been pointed out to me by Fr. Gál that the latest works in which Ockham discusses this issue—the *Quodlibeta* and the *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*—are records of actual debates. And it is conceivable that in the course of such exercises, Ockham should have defended an opinion or made use of an argument to which he would not have given his whole-hearted endorsement. Thus, Ockham's attacks on the objective-existence theory and defense of the mental-act theory in these works do not provide conclusive evidence that Ockham ever gave the mental-act theory his full support. On the other side, it should be noted that in these questions as we have them, Ockham consistently adopts a favorable attitude towards the mental-act theory and a negative to derogatory attitude towards the objective-existence theory. See note 5 below.

[5] Ockham's progressive changes of mind have been traced by Boehner, who found them an important tool for dating Ockham's works (see "The Relative Date of Ockham's Commentary on the Sentences," *Collected Articles*, #9, pp. 96–110, and "The Realistic Conceptualism of William Ockham," *Collected Articles*, #13, pp. 168–74), and by Gál (see "Gualteri de Chatton et Guillelmi de Ockham Controversia de Natura Conceptus Universalis," *Franciscan Studies*, vol. 27 (1967), pp. 191–212; esp., pp. 192–99). Some corrections in Boehner's chronology have been suggested by Gordon Leff in his book *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse*, Manchester University Press, 1975, ch. 2, pp. 78–94. Briefly, their conclusions are as follows: When Ockham first commented on the *Sentences*, he held the objective-existence theory to the exclusion of any others. The text of Books II-IV (the *Reportatio*), which Ockham never revised for publication, dates from this period. When he made his first revision of Book I, *d.*2, *q.*8 *A-P*, he acknowledged the mental-act theory as not utterly improbable, but still preferred the objective-existence theory. In his *Commentary to the Perihermenias*, Ockham allows the objective-existence theory and the theory that concepts are real mental qualities as alike probable (Boehner's edition, *O*, p. 329; *Y*, p. 335), and in an added section declares the mental-act theory to be the most probable of the mental-quality theories and shows at length how it could deal with objections raised against it (Boehner's edition, *E-K*, pp. 322–27). At some point after this but probably before he made his final revision of Book I, *d.*2, *q.*8, Ockham inserted at Book I, *d.*27, *q.*3, a lengthy critique of a similar theory held by Peter Aureoli (see note 23 and section 2

mind may be viewed as a reasoned ontological conversion.

With the growing current interest in ontologies that posit entities that do not really exist, Ockham's reasons for first adopting and then rejecting the objective-existence theory merit closer philosophical analysis than they have received.[6] In what follows, I shall begin by considering Ockham's arguments in favor of the objective-existence theory. His reasons for changing his mind—of which we shall examine four—represent a surprising mixture of insight and confusion. In the end, I think it will appear that Ockham weighed the disadvantages of the objective-existence theory more carefully than the consequences of the mental-act theory and in fact had better reason to abandon the former than to adopt the latter.

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below). Ockham's final changes in the first book of his *Commentary on the Sentences* (the *Ordinatio*) regard the objective-existence theory and the mental-quality theory as equally defensible. In the *Summa Logicae*, I, ch. 12, Ockham notes that the principle of parsimony favors the mental-act theory over the view that mental signs are *ficta* or mental qualities distinct from acts of understanding (edited by Boehner, Gál and Brown, *Opera Philosophica* I, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1974, pp. 42-3). And where relevant he mentions what a mental-quality or mental-act theorist would say, omitting the objective-existence theory from further consideration (I, ch. 14, p. 48; ch. 15, p. 53; ch. 40, p. 113). Finally, in the *Quodlibeta* and the *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*, he explicitly attacks the objective-existence theory as mistaken, thereby sustaining his endorsement of the mental-act theory in these works. See note 4 above.

[6] The principal relevant texts in Ockham have been available for some time and are as follows: (*i*) The incomplete redaction of *Commentary on the Sentences*, Book I, *d*.2, *q*.8, edited and translated by Boehner in *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, Thomas Nelson & Sons, London, 1957, Part II, sec. 7, pp. 41-3; the complete redaction of *Commentary on the Sentences*, Book I, *d*.2, *q*.8, now edited by Stephen Brown and Gedeon Gál, *Opera Philosophica et Theologica*, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1970; II, pp. 266-292; the *Commentary to the Perihermenias*, ch. 1, edited by Boehner (see note 2 above); *Quodlibeta* IV, q. 19, Strasbourg, 1491; and *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*, *q*.1, edited by Francesco Corvino, *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia*, 10 (1955) Fasc. III-IV, pp. 276-7. Gál has edited Chatton's *Reportatio* I, *d*.3, *q*.2 in "Gualteri de Chatton et Guillelmi de Ockham Controversia de Natura Conceptus Universalis," *Franciscan Studies*, vol. 27 (1967), pp. 191-212. I have translated quotations in this article from these editions. Translations of questions in the *Commentary on the Sentences* after distinction 3 are made from the Lyon, 1495 edition, with the exception of *d*.38, *q*.1, which is edited by Boehner in *The Tractatus de Praedestinatione et de Praescientia Dei et de Futuribus Contingentibus of William Ockham*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1945.

I. *The Distinction Between Objective and Real Existence*

Ockham's arguments for distinguishing a kind of existence distinct from real existence rest on the observation that we are able to think of three kinds of things that do not and/or cannot really exist: (*a*) First, we think of things as having incompatible properties. Ockham's examples are chimeras and goatstags,[7] but the round square might strike the modern reader as a better case. (*b*) Other things, not thought of as having incompatible properties, nevertheless are not the kind of thing that can really exist. For Ockham, these include objects of logic—propositions and syllogisms,[8] relations of reason such as that of being the subject or predicate of a proposition which are produced by some mental act of comparison,[9] and universals.[10] (*c*) Finally, there are things that can really exist but in fact do not. Ockham mentions creatures thought of by God prior to their creation and merely possible creatures that God eternally thinks of but never makes.[11]

Ockham assumes that whatever is thought of must have some sort of ontological status. When we think of something that really exists, its ontological status is straight-forward. What about when we think of things that do not and/or cannot really exist? Ockham insists that even these must be something that is not nothing. Otherwise, we would be thinking of nothing.[12] He says

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[7] *Ordinatio* I, *d.*2, *q.*8; OT II, p. 273; *Com. to Peri.*, ch. 1 *P*, p. 330.

[8] *Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*8; *OT* II, p. 273; *Com. to Peri.*, ch. 1 *W*, p. 334.

[9] *Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*8; *OT* II, p. 274.

[10] *Com. to Peri.*, ch. 1 *W*, p. 334.

[11] *Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*8; *OT* II, *p.* 274; *Ord.* I, *d.*35, *q.*5 F; *d.*38, *q.*1 *M, O* (Lyon, 1495). *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge and Future Contingents* (translated with introduction, notes, and bibliographies by Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969) *q.*2, art. IV, part I *L*.

[12] Thus in *Com. to Peri.*, ch. 1 *F*, p. 323, Ockham begins an argument against the mental-act theory in favor of the objective-existence theory as follows: "First, take the common or confused cognition that corresponds to the spoken word 'man' or 'animal'. I ask whether something is understood by this cognition or nothing. It cannot be said that nothing is. For just as it is impossible that there should be a vision and nothing be seen, or that there should be a desire and nothing desired, so also it is impossible that there should be a cognition and nothing be cognized by that cognition . . ." Cf. *Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*8; *OT* II, p. 268.

that such unreal objects of thought have "objective,"[13] "intensional," or "cognized" existence[14] as opposed to "subjective" or real existence.[15]

Ockham's reasoning could thus be formulated as follows.

1. We think of objects of sorts (a)-(c).

2. If we think of something, it has some sort of existence—that is to say either objective or real existence.

3. Objects of sorts (a)-(c) do not and/or cannot really exist.

4. Therefore, objects of sorts (a)-(c) have objective existence. (1, 2, 3)

5. Mental acts, mental qualities, and the mind itself really exist.

6. Therefore, objects of sorts (a)-(c) are distinct from mental acts. (3, 5)

(2) is presumably regarded as a necessary truth. And the conclusion in (6) indicates an analysis of what goes on when we think of something unreal into two components: the really existent mental act and the objectively existent object.

Once one has arrived at such an analysis for these cases, it is natural to extend it to thoughts about real things, so that really existent things also have objective existence when they are thought of. Ockham does not explicitly make this move in the passages where he is arguing for the distinction between objective and real existence. But there is some textual evidence that he took such

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[13] *Com. to Peri*, ch. 1 *W*, p. 334. *Ord* I, *d*.2, *q*.8; *OT* II, pp. 271–4, 283.

[14] *Com. to Peri.*, ch. 1 *L*, p. 327.

[15] *Ord.* I, *d*.2, *q*.8; *OT* II, pp. 271–4. Notice that Ockham's use of "objective existence" for the nonreal mode and "subjective existence" for the real mode is not to be confused with some contemporary usage of "subjective" for how things seem and "objective" for how things really are.

an extension for granted when he first commented on the *Sentences.*[16]

Contemporary philosophers may be struck by the similarity between Ockham's views and those generally ascribed to Alexius Meinong. They would be even more similar if Ockham had said that what has objective existence has it independently of whether it is ever thought of. In fact, he says the opposite. He claims that things that have "only objective existence" are such that "their to be is to be known or cognized."[17] Thus, "x has objective existence" entails "Someone is thinking of x" or "An act of thinking of x really exists." This does not necessarily mean that the objective existence of things is interrupted, however. For Ockham seems to imply that everything—actual, possible, or impossible—has objective existence eternally and immutably in the mind of God.[18]

Conclusions (4) and (6) distinguish two elements involved in our thought of nonexistents: really existent acts or qualities of mind, and objects that have objective existence (in Meinong's terminology, subsist or have *Aussersein*). Presumably, there is also a rela-

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[16] The clearest indication comes in his discussion of divine ideas, where he implies that creatures have objective existence in God's mind even when they are real. For he says that the "ideas" of all creatures are "eternally and immutably understood by God." (*Ord.* I, *d.*35, *q.*5 *K*) And he has previously identified divine ideas with the creatures themselves insofar as they are in the divine mind objectively (ibid. *G*). It seems to follow that all creatures have objective existence in the divine mind eternally and immutably, even though some of them are real at times. And since there is no theoretical reason why God's awareness should differ from creatures' in this respect, this is some reason to think that Ockham's objective-existence theory applied to all thoughts. Further evidence comes in Ockham's reference to an intuitive cognition of a particular. Unlike the early Russell, Ockham never thought that particulars—other than conventional signs and (on the mental-act theory) mental qualities—could, insofar as they existed in reality, be terms in a proposition. If when he held the objective-existence theory, he thought that particulars such as Socrates, this whiteness, or this body, could be the terms of propositions, it must have been because he supposed them to have objective existence. And since intuitive cognitions cannot be produced naturally unless the object really exists, he must have thought that the objects of such cognitions have objective existence even when they really exist. (*Reportatio* II, *q.*15 *E*; edited by Boehner in "The Notitia Intuitiva of Non-Existents According to William Ockham," *Traditio,* vol. 1 (1943), pp. 245–75. Cf. *Ord.,* Prologue, *q.*1; *OT* I, pp. 24–6.)

[17] *Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*8; *OT* II, p. 273; *Com. to Peri.,* ch. 1 *L,* p. 327.

[18] *Ord.* I, *d.*38, *q.*1 *O*; cf. *Ord.* I, *d.*35, *q.*5.

tion between them, which Ockham and Meinong[19] would agree is not any real thing. Is anything else involved? Meinong thinks that there must be, even though most of the time we are not aware of anything else in our experience.[20] Otherwise there would be nothing in what really exists to account for the fact that acts of thought are directed towards one object rather than another. It would be purely contingent that such relations held at all and held between a given object and a particular mental act. Unwilling to accept this consequence, Meinong supposes that there is some real feature of an act of thought that necessarily directs it to its object. He calls such real features "contents."

Does Ockham posit anything analogous to Meinong's contents? There is some hint that when he first held the objective-existence theory, he believed that the similarity of a mental act to a thing is in part what directs the act towards one object rather than another. In *Reportatio* II, q. 15 *EE*, Ockham considers an objection based on the postulate of Greek epistemology that "all knowledge is by assimilation." From the observation that every mental act of cognition is equally similar to a number of distinct particulars, the conclusion is drawn that we never have a cognition that is proper to one particular alone. Ockham replies that the similarity of an act to the thing will not suffice by itself; one must add that the act is caused or apt to be caused by one of the particulars and not the others.[21] In taking the objection to be relevant and replying as he does, Ockham thus implies that a mental act's similarity to a thing, and actual or possible causal connection with it, is what directs it towards one object rather than another. For the objective-existence theory, a cognition will be proper to one particular alone provided it is directed towards that particular in objective existence and that particular alone. Any observation about how similar the mental act is or is not to a particular would seem irrelevant, unless such similarity were thought to play a role in directing the act towards one object rather than another.

In sum, then, Ockham's objective-existence theory analyzes acts of thought into really existent mental acts and objectively

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[19] J.N. Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1963, ch. 1, p. 35.

[20] Findlay, ibid., ch. 1, sec. 9, pp. 28–32.

[21] Thus, Ockham admits ". . . that the intellect is the likeness of the

existent objects, and identifies concepts with the latter. The mental act is thought of as directed towards its object by similarity and/or actual or possible causal relations to the object. And the objective existence of a thing is not logically independent of the real existence of some mental act directed towards it, whether that of a finite or infinite mind.

It should be noted here that Ockham often refers to universals, chimeras, and other thought-objects that cannot really exist as "*ficta*" or "imagined objects," which the mind fashions for itself.[22] And many Ockham scholars, primarily interested in his theory of universals, have accordingly labelled Ockham's first theory about the ontological status of concepts the "*fictum* theory."[23] Yet, in his early formulations and applications of the theory, Ockham never explicitly refers to objectively existent particulars as "*ficta*." And his pupil and probable secretary Adam Wodeham tells us that he did not regard them as such.[24] Since concepts of particulars

object, just as the species would be if they were supposed to exist, and it is no more a likeness of one than of the other. Therefore, similarity is not the precise cause why it understands one thing and not the other. . . ." But he insists that ". . . although the act of intellect . . . would be equally similar to many individuals, nevertheless, by its nature it determines itself to lead the intellect to a cognition of the object that is its partial cause. For it determines itself to be caused by that object in such a way that it cannot be caused by another. Therefore, it leads to a cognition of the one in such a way that it does not lead to a cognition of the other." (*Rep.* II, *q.*15 *EE*) When it is objected that this will not explain how an intuitive cognition that is caused by God alone is determinate to one particular rather than the other, Ockham replies that "Any created act of intellect that is caused by God can have a creature as a partial cause, although it is not caused by it in fact. Therefore, through that act of intellect one cognizes the particular by which it would be determinately caused if it were caused by a creature. . . ." (ibid.) These remarks of Ockham's invite comparison with contemporary discussions of causal theories of proper names. See, for example, David Kaplan, "Quantifying In," sections IX-X; reprinted in *Reference and Modality*, ed. by Leonard Linsky, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 131-9.

[22] *Ordinatio* I, *d.*2, *q.*8; *OT* II, pp. 274, 276-81, 283-4.

[23] Following Boehner, who labels the early view about the ontological status of concepts the "*fictum* theory" and the later view the "*intellectio* theory." See "The Relative Date of Ockham's *Commentary on the Sentences*," op. cit., pp. 99 ff.

[24] Speaking explicitly of Ockham, Wodeham writes, "Now it is true that he never supposed that this sort of imagined (*fictum*) or formed [object] was proper to any one thing (*res*). Rather, according to him, all such imagined or formed [objects] are universals and they are not proper to any either as regards their signification or their predication. . . ." (*Quaestiones in I Sententiarum*, Prologus, *q.*6; cod. Cambridge, Gonville and Caius 281/674, f.126ra) I am indebted to Fr. Gál for pointing out this passage to me and providing me with a transcript of it.

are the particulars themselves in objective existence, they are not *ficta* or formed by the mind. Thus, I have preferred to call Ockham's early view the "objective-existence theory," because, according to it, *all* concepts are objectively existent.

II. *The Objective-Existence Theory and Direct Realism in Epistemology*

Ockham was a staunch defender of direct realism in epistemology. In fact, he insists that our mental life *begins* with an immediate awareness of mind-independent particular physical objects.[25] If the objective-existence theory conflicted with this, he would have a powerful reason for rejecting it. Yet, Walter Chatton charged that the similar theories of their older contemporaries Henry of Harclay and Peter Aureoli threatened direct realism in epistemology. Chatton insisted against them "that besides the act of intellect and the mind-independent thing cognized by the intellect, there is no fictional being *(ens fictum)* that is a mean and is the immediate term of the act instead of the mind-independent thing . . ."[26] And in *Quodlibeta* IV, *q.* 19, Ockham turns this criticism against his own earlier view:

Further, such a *fictum* hinders the cognition of a thing. Therefore, *ficta* should not be posited to explain cognition. Proof of the premise: The *fictum* is neither the cognition nor the whiteness nor both together, but some third thing that is a mean between the cognition and the thing. Therefore, if the *fictum* is understood, the mind-independent thing is not understood . . .

Ockham was not the first philosopher to hold that particulars as well as universals have a nonreal mode of existence when they are objects of thought. His older contemporary, Henry of Harclay (d.1317), suggests such a view in an early question on divine ideas (edited by Armand Maurer, *Medieval Studies*, 23 (1961), pp. 166–72), and Ockham was considerably influenced by this discussion in formulating his own position. By his own account (*Ord.* I, *d.*27, *q.*3 *H*), Ockham was less familiar with the views of another older contemporary, Peter Aureoli, who had argued that the objects of sensation as well as objects of thought had a nonreal mode of existence. (See section 3 below.)

[25] *Ord.*, Prologue, *q.*1, passim, and *Rep.* II, *q.*15.

[26] Quoted from Chatton's Lectura I, *d.*3, *q.*2, by Gál in "Gualteri de Chatton et Guillelmi de Ockham Controversia de Natura Conceptus Universalis," p. 203, note 26. Cf. pp. 201–3.

The argument here is puzzling, however. The following two of its premises are implicit:

1. *Ficta* are always the immediate objects of thought and awareness,
2. If x and y are distinct, then an immediate awareness of x is not an immediate awareness of y; and vice versa; while the third:
3. *Ficta* are not the same either as the act of intellect or the mind-independent thing,
   is stated. And from (1)-(3), we can infer that:

4. Mind-independent things are never the immediate objects of our awareness,

which is clearly a denial of direct realism in epistemology. I shall return to (2) later. The appropriate response to (1) and (3) depends upon how the word *"fictum"* is understood. If it is being used here the way it was used by Ockham when he first formulated the objective-existence theory, then it stands only for those objectively existent entities that cannot exist in reality. On this interpretation, (3) is clearly true, but (1) is false on the objective-existence theory. For as long as he was an adherent of the objective-existence theory, Ockham would have held that *ficta* are the immediate objects of thought and awareness in some cases only: that is to say, when we think (*a*) of things having incompatible properties or (*b*) of abstract objects such as universals, but not when we think (*c*) of things that can really exist but in fact do not. He explicitly notes that where our thoughts of universals are concerned, these *ficta* do 'come between us and really existent particulars naturally signified by them. But, as he recognized, this fact presents no challenge to his version of direct realism in epistemology. For the latter theory claims only that we are sometimes—namely, in intuitive cognition and the abstractive cognition that immediately follows it—immediately aware of particulars, not that we *always* are. And according to the objective-existence theory, no *fictum* is the immediate object of thought in intuitive cognition. Rather the objectively existent particular it-

self, which is identical with the really existent particular is.[27]

On the other hand, if *"fictum"* is used for any putative entities in a nonreal mode of existence, Ockham's objective-existence theory is committed to (1), but not to (3). For the objectively existent entities that are the immediate objects of our awareness in intuitive cognitions, are the particulars themselves. Either way, Ockham's objective-existence theory does not maintain both (1) and (3), and the objection seems to fail because of a false premise.

Ockham's general arguments against Aureoli's similar theory include a different version of this reasoning. Focusing on a veridical visual awareness of whiteness, Ockham argues first that the whiteness and its apparent existence (Aureoli's analogue of objective existence) are not really the same.

> I ask about the apparent existence in which the whiteness is constituted when the whiteness appears. Either it is really the same as the whiteness, or it is not really the same. If it is said that it is really the same—on the contrary, when some things are really the same, they are simultaneously generated and corrupted, according to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics*, Book IV. Consequently, whenever some things are really the same, it is impossible that one should exist while the other does not. But this (where the whiteness is indicated) cannot be that (where that apparent existence, which does not exist, is indicated). Otherwise, that apparent existence would exist apart from a vision.[28]

He then assumes, parallel to (2) that

> 2'. If whiteness and its apparent existence are not really the same, then an immediate awareness of one is not an immediate awareness of the other,

and parallel to (1), that

> 1'. Apparent existence is always the immediate object of our awareness.

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[27] Even in *Ordinatio* I, d.27, q.3, where Ockham has been attacking Aureoli's similar theory about our awareness of particulars, principally on the ground that it compromises direct realism (see below), Ockham continued to allow as probable the opinion that when I conceive of man in general "only a certain *fictum* that is common to all particulars" and not any particular is the immediate object of my thought (ibid. *J*). As we shall see, Ockham ultimately eliminates the *fictum* in these cases, too, but on grounds of superfluity. For he comes to see how a mental-act theorist might maintain that conceiving of man in general is not a matter of his having a universal rather than a particular man as the immediate object of thought, but rather a matter of conceiving of particular men in a different way—viz., confusedly rather than distinctly. (*Com. to Peri. G*, pp. 234–5)

[28] *Ord.* I, d.27, q.3 *H.*

It follows that in the visual awareness in question, we are not immediately aware of the mind-independent particular whiteness, and that its apparent existence would always be a mean between the whiteness and the visual act.

This version of the argument seems even stranger than the first, however. To begin with, it seems inappropriate to ask whether the apparent or objective existence of something is *really* the same as the mind-independent whiteness. For Ockham most frequently uses the terms "really the same" and "really distinct" in such a way that it makes sense to say only of real things (*res*) that really exist either that they are really the same or really distinct. [29] It seems contrary to the spirit of the theory under attack to regard the apparent or objective existence of something as a real thing (*res*). For the whole point of such a theory is to distinguish a nonreal from a real mode of existence in such a way that the former is not reducible to the latter (see section IV below). Thus, the existence of a thing in a nonreal mode would not be something that occurs in the real mode, but rather in the nonreal mode of existence.

In this argument, Ockham seems to depart from his normal usage and, in effect, to allow that the apparent or objective existence of the whiteness really exists if and only if it is true that the whiteness has apparent existence. On this understanding, he correctly reasons that since it is logically possible that the whiteness should really exist when there is no visual awareness of it and hence when its apparent existence does not really exist and vice versa, the whiteness is not really the same as its apparent existence.

The difficulty is that this conclusion is doubly irrelevant to the issue at hand. For the theory under attack will be seen to compro-

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[29] Thus, Ockham insists that "just as distinction of reason and identity of reason are related to beings of reason, so real difference and real identity are related to real beings...." (*Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*3; *OT* II, p. 75) And he maintains that "no being of reason is really the same as or distinct from any being of reason" (*Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*2; *OT* II, p. 65). And later on (*Ord.* I, *d.*36, *q.*1 *F*) he maintains that even though creatures were possible things (*res*) from eternity, they were neither really the same as nor really distinct from the divine essence from eternity, because they did not really exist from eternity. Thus, he implies that "*x* is really distinct from *y*" is true at *t* only if both *x* and *y* exist at *t*.

mise direct realism in epistemology only if it further endorses (1′)—which neither Ockham's nor Aureoli's theory explicitly does. Second, where (1′) is incorporated into the theory, the question about direct realism will be whether I can be immediately aware of the apparent or objective existence of the whiteness without also being immediately aware of the whiteness, not whether the whiteness can exist in reality without having apparent existence and vice versa. Direct realism will be threatened only if the answer to the first question is affirmative, just as the answer to the second is. But surely the answer to the first question is negative. For it seems impossible that I should have the apparent existence of this whiteness—as opposed to the apparent existence of some blackness or the notion of apparent existence in general—as an immediate object of my thought without simultaneously having this whiteness as an immediate object of my thought. If so, (1′) and the supposed real distinction of whiteness and its apparent existence, are compatible with direct realism and Ockham's argument fails. Nevertheless, this does not settle the question of whether the objective-existence theory and direct realism are compatible. For we shall see that one way in which the objective-existence theory might be altered to meet the next objection involves giving up direct realism in epistemology.

III. *The Objective-Existence Theory and Ontological Paradox*

Ockham came to believe that paradoxical consequences follow from the general principles used in the objective-existence theory to infer the existence of something in a nonreal mode from the fact that someone thinks of or is aware of it. These alleged consequences are of the same sort as those raised for Anselm's and Descartes' ontological arguments by Gaunilo's perfect-island argument and Caterus's existent-lion objection. Ockham's argument occurs in his lengthy critique of Aureoli's theory; a summary of Aureoli's view will help us to appreciate the objection.

Aureoli bases his theory in the first instance on an argument from sensory illusion.[30] He begins with the premise, familiar from

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[30] *Petri Aureoli Scriptum Super Primum Sententiarum*, edited by Eligius Buytaert, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, 1953 & 1956. Cf. I, *d.*3, sec. 14, *a.*1, vol. 2, pp. 696–8.

more recent philosophy, that what appears must be *something,*
even in sensory illusion. But while some philosophers have
identified what appears with a sense datum and others with a
false proposition that appears true, Aureoli insists that it is the
thing and its properties that appear. And if either or both do not
really exist but are merely apparent, then they will have to have
a nonreal mode of existence. He elaborates this reasoning in
connection with eight examples of sensory illusion; but for present
purposes it will be enough to consider two. (*a*) Someone is being
carried along the water on a boat. The trees on the shore seem to
that person to move. Nevertheless, Aureoli supposes, contrary to
modern physics, the trees do not move. He apparently assumes
(but does not explicitly state) a principle of the form

> P1. If *x* seems to be *F, G,* etc., then that instance of *F*-ness, *G*-
> ness, etc. must be (in some sense).

Substituting "in motion" for "*F* " and "motion" for "*F*-ness" and
"the trees" for "*x*," he concludes that since the observed motion
does not really exist in the air or in the act of vision, the motion
must have some nonreal mode of existence, which he variously
labels "intensional," "seen," or "adjudged" existence.[31]

(*b*) A stick is swung rapidly around in the air; a circle appears.
Nevertheless, the circle will not be anything real in the stick,
because the stick is straight. Nor is it anything real in the air.
Nor can it be in the act of vision or in the eye, since the circle
appears to be in the air, while the act of vision and the eye are not
located there. Tacitly assuming a principle of the form

> P 2. If *x* appears to be *F, G,* etc., then *x,* having some sort of
> existence, is *F, G,* etc.

and substituting "the circle" for "*x*" and "in the air" for "*F*," he
concludes that the circle "that has intensional existence or that is
in apparent, adjudged, or seen existence, is in the air."[32] Having
argued that nonveridical acts of sense perception always posit
something in a nonreal mode of existence, Aureoli extends this
conclusion to veridical acts, acts of imagination, and acts of
intellect.[33]

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[31] Aureoli, ibid., p. 696. Quoted by Ockham in *Ord.* I, *d.*27, *q.*3 C.
[32] Aureoli, ibid., pp. 696–7.
[33] Aureoli, ibid., p. 698.

Ockham focuses on the first example and challenges Aureoli's tacitly assumed principles:

'The trees appear to move; therefore some motion has objective existence' no more follows than 'The trees appear to move in reality; therefore, a real motion appears' follows. For the mode of arguing is analogous. But everyone agrees that the second inference does not hold good. Therefore, neither does the first.[34]

Consider the principle instantiated by the first inference:
   P1'. If something x appears to be F, G, etc., then that instance
      of F-ness, G-ness, etc. has objective existence.
Ockham says that (P1') is equivalent to the principle employed in the second inference and it replaces (P1) once Aureoli's theory is extended to cover veridical as well as illusory acts of awareness. Ockham's point is that if (P1') held good for all substitutions for "F," "G," and "F-ness," "G-ness," then—substituting "really $\emptyset$" for "F" and "real $\emptyset$-ness" for "F-ness"—we could infer "Real $\emptyset$-ness has objective existence" and hence "Some $\emptyset$-ness is real" from "Something seems to be really $\emptyset$" and thus produce $\emptyset$-nesses in real existence simply by thinking of something as really $\emptyset$ or by having something appear to be really $\emptyset$—which is absurd.

I think we can get clearer about the structure of Ockham's objection if we apply his reasoning to (P2) and its extension:
   P2'. If something x appears to be F, G, etc., then that thing x,
      having objective existence, is F, G, etc.
Aureoli seems to reason that since the circle appears in the air, it has the property of being in the air and is not to be identified with anything, real or unreal, that lacks this property. In contemporary terms, it is as if Aureoli were operating with a system whose universe of discourse includes everything that exists either in reality or in a nonreal mode. Within this system, statements of the form "x is F" do not, in general, entail statements of the form "x exists in reality"; nor do they, in general, entail statements of the form "x has objective existence," although they do entail statements of the form "Either x exists in reality or x has objective existence." Given such a system, which allows items in the universe of discourse to exist in different modes, the way is open to relativize the predications to one mode of existence or the

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[34] *Ord.* I, *d.*27, *q.*3 K.

other. This might be done by regarding such phrases as "in reality" and "in objective existence" as analogous to modal operators in having a single argument place satisfied by a proposition. Alternatively, one could construe "is in motion" and "is in the air," which appear to be one-place predicates, as two-place predicates, one of whose places is satisfied by a mode of existence. But it is clear from Aureoli's reasoning that he is not exercising either of these options. In Aureoli's system, the predications are not relativized to one mode of existence rather than the other, but rather attach absolutely. Thus, Aureoli says that the circle is in the air; he does not say that it is in the air in the mode of objective existence or that it is in the air in the mode of real existence. Aureoli's conclusion might be formalized in such a system as follows: (∃x) (x is a circle & x is in the air & x has objective or apparent existence). "Is a circle" and "is in the air" and "has objective existence" all attach to "x" absolutely, not relative to a mode of existence. While statements of the form "x is F " do not in general entail statements of the form "x exists in reality" or "x has objective existence," such entailments will hold for some substitutions for "F." For instance, suppose that "really existent" or "objectively existent" or "really existent $\emptyset$" or "objectively existent $\emptyset$" is substituted for "F." Then we get entailments of real or objective existence, respectively. What Ockham has done, in effect, in dealing with (P1′) is to understand "Real motion has objective existence" to be a statement formalizable in the above-described system as "(∃x) (x is motion & x is real & x has objective existence)"—which, of course, entail that motion really exists. It is easy to see how a similar difficulty would follow from substituting "really nonexistent $\emptyset$ for "F " in (P2) and (P2′).

The latter paradoxical consequences might seem easily averted by simply disallowing "really existent," "really existent $\emptyset$," "really nonexistent," "really nonexistent $\emptyset$," and so forth, as legitimate substitutions for "F." However this move might otherwise fare, it would do nothing to obviate a more general difficulty which arises especially in connection with cases of sensory illusion in which a really existent particular is perceived to have properties that it does not really have. Reconsider the trees that appear to move but do not. From the latter clause, we can infer "These

trees are not in motion." But (P2) entitles us to infer "These trees are in motion" from the fact that they appear to be in motion. Within the system Aureoli seems to be presupposing, both predications are made absolutely and not merely in relation to one or another mode of existence. Thus (P2), together with the assumption that something appears to have a property that it does not really have, entails a contradiction. Similarly, for (P2′).

Although it is perhaps less obvious, the same general difficulty arises for (P1) and (P1′). Substituting "white dog" for "*F*" and "white caninity" for "*F*-ness" in (P1′), we derive "If something appears to be a white dog, then that particular white caninity has objective existence." Suppose that what appears to be a white dog is really a brown dog, so that the particular caninity that appears white is brown. Then, given that (P1′) requires that the same caninity has objective existence and is white as has real existence, and is brown, if the predicates are not relativized to modes of existence, we shall have to conclude that the same particular caninity is both white and brown.

The trouble with these principles is that they all specify that the same particulars that appear to have certain properties are the ones that actually have those properties. If this stipulation is combined with the assumption that the predicates attach to their subjects absolutely and not merely in relation to a mode of existence, then sensory illusion becomes impossible, since it would involve the same particular in both having and lacking the same properties. And this difficulty will arise no matter what is substituted for "*F*," "*G*," and so forth, and hence cannot be removed by restricting permissible substitutions. Short of completely abandoning the theory that the particulars we are aware of or think of have a nonreal mode of existence, Aureoli could modify his theory in one of two obvious ways. First, he could retain the assumption that predication is not relativized to a mode of existence, but drop the specific requirement in (P1), (P1′), (P2), and (P2′) that the same particulars that exist in reality and have certain properties, have objective or apparent existence and have certain other properties. For example, one could say that when the trees appear to move but do not, the trees that have objective existence and move are not the same particular trees as those

that really exist and do not move. If Aureoli modified his theory this way, however, it would fall prey to Ockham's earlier charge that it compromises a direct realist position in epistemology. If the objectively existent moving trees are not the same trees that really exist, then in such cases of sensory illusion, we are not immediately aware of the real trees.

Alternatively, Aureoli might retain the requirement that the same particulars that really exist and have certain properties, objectively exist and have certain other properties, while providing for predications to be relativized to modes of existence. This approach would involve replacing the above principles with

P3. If something x appears to be F, G, etc., then in some mode of existence, x is F, G, etc.

and its analogue

P3'. If something x appears to be F, G, etc., then in the mode of objective existence, that thing x is F, G, etc.

Here "in the mode of objective existence" functions as a sort of operator on the whole proposition and qualifies the predication by indicating that the predicate attaches to the subject in the mode of objective existence; similarly for "in reality." On this scheme, one can say without contradiction of the same particular trees that in reality the trees exist and are not moving, while in the mode of objective existence they exist and are moving. And one can thus account for sensory illusion without in any way compromising direct realism in epistemology. Similarly, the substitution of "really existent" and "really nonexistent" for "F" in these principles can be construed in a non-problematic way. For just as some things are real and others only imaginary, so some things are thought of as real and others are thought of as only imaginary. Thus, "In the mode of objective existence, x really exists" might be understood as logically equivalent to "In reality, someone thinks of x as really existent" and "In the mode of objective existence, x does not really exist" to "In reality, someone thinks of x as really non-existent." But the former does not entail "In reality, x exists" any more than the latter entails "In reality, x does not exist."

It would not be necessary to stipulate that all predications within this system must be relativized. In fact, one would wish to

allow for some nonrelativized predications so that one might assert relations between things that exist in different modes. For the claim that objectively existent things are somehow similar to mind-independent particulars is crucial to Ockham's theory of natural signification.

If Aureoli's theory could be rescued in either of these ways, the application of Ockham's objective-existence theory to our awareness or thoughts of particulars could be saved as well. But it is clear that Ockham would reject the first way. And it is equally obvious from his works that he completely overlooks the second way of removing apparent contradictions. For example, in arguing that genera and species cannot be real things, Ockham repeatedly insists that "universal" and "particular" are contradictory properties, and that everything that really exists is particular. He concludes that theories which say that anything that really exists is universal will end in contradiction. A number of his opponents reply that they do not simply assert that some real thing is particular and the same real thing is universal. Rather they say that a real thing *of itself* is universal and the same real thing *signed in this suppositum* is particular; or alternatively, that a real thing *according to its actual existence* is particular, and the same real thing *according to its existence in the intellect* is universal; or again that the same real thing is universal *under one concept* and particular *under another concept.* [35] In responding, however, Ockham assumes that the only way such inserted phrases could remove the contradiction is by functioning to alter what the subject terms stand for, so that it turns out that genuine contradictories are not really asserted of one and the same property-bearer. And he considers himself to have refuted their positions when he has argued that the above-mentioned phrases cannot function in that way. [36] But it is quite clear, even from the wording of these positions, that the above-mentioned phrases were not supposed to alter what the subject term stands for, but rather to relativize the predications.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Ockham came to regard these difficulties, together with the others that he brings against Aureoli,

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[35] *Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*7; *OT* II, pp. 227-8.
[36] *Ord.* I, *d.*2, *q.*7; *OT* II, pp. 244-48.

as decisive for showing that the objective-existence theory is in-
correct as applied to our intuitive and abstractive cognitions of
particulars. But since in his view universals cannot exist in
reality as well as objectively, he continued to allow that both
the objective-existence theory and the mental-act theory are
defensible where our thought of universals is concerned.

IV. *Divine Ideas and the Objective-Existence Theory*

Ockham's most explicit application of the objective-existence
theory to thoughts of particulars comes in his formulation of the
doctrine of divine ideas, where he uses it to reconcile an apparently
inconsistent triad of theological claims. The first
  1. God alone exists necessarily and everything else is a product
     of His free and contingent volition
is surely a claim of Christian doctrine as the medieval church saw
it. And the second
  2. God is simple (not a composite of real things)
is common to many medieval philosophers, including Augustine,
Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham. The third
  3. There is necessarily a plurality of ideas that are (*a*) the
     exemplars to which God looks in creation, and (*b*) that by
     thinking of which God conceives of creatures,
originally entered the theological tradition by way of Christian
Platonism. Influenced by the Demiurge myth, Platonizing church
fathers found it attractive to identify the Platonic Ideas with
the exemplars to which God looks in creation, and with that
by thinking of which God knows or conceives of creatures. Theo-
logians, including Augustine,[37] tried to reconcile this suggestion
with (1) by maintaining, contrary to Plato's intention, that the
Ideas are identical with the divine essence itself. That way, there
is no more difficulty in asserting that they exist in reality eternally
and necessarily and independently of the divine will, than there
is in claiming that the divine essence itself does. This solution
dealt with (1) at the expense of (2), however. For as Augustine
admits, there is a plurality of divine ideas.

Initially, when Ockham wrote the *Ordinatio* I, *d.35, q.*5, he

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[37] *On Eighty-Three Different Questions*, *q.* 46 "About Ideas."

thought that the objective-existence theory—with its analysis of thought into the really existent mental act and the objectively existent object—could make short work of this difficulty. For Ockham then understood (1) to claim only that there are no *real* things other than God that exist necessarily; and (2), that the really existent divine essence has no parts. The objective-existence theory assigns real existence to the divine act of thought—which Ockham claims is identical with the divine essence[38]—and only objective existence to what it thinks of. And (3) asserts only that there is a plurality of objects, not acts, of divine thought. Hence, an objective-existence theorist can say that by one simple, really existent act of thought, God eternally and immutably understands an infinite plurality of objectively existent creatures. Since He is essentially omniscient, He necessarily conceives of each of them and hence the infinite plurality has objective existence necessarily. But it does not follow from this that anything exists in reality necessarily, eternally, and independently of the divine essence. Ockham emphasizes that "from eternity a thing is an idea, but it is not actually existing from eternity."[39] Indeed, since objective existence is mind-dependent existence, the ideas depend for their necessary objective existence on the divine act of thought.

By the time he wrote *Quodlibeta* IV, *q*.19, however, Ockham had come to see (1) as asserting that nothing other than God has necessary existence of any kind—real or unreal. And given that understanding, he argues that (1) is incompatible with his application of the objective-existence theory to God's thought:

understanding other things, God would understand such *ficta*. Thus, from eternity, there was a whole coordination of as many *ficta* as there can be different intelligible things, whose existence was so necessary that God could not destroy them, which seems false.[40]

Once again, the argument misrepresents Ockham's objective-existence theory, if the term *ficta* is understood the way Ockham originally took it: namely, as standing only for those objectively existent entities that cannot exist in reality (see section I above).

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[38] *Ord.* I, *d*.38, *q*.1 M. *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, Assumption 6 P, p. 50.

[39] *Ord.* I, *d*.35, *q*.5 L; cf. G, J, K.

[40] *Quodlibeta* IV, *q*.19; repeated in *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum*, *q*.1, Corvino ed., p. 276.

For Ockham did not originally claim that when God understands other things, the immediate object of His thought is invariably a *fictum*. It is when He understands genera and species.[41] But when He understands possible creatures, the immediate object of His thought is those creatures themselves insofar as they exist objectively in Him. Nevertheless, the above passage poses a genuine problem for the objective-existence theory, because that theory does imply that an infinite coordination has objective existence necessarily and eternally. God as essentially omniscient will no more be able to bring it about that the objects of His thought do not have objective existence, than He will be able to alter His own nature. Thus, even if their objective existence is dependent upon God's thought, it is independent of His will—which Ockham had come to regard as theologically unacceptable.

Someone who understood (1) the second way would have good theological reason to abandon the objective-existence theory. But this does not mean he would have a motive for putting the mental-act theory in its place. On the mental-act theory, a thought of particulars is *of* those particulars it naturally signifies. What, then, makes the divine cognition to be a thought of each and every possible particular? Briefly, according to the only criterion Ockham provides for the mental-act theory, an act of thought is proper to a particular if and only if that particular meets the following two conditions: (*a*) it is one of the actual or possible things that the act of thought resembles most; and (*b*) of those things that meet condition (*a*), the act of thought is apt to be caused by that particular and not by others.[42] Presumably, the divine thought

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[41] In *Ord.* I, *d.*35, *q.*5 *R*, Ockham says that "where the things to be made by Him are concerned, God has a cognition not only of universals the way a created artisan does of things to be made by him, but also a distinct and particular cognition of any particular to be made. . . ." It follows that God conceives of both universals and particulars.

[42] In *Quodlibeta* I, *q.*13, the following objection is raised: "First, it seems that an intuitive cognition is not proper, since any intuitive cognition is granted to be equally similar to one particular as to another . . . " Ockham replies, "I say, therefore, to the first of these that an intuitive cognition is a proper cognition of a particular, not because it is more similar to one than to another, but because it is naturally caused by one and not by the other, nor can it be caused by the other. If you say that it can be caused by God alone—it is true. But such a vision is always apt to be caused by one created object and not by the other." Compare *Rep.* II, *q.*15, *EE*, quoted in note 21 above.

would be a distinct cognition of all actual and possible partic-
ulars, according to this criterion, only if the divine essence were
equally similar to all such particulars and only if each was an
actual or possible cause of the divine cognition. But Ockham
thinks that the divine essence is not equally similar to all actual
and possible creatures, since it is more similar to rational
creatures made in God's image than to nonrational creatures.[43]
Further, and more important, Ockham regards it as altogether
impossible that God's act of thought should have a total or partial
efficient cause in God or in creatures.[44] Hence, contrary to
what Ockham silently assumes, a consideration of God's thought
of particulars would not recommend the mentalact theory more
highly than the objective-existence theory.

V. *The Objective-Existence Theory and Ockham's Razor:*

Ultimately, Ockham abandoned the objective-existence theory
altogether—both where thoughts of universals and thoughts of
particulars are concerned—because Walter Chatton convinced
him that the objective-existence theory "does with more entities"
what the mental-act theory "does with fewer." That is, Ockham
concluded that the objective-existence theory violated the
principle of parsimony better known now as Ockham's razor.
To evaluate this claim, it is necessary to know what "ontological
commitments" each theory has and whether, on balance, the
mental-act theory is able to solve philosophical problems as well
as the objective-existence theory. Perhaps the notion of an
ontological commitment calls for some explanation, however. For
Quine, a theory has an ontological commitment to the entities
that must be taken to be values of the variables if the theory is to
be true; and a philosopher has an ontological commitment to
those entities if he accepts the theory. An analogous account is

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[43] *Ord.* I, *d.*3, *q.*10 D; *OT* II, pp. 555-7.

[44] Thus, Ockham writes in *Ord.* I, *d.*35, *q.*5 F, ". . . the cognition of a creature
together with the divine essence is common to the three persons [and] is alto-
gether uncausable, indeed even altogether unproducible. Consequently, the
divine intellect is not changeable at all—indeed to change is altogether incon-
sistent with it, just as to be brought about or to be caused by anything is incom-
patible with the divine cognition."

available within Ockham's logic: for Ockham, we may say, a theory has an ontological commitment to entities of a certain sort, if, in order for the theory to be true, a term must be taken to supposit or stand for such entities in a proposition included in the theory.[45]

(A) *Ontological Commitments of the Objective Existence Theory*: By this criterion, Ockham clearly thought that the objective-existence theory had an ontological commitment to both real and objectively existent entities. It has an ontological commitment to real entities, since "A man is an animal" cannot be true unless both the term "man" and the term "animal" supposit or stand for really existent particular men; to objectively existent entities, since the proposition "Man is a species" cannot be true, unless both the term "man" and the term "species" supposit or stand for the objectively existent universal man.

Nevertheless, a philosopher might make use of a theory that had an ontological commitment to entities in the sense just explained, while holding the metaphysical belief that they are reducible to something else. For instance, a phenomenalist might make use of a system in which terms are taken to stand in a proposition for physical objects, even though he holds the metaphysical belief that physical objects are ultimately reducible to perceptions or sense data. And he might or might not hold that it is in principle possible to formulate a language whose terms can stand

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[45] For Ockham, supposition is a property of terms, but unlike signification, a property that terms have only insofar as they occur in propositions. In the *Summa Logicae* I, ch. 63, he explains: "Moreover, 'suppositon' means, as it were, being posited in the place of something else. Thus, when a term stands for something else in a proposition, in such a way that we use that term in place of something of which, or of a pronoun indicating which the term (or the nominative case of that term, if it is in an oblique case) is verified, the term supposits for that thing." (Boehner, Gál, and Brown edition, p. 193). For instance, "man" supposits for Gerald Ford in "Every man is an animal" because the proposition "This is a man" (where "this" indicates Gerald Ford) is true. The term "man" has personal supposition when it stands in a proposition for one of the things it signifies (as in the previous example); material supposition, when it stands for the spoken sound or written inscription "man"; and simple supposition, when it stands for the concept "man." *(Summa Logicae* I, ch. 64) For a discussion of difficulties with Ockham's account, see my article "What Does Ockham Mean by 'Supposition'?" forthcoming in the *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, vol. 17 (1976), pp. 375–91.

in a proposition only for sense data. Did Ockham, while he held the objective-existence theory, believe that objectively existent entities were ultimately reducible to real existents?

Although Ockham did not explicitly address himself to this issue, I think it is fairly clear that the answer is negative. In my opinion, the only reduction it would be plausible to see him envisioning is one that identifies the objective existence of a thing with the real existence of a mental act with a certain content. After all, he does appear to think that a statement of the form "*x* has objective existence" entails and is entailed by the statement that a mental act with a certain content really exists. But any attempt to make this reduction by identifying the immediate object of thought with an act of intellect of a certain content, would have been rejected by Ockham. For in arguing for the objective-existence theory against the mental-act theory, he maintains that every act of understanding must have an object— even when it is a thought of a universal that cannot really exist— since otherwise the thought would be a thought of nothing. But he says that the object of thought cannot be identified with the act of intellect, because then the act of intellect would be an act of understanding itself—which he finds absurd.[46] And if he had originally envisioned any other sort of reduction of objectively existent entities to acts of intellect with certain contents, it seems that fairness to the mental-act theory would have required him to bring it up at this point. Further, as we have just seen, Ockham worries that the objective-existence theory, together with the doctrine of divine omniscience, posits a whole coordination of entities that have objective existence eternally and necessarily and independently of the divine will. But if the objective existence of creatures from eternity were reducible to the real existence from eternity of the divine act of thought, it would not be necessary to suppose that anything other than the divine essence exists eternally and independently of the divine will. That Ockham abandoned the objective-existence theory in part because of this objection, is evidence that he did not envisage such a reduction.

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[46] *Com. to Peri.*, ch. 1 *F*, p. 323.

Thus, Ockham's objective-existence theory does have an ontological commitment to objectively existent entities whose existence in the nonreal mode is not reducible to the real existence of anything else. And when one considers that, according to Ockham, not only actual and possible creatures, but also things that cannot really exist—whether because they are abstract or because they have contradictory properties—have eternal objective existence in the mind of God,[47] its ontology begins to look very generous indeed.

Chatton tries to demonstrate the fulness of its ontology in another way. Ockham's early expositions of the objective-existence theory make it clear that only what is thought of by someone can have objective existence. But these discussions do not seem to rule out the possibility that two people might have the same objectively existent entity before their minds. That is, nothing Ockham says earlier suggests that the objectively-existent entity before my mind is numerically distinct from the one before yours, just because the one is before *my* mind and the other is before *yours*. Instead, when someone objects that if Ockham's theory were true, "then there would be as many universals as intellects," he brushes the issue aside, replying "I do not care for the present whether or not a figment (*figmentum*) or concept is varied as the intellects are varied," so long as my concept and yours are "one through equivalence"—that is, equivalent in signifying.[48] Chatton argues, however, that the theory must make this assumption. For he maintains that if the objective existence of a thing does not logically presuppose the real existence of any act of this kind in particular, then it cannot logically presuppose the real existence of some act or other of this kind.[49] Chatton's inference is of the form "This A does not logically presuppose this B and this A does not logically presuppose that B and so on for each B; therefore, this A does not logically presuppose the existence of some B or other"—which is not in general valid. For example, this body can exist without having a volume of 3 cubic meters and this body can exist without having a volume of 2.999 cubic meters and so

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[47] *Ord.* I, d.38, q.1 M.
[48] *Ord.* I, d.2, q.8; *OT* II, pp. 284–5.
[49] Gál's ed., op. cit., p. 202, lin. 2–12.

on for each determinate volume; but it cannot exist without having some determinate volume or other. Nevertheless, Ockham agrees with Chatton and offers the latter's argument as his own in *Quodlibeta* IV, *q*.19. If objectively existent entity *a* logically presupposes the real existence of my act of intellect and objectively existent entity *b* logically presupposes the real existence of your act of intellect, then since my mental act can continue to exist when yours ceases and vice versa, it follows that *a* can continue to exist when *b* does not and vice versa. The conclusion is that there are two objectively existent entities, just as there are two acts of intellect.

(B) *Does the Objective-Existence Theory Posit a Plurality without Necessity?* It will be a violation of Ockham's razor to posit such a coordinate realm of objectively existent entities in addition to really existent acts of intellect, however, only if the former serve no necessary theoretical function. So long as Ockham retains the premise

2. If we think of something, then it has some sort of existence—namely, either real existence or objective existence, objectively existent entities are needed, because we sometimes think of things as having properties that no real things can and/or do have. Further, once the theory is extended to cover thoughts of things that do exist, it is claimed that it is the fact that an act of intellect is directed to an objectively existent entity and to this one rather than that one, which accounts for the fact that it is a thought of something and of this rather than that.

Chatton argues that objectively existent entities are superfluous because they cannot possibly fill the latter theoretical role, while the real things posited by the theory can do so, unassisted by such objectively existent entities. To begin with, he contends that "there is no apparent contradiction in an act of intellect's remaining in existence without any such *fictum*."[50] Chatton bases this claim on the assumption that if the real existence of an act of intellect is logically independent of every other really existent thing, then *a fortiori* it must be logically independent of the objective existence of anything. His second premise is that "it is a

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[50] Gál's ed., p. 202, lin. 21-2.

contradiction to suppose that there is an act of intellect unless something—say its term—is understood."[51] Necessarily, every act of thought has an object. If it is not necessary that an act of thought is directed towards some objectively existent entity (as it cannot be if it is not necessary that some entity have objective existence whenever an act of thought exists), then that the thought is directed towards the objectively existent entity and towards one rather than another, cannot be what accounts for its being a thought of something and of this rather than that. Some alternative explanation must be found.

A devotee of the objective-existence theory would no doubt accept Chatton's second premise and use the objective-existence theory's analysis of thought to argue that his first premise is false. By the time Ockham wrote the *Quodlibeta,* however, he had come to endorse Chatton's argument as his own.

Chatton thinks that an adequate analysis of what happens when we think of something can be given in terms of the really existent things admitted by the theory. If we think of a round square or a chimera, it is not necessary that there be (in some sense) anything that is a round square or a chimera. It is enough if a really existing thing has a different property—namely, the property of being-of-a-round-square or the property of being-of-a-chimera. Thus, Chatton writes,

The mind can imagine (*fingere*) many things, such as a golden mountain, a chimera, etc. But this is nothing other than for it to have an act of understanding by virtue of which I could judge that its nature would be of this sort if it existed, as was said above.[52]

Such properties are no doubt to be identified with those real features of mental acts that Meinong labelled "contents" and that Ockham acknowledges even on the objective-existence theory. And Chatton wants to say that it is just such features that make thoughts to be of one thing rather than another. Ockham accepts Chatton's conclusion and—abandoning the distinction between objective and real existence—identifies concepts with really existent acts of intellect.

A full evaluation of Chatton's contention that the mental-act

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[51] Gál's ed., p. 202, lin. 22–4.
[52] Gál's ed., p. 207, lin. 25–9.

theory can provide as good or better an analysis of thought without objectively existent entities as the objective-existence theory does with them, would require a lengthy digression into Ockham's doctrine of natural signification. But even if there were space to show what I believe to be true—namely, that the mental-act theory is neither more nor less able to account for natural signification than the objective-existence theory is—the proof that the objective-existence theory does with more entities what the mental-act theory does with fewer, would not be complete. For we have yet to examine the extent of the ontological commitments that Ockham, as a mental-act theorist, feels compelled to make. And we have still to ask how the two theories measure up against the wider range of philosophical issues.

(C) *Ontological Commitments of the Mental-Act Theory*: From Chatton's discussion one might expect the mental-act theory to make do with an ontology exhausted by actually existent particular real things and unembellished by abstract entities of any sort. To see whether this is so, we must ask first of all whether Ockham retained an ontological commitment to un-actualized possible particulars even after abandoning the objective-existence theory. In at least one place, Ockham emphatically rejects such a commitment. For in the *Ordinatio* I, *d*.43, *q*.2 *E*, Ockham attacks Scotus's claim that the divine intellect produces creatures in a nonreal mode of existence, intelligible existence, prior to their creation.

It does not seem good to say that the divine intellect produces a creature in intelligible existence, since what receives no formal existence by an act but is only named by a certain extrinsic denomination, is not produced by being understood, but is only named by a certain extrinsic denomination.
  Therefore, a creature is not produced in such intelligible existence.[53]

In the next paragraph he goes on to say that ". . . even when a creature is understood, it is nothing although understood . . ." According to Ockham's later view, God understood creatures from eternity before any really existed, and therefore such propositions as "A man was understood from eternity" are true. But the only thing that must have existed from eternity in order for them to be true is God's act of thought. Thus, when Ockham

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[53] Cf. *Ord.* I, *d*.36, *q*.1 *P-R*.

wrote this question, he seems to have thought that nonexistent possibles neither have a nonreal mode of existence, nor are reducible to anything that really exists. They are simply nothing.

Nevertheless, Ockham does not restrict himself to such a sparse ontology when doing modal logic. For throughout the *Summa Logicae*, his principal work on logic, he assumes that concepts are mental qualities and not objectively existent entities. But he explicitly retains the claim that terms can supposit or stand for possibles in a proposition, whether or not the possibles actually exist. Specifically, he lays down the rule that in a present tense proposition, a term can supposit only for things that really exist at the present time; in a past tense proposition for those that exist now or for those that existed in the past; in a future tense proposition, for those that exist now or for those that will exist; and in a proposition of possibility, for those that exist now or for those that can exist.[54] By the above definition, it follows that Ockham retained an ontological commitment to unactualized possibles even after he gave up the objective-existence theory.

If so, however, we must ask whether the mental-act theory can account for the ontological status of unactualized possibles as well as the objective-existence theory can. Ockham does not address himself to this issue either in the *Summa Logicae* or in his later works, but merely takes unactualized possibles for granted. But clearly he could not consistently retain the claim of the *Ordinatio* I, *d.*43, *q.*2, that unactualized possibles are simply nothing. There are two obvious alternatives: (*a*) He could contend that there are unactualized possibles but they are reducible without remainder to actually existent real things. From Ockham's point of view, the most plausible proposal would be to reduce unactualized possibles to the really existent divine act of thinking of them. Unfortunately, given the mental-act theory, this suggestion will not work out. For as we have just seen (in section III above), that theory cannot account for God's thinking of everything actual and possible. But without any abstract real objects, it is not clear what viable alternative reduction Ockham could propose. (*b*) He could contend that there are unactualized possibles and that they

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[54] *Summa Logicae* 1, ch. 72; *OP* I, pp. 215–6. Cf. ch. 33, pp. 95–6.

are not reducible to actually existing real things. But what sort of ontological status will they have? By hypothesis, they are not nothing, although they do not really exist and are not reducible to what really exists. Nor can it be said that they have objective existence as objects of thought, since that would be to resurrect the objective-existence theory. Apparently, it must be said that they have some ontological status independently both of real things and of being thought of. But if, after adopting the mental-act theory, Ockham was inclined to ridicule the objective-existence theory for positing "a little world of occult objectively existent things,"[55] he should have found such unreduced, unactualized possibles even stranger. Further, this hypothesis would create even more theological difficulties than the objective-existence theory did. For assuming that possibles are necessarily possible, it would follow that possibles have this "occult" status eternally and necessarily and independently of both the divine will and the divine intellect (see section IV above).

Despite these difficulties, the objective-existence theory is really in no better position to account for the ontological status of unactualized possibles. To be sure, it asserts that they are all eternally objectively existent objects of God's thought. And it does seem easier to understand what it is for something to be an object of thought than for it to be an unreduced, nonexistent, unactualized possible. But like the mental-act theory, the objective-existence theory says that what ultimately directs a really existent act of thought towards its objects is the content of that act of thought—on Ockham's view, comparative similarity and possible or actual causal relations (see section I above). Thus, if such relations cannot account for God's thought being of all possibles on the mental-act theory, it cannot do so on the objective-existence theory either. On the other hand, if some alternative to these relations were found, it would open the way for the mental-act theory to reduce unactualized possibles to the divine act of thought, just as much as for the objective-existence theory to explain its direction to all objectively existent entities. And the mental-act theory would still turn out to be the thriftier, because it would not carry an onto-logical commitment to any unreduced unreal entities.

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[55] *Quodlibeta* III, *q.*3.

But the objective-existence theory is not only committed to real things and unactualized possibles. It also assigns objective existence to things that cannot really exist: to abstract objects and to objects with incompatible properties. And if the former seem harmless enough so long as they do not really exist, the latter create well-known difficulties. Is Ockham, in the *Summa Logicae*, as willing to let "round square" and "chimera" supposit for impossibles as he is to let "man" and "animal" supposit for un-actualized possibles? The answer is that he is not. He writes,

it should not be imagined that just as there are certain beings signified by terms such as 'man', 'animal', 'white', 'heat', 'short', 'long', etc., so there are also certain non-beings and impossibles wholly distinct from beings and signified by terms such as 'chimera', 'goatstag', etc., as if there were one world made up of impossibles, just as there is one world made up of beings.[56]

Ockham says that such concepts signify things signified by their component concepts and "signify nothing other than real things that are or can be or at least could have been actual."[57] But they do not signify them in such a way that they can supposit for them in a proposition.

So long as there is no theoretical work for which impossible entities are required, this economy by the mental-act theory carries with it no accompanying cost. It is not clear, however, that the objective-existence theorist could not also trim such impossibles from his ontology. The need for objectively existent entities might still be defended on the ground that we think of abstract objects and unactualized possibles, and further that some such entities are needed for logic. And Ockham might try to adapt to the objective-existence theory the traditional medieval contention that neither God nor anyone else has a *proper* idea of impossibles; rather we think of impossibles only by thinking of possibles.

Conclusion:

Of the four objections to the objective-existence theory examined above, only the first—that it compromises direct realism in epistemology—is entirely misguided. The second—that it leads

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[56] *Summa Logicae* II, ch. 14; *OP* I, p. 287.
[57] Ibid., p. 286.

to ontological paradox—presents Ockham with three alternatives: he can (*a*) refuse to apply the objective-existence theory to thoughts and awarenesses of particulars, or (*b*) compromise a direct realist position in epistemology; or (*c*) adopt some scheme which allows predications to be relativized to modes of existence. Ockham's choice of (*a*) is unequivocal. From his point of view, (*b*) is unthinkable. And in ignoring (*c*), Ockham passes over what is probably the most promising way of developing the objective-existence theory. While the theological considerations invoked by the third objection reinforce Ockham's choice of (*a*), the mental-act theory seems no better equipped to provide an adequate analysis of divine thought. And the lack of such an analysis leads to even greater difficulties when the mental-act theory is combined with an ontological commitment to unactualized possibles. Ockham eventually gave up the objective-existence theory as applied to thoughts of universals as well because he thought it violated the principle of parsimony. And as he leaves the two theories, the mental-act theory does have an advantage over the objective-existence theory in not positing "a world of impossibles." Further, although neither can give an adequate account of unactualized possibles without explaining what directs God's thoughts to all of them—given such an explanation—the mental-act theory will be able to do with reduced unreal entities what the objective-existence theory can do only with unreducible ones. If so, it seems Ockham was right to think that the "little world of occult objectively existent things" should be shaved by Ockham's razor.

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