History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages

Handouts

I have collected here all the handouts, as near as I can, from my Fall 2009 course “History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages.” I have adjusted a few things here and there — to hide telephone numbers and email addresses you shouldn’t see, for instance, or to remove something I am not authorized to distribute freely. So you will find an occasional line of “x’s” or a simple blank space. They should not be obtrusive.

These handouts come from a number of sources. Most of them have been provided by my friend and former student Curtis Sommerlatte. Others, particularly texts, are public-domain items I have substituted for copyrighted texts we read in class.

Several of these handouts are available separately elsewhere on IU Scholarworks.

History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages: Handouts, by Paul Vincent Spade is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.
PHIL P401 History of Philosophy: Special Topics (§ 11962) & P515 Medieval Philosophy, (§ 29794), Fall 2009: "History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages."

Professor Spade, Sycamore Hall 122.

Class meetings

MW 2:30–3:45 p.m., Ballantine Hall 208.

Office Hours

MW 10:15–11:30 a.m. You can try to call my office at xxxxxxxx, but it won't do you a bit of good, since I have my telephone unhooked in self-defense. A better bet is to call the main departmental office at xxxxxxxx and one of the office staff can leave a note in my mailbox. But the absolutely best way to get in touch with me outside office hours is by e-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. I check that several times a day.

General policy on office hours: You don't need an appointment during the posted times; just come on by. If your schedule doesn't fit mine, I can generally arrange other times (within reason) on Mondays and Wednesdays, and sometimes on Fridays, and will be happy to do so, but they do need to be arranged. (Again, e-mail is the best way to set up such an arrangement, or just speak to me after lecture to set up a time.)

OnCourse

I will be making essential use of the University's Oncourse facilities for this course. Log in at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx with your regular IU username and password.

Depending on whether you are enrolled in this course as an undergraduate or as a graduate student, you will see (among your other Oncourse pages) two tabs at the top of the screen:

- Either FA09 BL PHIL P401 11962 (for undergraduates) or FA09 BL PHIL P515 29794 (for graduate students); and
- FA09 BL PHIL P401 C11662. This is a combined site I have set up for this course. Everything will take place here. If you go to the other site, you will be redirected to this one.

Note: It is a little-known fact that you can customize the tabs you see at the top of the page on Oncourse. After logging in, click on the "My Workspace" tab, then on "Preferences" in the menubar on the left, and then on the "Customize Tabs" link across the top of the window. Follow the instructions.

On the Oncourse site you will find:

- This Syllabus.
- Important announcements about this course, posted as we go along.
- An email archive, where you can view messages from me or your classmates relevant to this course.
You can send email to xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx and it will be automatically forwarded to all members of this class and deposited in the email archive for later viewing. (Porphyry is one of the first main figures we will be talking about in this class.) Note that this feature is to be used only for matters relevant to this class. If you abuse it and start sending random emails to everybody, I'll have to reconfigure the utility so that only I can send mail through it.

- An "Assignments" utility, where you will submit your examinations and papers for this course in digital format.
- A quiz-taking utility, for weekly quizzes as described below. (Click on the "Original Test and Survey" link in the menubar on the left of your screen.)
- A "Post'Em" grade-reporting utility, where you can see your running grades for this course: quiz grades, examination grades, paper grades, comments, etc. (Note: I have to upload these grades manually from my Excel spreadsheet gradebook. So there will be some lag-time between, say, taking a quiz and seeing the results posted here.) I am not using the Oncourse "Gradebook" utility, which I find too restrictive for my purposes.
- A "Resources" folder. Lots of important things will be deposited here. These will include information about books on reserve for us at the Wells Library, several articles and papers in PDF format, copies of all class handouts (including this Syllabus), and whatever other amazing and unpredictable things I come up with.

You will be expected to keep up with what's happening on this Oncourse site.

**Required texts**

- Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, Armand Maurer, trans., 2nd ed. (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.)
- Paul Vincent Spade, *History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages: Notes and Texts*. A "course pack" containing additional additional notes on the materials translated in *Five Texts* (above), plus several further translations. This will be available at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. The price is $29.90 + sales tax.

**Scope of the course**

This course will investigate in detail the history of the problem of universals in the Middle Ages, together with the issues that go along with that. Such other issues include:

- The problem of "individuation."
- Epistemological questions concerning the formation of general concepts.

Authors to be treated include (more or less in chronological order):

- Porphyry,
- Boethius,
- Odo of Tournai,
- Fridugisus,
- William of Champeaux,
- Gilbert of Poitiers,
- Peter Abelard,
- Clarenbald of Arras,
- Avicenna,
- Thomas Aquinas,
- John Duns Scotus,
- Walter Burley,
- Walter Chatton,
- William of Ockham.

Other such household names will be treated in passing, and of course the ghosts of Plato and Aristotle will haunt the classroom all semester.

The discussion will stress the historical facts and details about these people and their views (oh yes, lots and lots of facts and details!), as well as their philosophical merits and demerits. I hope to surprise you by showing that there are plenty of philosophical merits to views that may at first seem just wild and that you initially have no sympathy for at all.

**Presuppositions**

Although a knowledge of Latin would certainly be nice in this course (as in all other aspects of your life too—sigh!), particularly when it comes to broadening your range of possible paper topics, it is not in any way needed or expected. All required readings will be in English, as will the lectures, for that matter. Like all advanced courses in philosophy, this one will presuppose a fair background in philosophy generally. Nevertheless, I welcome students from the Medieval Studies Program who do not have any special expertise in philosophy. You may have to scramble in parts of the course, but you will have the enormous advantage of already being familiar with much of the medieval context that will pose an initial obstacle to non-medievalists. In short, I plan to be flexible and make the course beneficial to a wide range of advanced students with varying backgrounds. (On the other hand, undergraduates with no background at all in philosophy should not even think about registering for this course. If in doubt, please consult with me.)

**Auditors**

Subject to the availability of seats (the paying customers of course get priority), active auditors are also welcome. (An "active" auditor is defined as one who attends class faithfully, does the reading, and takes full part in the class in every way except for examinations and the paper.) Passive auditors (defined as "dead wood") are invited to go audit some other course in the department. I will be happy to help you select such a course in the privacy of my office.

**Benefits of the course**

This course will make you wise beyond your years, reduce your time in Purgatory (if any), and guarantee success in all the things that really matter. It will cure myopia, prevent balding, mend broken bones and even prevent their breaking in the first place! What other course can make such a claim?

As an additional benefit, graduate students in Philosophy may count this as a course in “medieval philosophy” for the Department’s graduate distribution requirements. It has also been pre-approved by the Metaphysics & Epistemology committee as counting for distribution in that area. (But you can’t count it for
Course requirements

This course will focus on a number of unfamiliar authors, which means there are many things to keep straight. In order to satisfy myself that you have kept them straight, I will schedule a series of weekly 20-point quizzes over matters of terminology, points of theory and other such nuts and bolts. Having verified that you know what you're talking about, I will ask you actually to go ahead and talk about it on essay-type mid-term and final examinations and a term paper on some topic relevant to the people and theories we will be treating. Students taking this course under the graduate P515 number will be expected to write appropriately more ambitious term papers and examinations.

On-line submissions

All written work for this class—quizzes, examinations, term-papers—will be submitted in digital format through the Oncourse "Assignments" utility. There are several advantages to doing this:

- All submissions are time-and-date stamped, so there is absolutely no question when something was turned in.
- I can download your papers and examinations, grade them by inserting comments directly into the files, and return the graded versions to the "Assignments" utility. This way, both you the student and I the instructor have complete copies of everything submitted and returned.

In the past, I have sometimes had the students themselves submit their written work (except for quizzes) to Turnitin.com, an online plagiarism-checking service. That proved to be complicated, and some students seemed to be unable to manage it. So I am not doing it that way this time. Instead, this semester you will submit examinations and term-papers to the "Assignments" utility on Oncourse. See below for important information about how to do this.

But make no mistake about it: Even though I am not having students submit their papers directly to the Turnitin.com plagiarism-checking site this semester, I will routinely submit all examinations and term-papers to that service for checking. I won't wait until I get suspicious; I will submit everything.

The examinations and term papers will be subject to a late-penalty as described below.

Important Information

It is your responsibility to make sure your examinations and your term paper get submitted through the Oncourse “Assignments” utility in timely fashion, not my responsibility to make some accommodation if you can’t figure it out or do something wrong. In other words, don’t tell me “I thought I had submitted it in time, but when I went back later it wasn’t there.” Once you’ve successfully submitted it, you will receive an email from Oncourse confirming your submission. Make sure you get that email, and save it. If you don’t get it, you’ve done something wrong. That email is your “proof of submission.” Don’t lose it or delete it. (Note: Once you’ve submitted your examination or paper, you can go back to the Oncourse “Assignments” utility. There under the list of assignments, you will see a notice in the “status” column by this assignment, saying “Submitted” followed by the date and time of submission.)

Prepare your examination or paper using your favorite word-processor. (Preferably Microsoft Word, but I can
usually convert from other formats if necessary.) When you’re ready to submit it, go to our Oncourse page and click on “Assignments” in the menubar on the left of your screen. Then click on the correct assignment from the list. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on the “Add attachments” button.

Then click on the “Upload local file” button. Locate the file on whatever computer you’re using, and select it. (Note: You’ll also see a bunch of things further down on your screen, under a “Select a resource” section. Unless you’ve been saving drafts of your paper somewhere else on the Oncourse system, this will be irrelevant to you. If you try to upload something you see there, it’ll probably work, but it won’t do you a bit of good if it’s not the relevant item.)

After your file has been uploaded, it isn’t submitted yet. You will see the filename immediately below an “Items to attach” bar on your screen. Click on the “Continue” button. You’ll be taken back to the page for the particular assignment you’re doing. Scroll down to the bottom again, and you’ll see the file you just uploaded under the label “Attachments.” If you’ve uploaded the wrong file, or if you need to upload more, use the “Add/remove attachments” button as needed.

Once you’ve got everything the way you want it, click the “Submit” button. But you’re not done! An alert will show up telling you that if you proceed, there’s no going back. (This is just a particularly alarming way of saying there’s no way to “unsubmit” something.) If everything is OK, verify it by clicking on the “Submit” button at the bottom of your screen. You will see a “Submission confirmation” page. Click the “OK” button and you’re done. (Don’t forget to look for that email confirmation you’ll be getting.)

My experience is that people sometimes omit the last step, described in the preceding paragraph. Be warned! It's your responsibility.

**Quizzes**

This material is very jargony, technical and full of subtle distinctions. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, to be sure we have all that stuff straight. And it necessary to do this as we go along, not in one big rush right before the end of the semester.

Accordingly, there will be a series of weekly twenty-point quizzes, beginning the second week of classes. There will a total of eleven of them. To take them, go to Oncourse and click on the "Original Test and Survey" link in the menubar on the left of your screen. You will be able to take any "currently active" quiz, and to go back and look at your results afterwards.)

The quizzes will be available to take any time between Wednesday 3:45 p.m. (the end of class) and the following Sunday midnight (technically, Monday morning at 0:00 a.m.). You can take each quiz only once, but you can spend as long as you like on it. You can access the quiz and print it out, if you wish, before you actually submit it. (But be sure you don't actually submit it prematurely; you only get one shot!) You can use your texts, notes and any other resources at your disposal (including talking to one another)—in fact, I hope you do. In short, there is virtually no way to cheat on these quizzes (short of having someone else take it pretending to be you). Their purpose is not to be tricky or hard, but simply to verify that you have mastered the nuts and bolts of the material.

The first such quiz will start on **Wednesday, September 9, at 3:45 p.m.**, and will be available to take until **Sunday, September 13, midnight**.

Each of the quizzes will be of a quite “objective” type, over matters of terminology and the details pertinent
to understanding this material. By “objective,” I mean “multiple-choice” and “true/false,” short answer, and an occasional fill-in-the-blank. If you ask how I can dare to give an “objective” quiz in a philosophy course, for heaven’s sake, the answer is: It’s easy! I ask the questions and you give me the answers, that’s how.

Mid-Term Examination

The mid-term examination will be submitted to the Oncourse "Assignments" utility. Questions for the mid-term will be distributed in class on Wednesday, October 14. (There will be no quiz that week.) Your completed examination is due online by the start of class the following Wednesday, October 21, 2:30 p.m. There will be a late-penalty, as described below.

Term paper

The term paper will be due in the Oncourse "Assignments" utility by the beginning of class on Monday, November 30, 2:30 p.m. (This is right after the Thanksgiving break. But of course you will have been working on your paper since long before the break.) There will be a late-penalty, as described below. Papers not submitted online in this way will not be accepted.

Final Examination

On Monday, December 7, I will distribute questions for the final examination. Your completed examinations may be submitted to the Oncourse "Assignments" utility any time after that, but are in any case due by Friday, December 18, by 2:45 p.m. Please note the odd time. This is the beginning of the final examination period reserved for this course. They will be subject to a late penalty, as described below. No final examinations, and no late anything, will be accepted after Friday, December 18, 4:45 p.m., the end of the final examination period for this class. If it isn't submitted by then, tough; the course is over!

Grades

Your course grade will be figured on the basis of four components: (1) quizzes (20%), (2) mid-term examination (25%), (3) term paper (35%), and (4) final examination (20%). Here's how it will work:

1. First, I will tally up your total number of points (that is, the total number you got right) on all the quizzes, discarding your lowest quiz grade. (This allows you to miss one quiz, or to do badly on it. Please understand: This is not a "freebie." It is designed to allow you get ill, or to have something unexpected come up. If you miss your one quiz early in the semester, don't expect get another one dropped if some emergency arises.) This total I will call your "raw" quiz score.

2. I will then take the top two such raw quiz scores and average them together. This average will be what I call the “base” score. This “base score” will count as 100% of the quiz-component of your final course grade. What I will call your “adjusted quiz score” will be calculated as simply a percentage of this base score.

For example, the absolute maximum number of possible quiz points is 220 points (11 quizzes x 20 points each). Discarding your lowest quiz score (a quiz not taken counts as a zero), the maximum possible "raw" score is 200. If your own raw score is 175, and the two highest raw scores in the class are 190 and 180, say, I will take the average of 190 and 180—which comes out to 185—as the "base score." So 185 points = 100% on the quiz component. Your own "adjusted quiz score" will therefore be 175/185, or 94.59%. I'll round that
up to 95%. The purpose of taking the average of the top two raw scores in the class as the "base" score is to provide some protection in case some of the quizzes are just too hard.

3. Your term paper and each question on your mid-term and final examinations will be given a letter grade. After adjusting for any late penalty that may be due, these letters will be converted to numerical values according to the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F+</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Don't laugh at an F+. If you turn in an otherwise B+ paper late, it's perfectly possible to get an F+ on it. It's worth more than half an A+! So be grateful.

4. The mid-term and final examinations may require you to write on more than one question each. Your overall grade on the examination will be simply the average of the numerical grades for the questions on it.

5. Finally, I will calculate:

\[(20\% \times \text{"adjusted quiz score") + (25\% \times \text{mid-term examination) + (35\% \times \text{term-paper) + (20\% \times \text{final examination)}}\]

and convert the final percentage so derived back into a letter-grade according to the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100–94%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93–90%</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89–87%</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86–84%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83–80%</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82–79%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80–77%</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79–75%</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75–67%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67–64%</td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63–60%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and that will be the grade you get for the course.

In all these calculations, I will round any fractions of exactly .5 in your favor. (In figuring your "adjusted" quiz score, it is to your advantage for me to round up; in figuring the "base" score, it is to your advantage for me to round down.)

Please read over these procedures so that you understand them. They're not as mysterious as they perhaps look. There will be no exceptions to them.

**Additional rules**

Here are some further rules and regulations about the course:

In order to pass the course, you must turn in the mid-term and final examinations and the term paper. It is perfectly possible to pass the course (although not very gracefully) with a
failing paper or examination, but it will not be possible to pass it without doing them. You don't strictly speaking have to take any of the quizzes, but if you don't the absolute maximum final course grade you can get is 80% = B–, and that's assuming you get an A+ on everything else!

Late penalty for papers and examinations

Late papers, mid-terms and final examinations will be penalized one letter grade per day or fraction thereof. (For this purpose, a day is a twenty-four hour period starting at the moment the paper or examination is due.) Late final examinations will not be accepted after the end of the final examiantion period: 4:45 p.m. on Friday, December 18. In other words, if you turn in your final after 2:45 p.m., it's penalized a letter. After 4:45 p.m., it's not accepted—and you fail (see the preceding rule).

There will be no "Incompletes" in this class.

Tentative schedule of events

Note: The schedule of readings and when we are going to discuss what is very tentative (particularly as we get toward the end of the semester). But basically, we will start with a once-over introduction to the problems this class will be discussing. After that, we will proceed more or less chronologically, starting with Porphyry's Isagoge, translated in Spade, Five Texts. (Read this in conjunction with the additional notes on it in the course packet.) The general pattern will be this: we will talk closely about a particular text for a while, and then "come up for air" to see what we've learned and what progress, if any, has been made on the theoretical problems. The list of people given above provides a rough chronological ordering, and we will follow that. (Note: That's not strictly correct. Avicenna is out of order in the above listing, but we will talk about him where he is listed, since that's when he starts being influential in Europe.)

The following table shows only the "formal" dates for the class, the dates when things happen and are due.

- M AUG 31 Introductory lecture, getting started: "What Is the Problem of Universals Anyway, and Why You Should Care." (Note: Although I bill this as "introductory," it is an absolutely essential lecture.)
- W SEP 2
- M SEP 7
- W SEP 9 Quiz 1 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Sept. 13.
- M SEP 14
- W SEP 16 Quiz 2 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Sept. 20.
- M SEP 21
- W SEP 23 Quiz 3 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Sept. 27.
- M SEP 28
- W SEP 30 Quiz 4 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Oct. 4.
- M OCT 5
- W OCT 7 Quiz 5 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Oct. 11.
• M OCT 12
• W OCT 14 Mid-term examination questions distributed in class and on-line. No quiz this week.
• M OCT 19
• W OCT 21 Mid-terms due by 2:30 p.m., the start of class. Quiz 6 is available from 3:45 p.m. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Oct. 25.
• M OCT 26
• W OCT 28 Quiz 7 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Nov. 1.

• M NOV 2
• W NOV 4 Quiz 8 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Nov. 8.
• M NOV 9
• W NOV 11 Quiz 9 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Nov. 15.
• M NOV 16
  • W NOV 18 Quiz 10 is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Nov. 22.
• M NOV 23
• W NOV 25 Thanksgiving holiday. No class. No quiz.
• M NOV 30 Term papers due on Oncourse by 2:30 p.m., the start of class.

• W DEC 2 Quiz 11 (the last quiz) is available from 3:45 p.m. on Oncourse. It is due by midnight, Sunday, Dec. 6.
• M DEC 7 Questions for the final examination will be distributed in class and on-line.
• W DEC 9 Last class meeting. No quiz this week.
• F DEC 18 Final examination due by 2:45 p.m. Please note the odd time. No late work will be accepted after 4:45 p.m.

Miscellaneous policies

About missed classes. Whether or not you come to class is entirely up to you. (For that matter, whether or not you get a degree from IU is entirely up to you.) If you miss one or more classes for any reason (good or bad, it doesn't matter), please get the notes from one of your fellow students. If you don't know anyone else in the class, get acquainted; they're generally nice folks. Don't expect me to repeat the lecture for you in a private, command performance in my office, or to give you a run-down on the contents of the lecture by e-mail. And above all, do not under any circumstances ask to borrow my lecture notes. I'll be happy to talk with students who do not understand the material, or who just want to discuss things further. But that presupposes that you've taken the trouble to get the material first.

Finally, here is the course policy on academic dishonesty: Anyone found guilty of academic dishonesty on examinations, quizzes or papers for this course will fail the course and a report will be filed with Dean of Students identifying the "F" as having been given for academic misconduct. (Such "Fs" are not removable by the "FX" policy.) If I have reason to think you are guilty of academic dishonesty, I will ask you to come to my office (or to some neutral corner) and will confront you with the evidence. Academic dishonesty includes presenting, as your own, work that is not in fact your own, whether you take it from another student, from a library book, from the Web or wherever. (It also includes knowingly allowing your own work to be misrepresented in this way as some other student’s work.) Cunningly rewording someone else’s work, in order to disguise what you are doing, does not make any difference; it’s still academic dishonesty if the thoughts behind it are not your own. When in doubt, always cite your sources! It’s infinitely better to produce
something totally unoriginal and say so outright than it is to turn in the very same thing and pretend it’s your
own. The former will probably earn you a mediocre grade on that piece of work; the latter will earn you a
non-removable “F” in the course.

The University Faculty Council and Board of Trustees have adopted certain procedures and safeguards
governing disciplinary action in cases of academic misconduct. See the Code of Student Rights,
Responsibilities and Conduct, especially Part III: "Student Misconduct" and Part IV: "Student Disciplinary
Procedures." Copies of the code are available in the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment Programs
(705 E. 7th St.). It is also available online at:

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

If you plan to engage in this sort of behavior, I urge you to familiarize yourself with these materials; I've had
lots of practical experience with them. For a discussion of my views on this, see
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx on our Oncourse site.
Library reserves and other bibliography

Library resources

There is a variety of materials available for this course in the Reserves Collection at the Wells Library, Room E044 (downstairs, on the same level as the cafeteria). Here you will find books I have placed on reserve for this course. You are not expected to *read* all these things, although that would of course be great. I put them on reserve so that they will be available for you to consult as needed while you are writing your paper, and won't be checked out. They may be used there in the reserves room or checked out for four hours, which is ample time for you to copy the parts you need. (Note: These are not Ereserves.)

- Jeffrey E. Brower and Kevin Guilfoy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). (B765 .A24 C36 2004.) From this, the following articles may be relevant for you:
- Hester Goodenough Gelber, *Logic and the Trinity: A Clash of Values in Scholastic Thought, 1300–1335*, 2 vols., (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Wisconsin, 1974). (BT 109 .G44 1974a.) This is a famous dissertation, discussing the formal distinction. As the title indicates, this approach is from the point of view of Trinitarian theory, so you may find it pretty difficult unless your theological muscles are in tone. Although most of what Gelber says is thoroughly reliable, you may want to look at Adams, "Ockham on Identity and Distinction," "Ockham's Nominalism and Unreal Entities," and "Universals in the Early Fourteenth Century" for some criticisms of particular detail. (Copies of these three papers may be found in the "Resources" section of our Oncourse site, in the subfolder "Articles (Bibliography).") (Note: My copy of Gelber's dissertation, which I got from University Microfilms directly, is in two volumes. But IUCAT gives only one call number. (Perhaps they rebound it.) So I don't know whether it will appear on the shelves as one or two volumes. Be aware.
- Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984.) (BD394 .G7 1984.) Excellent study, including Boethius (and not just from his *Commentary on Porphyry*), Eriugena, Odo of Tournais (note: not Odo of Tours, as Gracia has it), the School of Chartres, and Abelard. (Note: There is a second edition of this, but I think our library has only the first edition.)
number of translations you may be interested in, although they are often pretty rough.

- Norman Kretzmann, et al., ed. *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.) (B721. C35.) Many articles will be of interest, but pay special attention to Adam's excellent:


- Paul Vincent Spade, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). (B765 .O 34 C36 1999.) The following papers are relevant to our course:


- Martin M. Tweedale, *Abailard on Universals*, (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976). (B765 .A24 T86.) You should know about this volume. In my opinion, there are serious faults with Tweedale's account—not so much with his textual interpretation as with his assessment of what it all comes to. Still, you can learn an awful lot from this book. See my review of it.

- William of Ockham, *Ockham's Theory of Terms: Part 1 of the Summa logicae*, Michael J. Loux, trans., (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974. (BC60 .O 1613.) The translation here leaves a lot to be desired, in my judgment, but it is the only complete one available of this part of the *Summa logicae*. But there are two introductory studies of interest:
  - Michael J. Loux, "Ockham on Generality," pp. 23–46. Pretty good study at the time, but it's now dated and, in my judgment, demonstrably false.

- Thomas Williams, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). (B765 .D74 C35 2003.) The following articles in it are relevant to our course:

- John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines: A Study in Late Thirteenth-Century Philosophy*. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981). (B765 .G594 W56.) Godfrey was a rough contemporary of Scotus, and of considerable importance. Wippel's superb book discusses not only Godfrey himself, but also a number of other people around him—people you will hear about in this course. Chap. 9 is on the principle of individuation. You can learn a tremendous amount from this book, whether you're interested in Godfrey of Fontaines or not. (I venture to say most of you are at least not antecedently interested in Godfrey!)

Our Oncourse site
I have posted PDF copies of several articles and passages in the "Resources" folder of our Oncourse site, in the subfolder "Articles (Bibliography)." Full bibliographical information about each item (often with a little comment of my own about the article or passage) may be found by passing your mouse over the little blue "i" after the title.

**Links**

Here are some links to other sites where you can find lots of things relevant to this course:

- [Mediaeval Logic and Philosophy](#), my main professional site. Click on the "Download" link to find, among other things:
  - Paul Vincent Spade, "Boethius against Universals: The Arguments in the Second Commentary on Porphyry". A paper of mine on the part of Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry* where he presents the case against universals. The paper discusses: (a) where Boethius got his famous three-part description of a universal as something present as a whole, simultaneously and in some appropriate metaphysically intimate way to several things at once, (b) the curious and little-explored "infinite regress" argument contained in the passage, and (c) the overall structure of the passage, how the various arguments are related to one another. We will discuss some of the contents of this paper in class.
  - Paul Vincent Spade, *History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages: Notes and Texts*. The required course-packet for this course. This is the version I used twelve years ago, in the Fall of 1994. But, apart from the title page, the actual contents are the same.
  - Paul Vincent Spade, "The Warp and Woof of Metaphysics: How to Get Started on Some Big Themes". This is an updated (and on-line) version of a "handout" - by now a full-fledged "paper" - that I first prepared many years ago for use in some of my classes. It seems to have proved useful over the years, and so I am sharing it with you. I felt the need to prepare such a handout because I came to realize that students - graduate as well as even the best undergraduates - often find a broadly "Aristotelian" approach to metaphysical issues utterly baffling to them, even after they learn to "make the moves." That is, even after they get to the point of being able to predict with some accuracy what various authors were likely to say on a given issue, they often don't really see what motivates such views and why anyone would take them seriously. The handout seems to have helped get past this problem and to supply some missing motivation and orientation. Fair warning: A lot of the picture I develop in this paper is painted in very broad strokes. Specialists will find much to cavil over: I skip important qualifications, lump quite disparate things together under a common heading, ignore certain controversial points in the literature, and so on. But the paper is not addressed primarily to specialists (although I hope that even the most hardened scholar can find something useful here). It's addressed to two kinds of people: (a) those who need to be shown why and how the issues I discuss here are really interesting and even fun, and (b) those who already know that but just want to be reminded why. So, take it or leave it. We will discuss some of the contents of this paper in class. (Note: Experience tells me that, nowadays, people don't seem to know what the phrase "warp and woof" refers to. It's an allusion to weaving. The warp are the threads that run lengthwise, and the woof are the threads that run crosswise. The expression as a whole something like the "basic
structure"of something.)

- **Paul Vincent Spade, A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy, Version 2.0 (August 29, 1985) — interim.** This is the document popularly (and unofficially) known as "The Course in the Box," for reasons explained in the document itself. It is a set of lecture notes, handouts and other materials I have used over the years in teaching survey courses in mediaeval philosophy at various levels. The package has circulated freely in printed form since 1985, and previous versions since before that. An updated version (Version 3.0 beta) is under way, and from time to time I will distribute pieces of it in class. But this is the full version of the most recent complete version.

- **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.** An online encyclopedia with several good articles relevant to this course. Among them:
  - Jeffrey Brower, "Medieval Theories of Relations." This may be of relevance to you.
  - Alessandro Conti, "Johannes Sharpe." Sharpe was a late figure, a follower of Wyclif. We won't be talking about him in class, but is is certainly fair game for a paper.
  - Alessandro Conti, "John Wyclif." A late-fourteenth century realist.
  - Alessandro Conti, "Paul of Venice." A very late-fourteenth century follower of both Scotus and Wyclif.
  - Alessandro Conti, "Robert Alyngton." A late follower of Wyclif.
  - Alessandro Conti, "Walter Burley." Burley was terribly influential on later medieval realism.
  - Alessandro Conti, "William Penbygull." Another late follower of Wyclif.
  - Eyjólfur Emilsson, "Porphyry."
  - Russell Friedman, "Peter Auriol." Auriol was shortly before Ockham.
  - Markus Führer, "Albert the Great." Albert was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas.
  - Jorge Gracia and Lloyd Newton, "Medieval Theories of the Categories."
  - Kevin Guilfoy, "John of Salisbury."
  - Kevin Guilfoy, "William of Champeaux."
  - Maarten Hoenen, "Marsilius of Inghen." Marsilius was late-fourteenth century.
  - Rondo Keele, "Walter Chatton." Chatton was importantly influential on Ockham. (I'm proud to see Rondo Keele wrote his dissertation on Chatton a few years ago, under my direction.)
  - Peter King, "Peter Abelard." An excellent article.
  - Gyula Klima, "The Medieval Problem of Universals." About as relevant to this course as you can get.
  - John Marenbon, "Boethius." Boethius, of course, is central to our story.
  - Ralph McInerny and John O'Callaghan "Saint Thomas Aquinas." There's not a lot of detailed material here on universals, but this is a good place to start if you want a general orientation on Aquinas.
  - Tim Noone and R. E. Houser, "Saint Bonaventure." Bonaventure was an almost exact contemporary of Aquinas.
  - Paul Vincent Spade, "Binarium famosissimum [= most famous pair]." The alleged "pairing" of twin doctrines in the Middle Ages, universal hylomorphism and plurality of forms.
  - Paul Vincent Spade, "Medieval Philosophy." A general overview of the period, with lots of links to other articles in the Encyclopedia.
  - Eileen Sweeney, "Literary Forms of Medieval Philosophy." This may be of use in helping you read some of these very unfamiliar texts.
  - Thomas Williams, "John Duns Scotus." Scotus, of course, is one of the "biggies."
  - John Wippel, "Godfrey of Fontaines." An important figure at the very end of the thirteenth
century.
- Jack Zupko, "John Buridan." Buridan was an extremely important and influential nominalist in the early-fourteenth century.
Chapter 2: Methodological Considerations

This chapter might well be subtitled “Why study the history of philosophy anyway? What do you hope to get out of it?” I want to distinguish two main approaches to the history of philosophy, both of which I reject. (The second one has two subdivisions.) Then I’ll tell you how I think it should be done.

A. First view: The “who thought of it first” approach

A wonderfully explicit example of this first view is to be found in Kneale and Kneale’s The Development of Logic:

But our primary purpose has been to record the first appearances of those ideas which seem to us most important in the logic of our own day.

On this approach, the primary reason for doing the history of philosophy is to trace the first implicit glimmerings of the philosophical views we all now know are the correct ones. Hence we hear a lot about “anticipations” of this and that. On the other hand, it’s not clear just what difference any of this makes, why anyone should care. With this approach, there seems to be no serious motive for studying the history of philosophy in the first place. If there is no more to it than this, the history of philosophy will be of interest only to the antiquarian, the fact collector, the mental litterbug.

Perhaps there is more involved, however — although not much more. The “who thought of it first” approach can in many cases be correctly regarded as an application to the history of philosophy, in particular, of that more general approach to history sometimes called “Whig interpretation,” aptly defined by Herbert Butterfield as

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1 William and Martha Kneale, The Development of Logic, p. v.
2 I once heard a philosophical address that described this approach — with appropriate disdain, I thought — as “how Plato invented the atom bomb.”
3 Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History, p. v. See also the discussion in David Hackett Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, p. 139.
the tendency in many authors to write on the side of Protestants and Whigs, to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasise certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present.

After all, if there is one thing the history of philosophy ought to teach us, it is that nowadays we have all the right answers!

B. Second view: Despoiling the Egyptians

The second main approach I will call the “despoiling the Egyptians” approach. The phrase refers to the passage in Exodus, where the Israelites are being led out of Egypt and God gives them permission to take with them (to “borrow,” as the old King James version rather delicately put it) whatever they can carry:

The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing; and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians.

There are two forms of this view — or at least two that I want to distinguish here:

1. The “ask someone who knows” approach

The idea here is that you set yourself certain problems you are interested in, and then go look at the historical figures to see what they had to say about those problems. On this approach, you hear things like: “Those old folks were no fools. What they had to say on these questions is likely to be worth taking seriously.”

This approach at least has the virtue of showing some respect to your elders. But I still don’t like it. It will work only provided those old philosophers had anything at all to say about just exactly the questions you ask of them. In practice, though, it usually turns out that their interests were not exactly yours after all, their questions were slightly different, and their whole outlook on things strikes you as foreign enough that they are not much real help with the problems you ap-

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4 Exod. 12:35–36 (RSV). My emphasis, of course. This theme of “despoiling the Egyptians” became something of a trope in the Middle Ages, largely because Augustine used it to justify Christians’ taking whatever they can use from ancient pagan philosophy. See, his On Christian Doctrine II.xi.60.
proached them with. This should not surprise you. You were not really interested in *their* problems; you were interested only in *your* problems. Usually, you will end up either being just frustrated or else distorting the old philosophers’ doctrine to make them say something you can use.

2. The “oh that reminds me” technique

The idea this time is that you use the historical texts to suggest views or answers to questions you are interested in. You approach the historical figures not for what they had to say about those questions, but for what you can find suggested by what they did say. The most offhand remark can serve the role of suggesting to you fantastically wonderful theories. A good example of this approach may be found in Hans G. Herzberger’s “Truth and Modality in Semantically Closed Languages.” This is a provocative and exciting paper on issues surrounding the Liar paradox, and the ideas in it were suggested to Herzberger in part by reading John Buridan’s own discussion of the Liar paradox. (Buridan was a fourteenth-century Parisian philosopher of considerable importance and influence.) On the basis of this, Herzberger derives suggestions for a theory of three-valued semantics using Bochvar’s internal matrices and other such things.

All this of course is admirable, to be sure, and there is no doubt that some very exciting things can come along this way. (*I like* Herzberger’s paper — *I like it a lot!* ) But it is not really the history of philosophy at all, now is it? Historical accuracy doesn’t matter here; the only thing that’s important to you is the catalytic effect history has on your own thinking. If an entry in the Manhattanville telephone book happened to have the same effect on you, it would have done just as well.

C. My own view

I reject all these as legitimate ways to approach the history of philosophy. In my view, the trouble with all of them is that they presuppose that the important philosophical problems and concepts are just the ones *now* in circulation. This is in the end *why* you are interested in who thought of it first, in what the old-timey philosophers had to say about this and that, and so on.

In short, the assumption — to put it as neutrally as possible — is that if there is anything of value in the history of philosophy, it is of value only insofar as it is relevant to present-day philosophical issues, techniques and concepts.

I say that assumption is false. What is of most value in the history of philosophy is of value because it is *not* connected with current philosophical issues, techniques, concepts.
The problem with the approaches sketched earlier is that they all start off with a fixed set of questions and concepts, and never get beyond them. In effect, they are rigged from the outset to guarantee that one never learns anything really important from the history of philosophy.

In my view, what should happen when you study the history of philosophy is that you come into contact with new techniques and concepts, points of view that are radically new to you, philosophical questions or issues you had never thought of or had never taken seriously before. The more foreign the philosophy is (provided you can get a handle on it at all), the better. Certainly, unless you have had a pretty remarkable philosophical background already, what you are about to see in this survey will serve this purpose very well.

Hence, my approach to the history of philosophy I will call the Mind-Expanding Approach, or the Consciousness-Raising Approach. (I also call it the Correct Approach.)

On this approach, the basic reason for studying the history of philosophy is the same as the reason one should read the journal articles in one’s profession — and not just the articles on the very narrow topics one happens to be interested in at the moment. The reason is: to keep in touch, to stay familiar with all the things going on in the discipline, even those that may be quite alien to what you are primarily interested in personally, to make sure you do not get too narrow and parochial in your opinions. The fact that the authors of those journal articles are usually far away from us, both geographically and intellectually, is no reason not to read them. So too, the fact that philosophers of the past are dead and can no longer defend themselves doesn’t mean we can disregard them.

This analogy is also revealing in another respect: in both cases, in the history of philosophy and in the journals, the yield per unit effort is very low. There is a great deal of wasted time, of reading things that aren’t worthwhile. But it’s crucial that we do it anyway, in order to keep our options open and our thinking alive.

D. Consequences of my view

This notion of how to approach the history of philosophy has some important consequences:

(i) It is not our task to reconstruct, to translate an old philosophical position into a more contemporary idiom. When Aquinas talks about the difference between essential and accidental predication, for instance, his point probably has very little to do with “predicate modifiers” in the modern sense (or “pred-mods,” as someone once tried to explain it to me). Such a translation is perhaps useful at a
very rudimentary level, and of course we all have to resort to it sometimes in practice, particularly when we are first encountering some baffling theory. But we should do it as sparingly as possible.

In short, the approach I recommend rejects the sort of thing done, for instance, by J. M. Findlay in *The Philosophy of Hegel*. Here Findlay interprets Hegel as making “linguistic recommendations” in the manner of Wittgenstein. This was the “contemporary idiom” when the book was written, so that reluctant readers were reassured about Hegel’s notoriously difficult philosophy. But while I suppose that’s a good result in principle, their reassurance was misplaced. Readers ended up not really being reassured about Hegel, but only reassured about themselves. Once again, the past is viewed as mainly a ratification of the present.

My point here is that studying the history of philosophy is a little like learning a foreign language. (In fact, it is a lot like learning a foreign language.) In both cases, if you have to translate before you understand, then you don’t really understand very well, you’ve not really mastered the material.

(ii) We have to yield to the texts. We have to fight our biases and prejudices in reading the old philosophers. Hence the importance of reading widely in the historical literature, and above all of re-reading often.

This is not just a pep talk; on the contrary, it’s absolutely crucial. The tendency is to read a passage and then go away to think about it. Before long, you come up with a view about what the author had in mind and begin to extrapolate on the basis of that view. We hear things like “Abelard would say thus and so about this or that.” I personally have done this many times, and then gone back to find that Abelard (or whoever it was) in fact had said the direct opposite, and that I had completely missed the point. What had happened of course is that, by going away and thinking about the text on my own, I had brought my own conceptual machinery into play instead of Abelard’s categories and ways of thinking.

Of course I’m not suggesting you should not think about what you read. On the contrary, you have to think about it long and hard. But in such thinking there lies the danger of distorting the historical doctrine. You can minimize this kind of danger by making sure that you read more, and read again, and in general make sure that you read as much as you think! The idea is to check and double-check your understanding of the material every step of the way.

(iii) There is a third consequence of the approach I recommend. It implies that you have to be willing to do history, and not only philosophy. That is, you have to be prepared to go to the library and get your hands dirty with real books; you have to care about getting the facts straight.
Unlike many other branches of philosophy, in the history of philosophy it is frequently possible to tell whether you’ve got things right or not, and to tell by quite objective and universally recognized techniques; they are collectively called “scholarship.” Not everyone is good at it, of course, and even the best people will make silly mistakes sometimes. Furthermore, not all scholarly questions of interpretation can be settled once and for all. Still, you have to be prepared for this kind of meticulous, detailed work, you have to recognize it as an important — indeed, absolutely essential — part of the enterprise, or else you should just stop pretending to have any interest in the history of philosophy at all. In short, you should stop reading right now!

There is still a prejudice among some academic philosophers and graduate students of philosophy, a prejudice I suspect can be traced back to the heyday of logical positivism, with its disdain for (and general ignorance of) the history of philosophy. The prejudice used to be more common than, mercifully, it is now, but it has by no means disappeared. Whatever its origin, this prejudice holds that philosophers for some reason must be concerned with “the issues” in the abstract, and that therefore it doesn’t really make any difference what they say about the historical background of those issues. Worse, this prejudice holds that, since philosophers must be concerned with “the issues” in the abstract, they must therefore positively scorn historical work of the scholarly, detailed kind — as though somehow one could not possibly be interested in, much less good at, doing both at once.

To be sure, some academic philosophers, and for that matter many people in other fields, are simply not interested in the history of their discipline. That is no reflection on the historical enterprise, but rather on the breadth of their interests. Now it’s a free country, and it certainly isn’t my job to tell other people what they ought to be interested in. It is my job, however, if no one else will do it, to point out that people do not have some kind of divine right to play fast and loose with facts simply because they are not interested in them. “It’s OK! Don’t worry about a thing! Everything’s just fine. It doesn’t make any difference what I say. Why? Because I just don’t care!” It may be true that you don’t care, but that’s no defense for spreading falsehoods around.

The odd thing is, some people in this “queen of the sciences” are not really sure just what to think about the historical facts of their discipline. They are perfectly willing to make claims about those facts, to describe certain views as “Platonic,” for instance, or to call certain doctrines “Aristotelian essentialism.” But, having made the historical claim, they then think it is somehow unfair, or beneath their professional dignity, for anyone to demand of them that those claims be true. After all, the real point is the philosophical one; the scholarly details we can leave to the pedants.
This attitude may be seen, for example, in the following justly famous passage from W. V. Quine. I quote at some length to give you the full flavor.\(^5\)

Perhaps I can evoke the appropriate sense of bewilderment as follows. Mathematicians may conceivably be said to be necessarily rational and not necessarily two-legged; and cyclists necessarily two-legged and not necessarily rational. But what of an individual who counts among his eccentricities both mathematics and cycling? Is this concrete individual necessarily rational and contingently two-legged or vice versa? Just insofar as we are talking referentially of the object, with no special bias toward a background grouping of mathematicians as against cyclists or vice versa, there is no semblance of sense in rating some of his attributes as necessary and others as contingent. Some of his attributes count as important and others as unimportant, yes; some as enduring and others as fleeting; but none as necessary or contingent.

Curiously, a philosophical tradition does exist for just such a distinction between necessary and contingent attributes. It lives on in the terms ‘essence’ and ‘accident’, ‘internal relation’ and ‘external relation’. It is a distinction that one attributes to Aristotle (subject to contradiction by scholars, such being the penalty for attributions to Aristotle). But, however, venerable the distinction, it is surely indefensible.

Whether the view is in fact indefensible, or whether it is in fact even Aristotle’s,\(^6\) is something I don’t want to argue here. But notice the snide remark in the penultimate sentence. The suggestion there is that we can say what we like about Aristotle, because “scholars” on the topic will no doubt contradict whatever you say anyway; let’s not be bothered with them, and get on with the real philosophical business at hand. In fact, of course, it’s just the reverse. Although there are many areas of uncertainty, “scholars” by and large are in remarkable agreement about what Aristotle’s views were; it’s on the abstract philosophical issues that one is “subject to contradiction” almost no matter what one says!

Such philosophical disdain for history is not something inherent in the nature of the enterprise; it has to be learned. I said earlier that it is an attitude still to


\(^6\) The fact that Aristotle quite explicitly accepts the notion of an “inseparable accident” might be enough to make you wonder about this attribution. See, for example, *Metaphysics* v.30 1025b31–32: “‘Accident’ is said also in another way, as [the features] that belong to each thing in accordance with itself and are not in its substance (ὀνόματος), as having two right [angles — that is, having the sum of its angles add up to two right angles — belongs] to the triangle.”
be found among some “academic philosophers and graduate students of philosophy.” For the most part I have not found it among undergraduates. They generally have no preconceptions about what philosophers can and cannot be asked to do, and so they are willing to regard historical scholarship as a permissible part of the enterprise. Of course, undergraduates (like “academic philosophers and graduate students”) will often not do the work required for serious history of philosophy; but when that happens, it is usually just because they are incapable or lazy. Only at more advanced levels do I find people who refuse to do it on principle!

So, gentle reader, even if you have already been tainted by the influence of the ahistorical Philistines, still it is perhaps not too late to save yourselves. Throw off your old prejudices! Broaden your horizons! Read on!7

7 I said above (p. 18) that the professionally dismissive attitude toward the history of philosophy is now less widespread and pervasive than it was. The turning point, it seems, came sometime in the mid-1980s. I myself first realized that a new wind was blowing, and that perhaps I would find it easier to justify my existence to my colleagues, when a very interesting paper appeared: Lawrence H. Powers, “On Philosophy and Its History.” The paper is definitely not a practically-oriented one, but on the contrary is a rather abstract theoretical consideration of the relationship between philosophy and its history, and on the respective roles and duties of the philosopher and the historian of philosophy. Powers is a good philosopher in what used to be called the “analytic” tradition, but I think he would be among the first to say he is not a historian. I’m not sure I agree with all the things he says in this paper, but the mere fact that it was written by someone coming so much from that side of the profession, and that it was a respectful and thoughtful treatment of the topic, was significant and encouraging.
Chapter 3: The Greek Background to Mediaeval Philosophy, or Everything You Need to Know about the Greeks

Before we start on the Middle Ages, it is a good idea to review where we are coming from. Here is a summary of some of the main points of Greek philosophy, including Plotinus.

A. Plato

Perhaps the most basic and enlightening difference between Plato and Aristotle is this: whereas Plato’s overriding interest was in what is important (one is almost tempted to say “whether it is true or not”), Aristotle’s interest was in what is true (and here one is certainly tempted to say “whether it is important or not” — recall some of his more obscure physical and biological treatises). Hence the Platonic philosophy, and the whole Platonic tradition, will be shot through and through with a dominant concern for ethics, for wisdom and values generally. There is little patience in this tradition with knowledge for the sake of knowledge. If Aristotle represents the curious mind, the collector of truths for their own sake, the inquisitive intellect, then Plato represents the man who has no time for trivial things. There is a kind of ethical urgency about Plato that is missing in Aristotle.

Some things follow from this basic orientation in Plato’s philosophy. In our judgments about the values of things, for instance, we implicitly measure them against standards or ideals. This is so even if we are unable to articulate such standards and ideals very clearly. It makes no difference that different cultures have different standards, or for that matter different people within the same culture, or even a single person whose values may be unsettled. We’re not talking here about whether such “value judgments” are justified or true, but only about the plain fact that we do make them and that they appeal to standards.

We cannot get our concepts of these standards or ideals simply by observing them in the physical world around us, because they just aren’t there in the physical world around us. The physical world is far from ideal, and conspicuously imperfect. Therefore,
• (1) We observed these standards or ideals in another world, separated and distinct from the physical one.\(^1\)

These standards or ideals Plato calls *Ideas* or *Forms*. The same considerations lead one to postulate Ideas or Forms of mathematical or geometrical ideal entities not encountered in the sensory world — perfect circles, geometric points, etc. In general, the Platonic tradition of philosophy will always be most persuasive when it comes to values or mathematics — two great areas of knowledge where we employ or encounter standards and ideals. Platonism is always least plausible when it is applied beyond the realm of values and mathematics, for instance to the Form of the Bed in *Republic* 596\(^b\), or to the dubious Forms of mud, filth and hair in *Parmenides* 130\(^c\).

It follows from (1) that

• (2) We — that is, our minds or souls — must be capable of existing in that separated realm. In short, we must be capable of existing apart from the physical body.

Again, it follows that

• (3) We really have known these Ideas or Forms all our (physical) lives. Hence, what we call learning (at least about these matters) is really only the recollection of what was already known but forgotten because of the distracting influence of the senses. Thus the famous Platonic theory of Recollection or Reminiscence.

Hence,

• (4) It is *bad* for the soul to be in the body.

The body is a prison. Death is a liberation. It allows us to reach the realm where things *are* the way they *ought* to be.

There is a cluster of other assumptions that Plato, like most Greeks, accepted. Among them:

• (5) Whatever really is can be understood or known, and vice versa.

In short, the realm of Being and the realm of Intelligibility are the same. This view goes back at least to Parmenides (Fragment 3).

• (6) Real *knowledge* or understanding, as opposed to fickle opinion, requires that *what is known* be fixed, permanent and necessary.

\(^1\) Note the implicit premise that concept-formation is ultimately based on what might be called a kind of “knowledge by acquaintance.”
Note that this is really a very exalted notion of knowledge. The paradigm of knowledge seems to have been the mathematical knowledge provided, for instance, by Euclid (although he was later than Plato), and nothing was said to be really knowable unless it could be known with all the necessity and changelessness of mathematical truths.

- **(7)** On the other hand, the physical world is constantly changing.

  This, of course, comes from Heraclitus — or at least from Heraclitus as he was interpreted by Plato.

  Plato draws the following conclusions:

  - **(8)** The physical world cannot really be known or understood, but is only an object for opinion (from (6) and (7)).

  - **(9)** The physical world does not then truly exist (from (8) and (5)). It is a realm of Becoming, not of Being.

  - **(10)** From (3) and (5), it follows that the Forms or Ideas are what really exist. They are the realm of Being. They are the objects of real knowledge.

  - **(11)** From (3) and (6), it follows that the Forms or Ideas are changeless, fixed, eternal and necessary.

    In virtue of (10), there is some pressure on Plato to extend his notion of the Forms from values — Beauty, Justice, etc. — and mathematics, to forms of anything that can be said to be known. Plato’s exalted view of knowledge pushes him to extend the doctrine of Forms beyond the realm of values and mathematics, where it originated and where it is most plausible. See the doubts raised in the Parmenides 130b–135d.

    Plato has some things to say about the interconnection of the realm of Being (the Forms) with the realm of Becoming (the physical world):

  - **(12)** The things in the physical world participate in or imitate the Forms.

    A physical object is more or less an $x$ to the extent that it participates in or imitates more or less the form of $x$. For the most part, this relation is left at the metaphorical level in Plato. The notion of participation or imitation makes most sense, like the Platonic doctrine as a whole, in the context of values and mathematics. We can perhaps understand what it means to say that a person is more or less a human being to the extent that he or she “participates in” or “imitates” the ideal human being; but it is much harder to understand what it could mean to say that a thing is more or less a rock to the extent that it “participates in” in or “imitates” the ideal rock.
• (13) There is a mediator, something called the “Demiurge” (δημιουργός, demιourgar= workman, handicraftsman), who is responsible for the interconnection of the Forms and the physical world.

If you don’t know about this important feature of Plato’s thought, you will find it at Timaeus 27d ff. The Demiurge looks up to the Forms, and then imposes order on recalcitrant matter as best he can, according to the patterns of the Forms. (Compare the role of the Demiurge in the cosmos, according to the Timaeus, with the role of the philosopher-king in the state, according to the Republic, and the role of the soul in the human being, according to many places.) He does this eternally and necessarily (without choice), because he is good and “without jealousy” (Timaeus, 29e). (He wants to share the wealth.) He is “provident” — that is, he “cares” about what goes on in the physical world.

Finally, on the general principle that wherever you have a plurality of more or less similar things, you try to explain them in terms of some one principle or explanatory device (the motive behind the search for a Unified Field Theory, for instance), Plato says

• (14) Above even the many Forms, there is a unifying principle that grounds them. Plato calls this the Form of the Good, and frequently uses the metaphor of the Sun.

  Question for Plato: Is the Form of the Good in some sense above the rest of the Forms, so that it is not really a Form at all like the rest? It seems it must be, if it is to do its job of unifying and grounding the Forms. And, in fact, in at least one passage in the Republic (vi.509b9), Plato explicitly says that the Good is “above being” (ἐπεκείνα τῆς οὐσίας, epekeina tês ouisia). On the other hand, if it is above being, then since the realm of the Forms is the realm of Being and of Intelligibility, then the Form of the Good cannot really be understood (and, for that matter, does not really exist — it more than exists). Or, on the contrary, are we supposed to interpret the realm of Being as extending to include the Form of the Good too? The metaphor of the Sun is a “light”-metaphor, and light was frequently taken as a metaphor for knowledge by the Greeks, so that the Sun-metaphor suggests that the Form of the Good is indeed intelligible, and therefore a being. On the other hand, how can it ground the Forms if it is one of them itself? Plato is perhaps not clear on all of this, but watch what happens to the question in later people.

B. Aristotle

Aristotle does not have the Platonic overriding concern with values. Matters of value are for him just one branch of human endeavor — the practical dis-
ciplines, as opposed to the theoretical sciences. Hence, there is no pressure on Aristotle to accept (1)–(4) above. On the other hand, he does accept (5)–(7), but denies that (8) follows from them. On the contrary, despite (7),

- (15) there is in the physical, changing world a fixed and changeless core that sets limits to the change.

This core is constituted by the natures of physical objects. These natures are for Aristotle the proper objects of knowledge. They satisfy (6) above. Hence Aristotle rejects (8)–(9). For Aristotle, all our knowledge is ultimately based on our knowledge of the natures of physical objects, and comes through the senses. Far from distracting us from real knowledge, as in (3), the senses provide us with it. There is, here in the physical world of Becoming, a fixed core of Being. In the realm of Opinion, we can find a stable basis for real Knowledge.

- (16) Aristotle analyzes change into two components: the matter, which remains throughout the change, and the form, which is altered.

By a complicated doctrine the details of which need not concern us now, forms — or at least some of them — are the natures of physical objects. See above on natures.

- (17) Aristotle also thinks that, in addition to the material, physical world, there is a realm of “separated substances.”

He thinks this is required in order to account for and cause change in the physical world.

- (18) Since these separated substances are separated from matter, they are changeless and fixed, in accordance with (16).

- (19) They also think.

Aristotle’s reasons for this are complicated (and obscure). The separated substances think only about themselves. “Their thinking is a thinking on thinking.” (Metaphysics xi.9 1074b34–35.) They neither know nor care about the physical world. (Contrast (12), above.) Also, it is not clear how many of these separated substances there are. In some places, it appears that there is only one; but in other places, Aristotle says there is one such separated substance for each distinct celestial sphere, so that the question is ultimately a question for the astronomer, not the philosopher.

The separated substances are like Platonic Forms in being changeless and immaterial. They are unlike them in many other respects: Platonic Forms do not think, and do not cause change in the physical world. On the other hand, the sepa-
rated substances are not the proper objects of human knowledge, and do not account for the characteristics of physical things. (Physical things do not “participate” in them, for instance.) Aristotelian “natures” take over these roles of the Platonic Forms. To this extent (and to this extent only) is it true to say (as it frequently is said) that Aristotle took the Forms out of their “Platonic heaven” and implanted them in the material individual.

There is an important Aristotelian principle governing his theory of knowledge:

- **(20)** In knowledge, the knower takes on the form (although not the matter) of what is known.

The great advantage of this theory is that it guarantees the objectivity of knowledge. (Mental contents are not “representations” of the objects known; they are, on the formal side anyway, identical with the objects known. No inference from the one to the other is needed. Hence all the Cartesian problems with a representational theory of knowledge are avoided.) On the contrary, this view is faced with an opposite problem: how to explain the possibility of error. The theory can be summed up in a kind of slogan: “The knower is (formally) identical with the known.” This is a very foreign doctrine to us nowadays. It’s difficult for us to see how all the problems with it can be met. But Aristotle takes it quite seriously, and it is not, in the end, stupid at all.

Aristotle thought it followed from (20) that

- **(21)** What knows — that is, the mind — is separated from matter.

Compare the separated substances. We need not worry about his reasons for this claim right now. On the other hand, he also thought that

- **(22)** The human soul was the form of the material body, and hence is intimately tied up with matter, to the extent that it cannot exist separately.

From (22), it follows that it is good for the soul to be in the body — on pain of extinction. (Contrast (4), above.) Claims (21) and (22) together make the connection between human souls and minds rather troublesome. Aristotle never fully worked it out, although he was frequently interpreted in the Middle Ages as denying anything like a personal afterlife. Finally, Aristotle thought this whole

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2 For more on Aristotle’s epistemology, see Chapter 47 below.

3 This can be said, of course, without committing oneself to the anachronistic view that Aristotle intended to make a preemptive strike against Descartes. The problems of representationalism were by no means invented by Descartes.

4 Again, see Chapter 47 below.
framework was *eternal and necessary*. It has always been this way, and always will be.

C. Plotinus

The main way to view Plotinus is as follows: *He combines Plato with Aristotle*. Take the entire Platonic framework, as outlined above, and add the Aristotelian principle (20). The Platonic Forms, since they are the objects of knowledge, become in virtue of (20) also *knowers, minds, intelligences*. Plotinus argues that, in a curious way, they can be spoken of in the singular and yet also in the plural — as being one Intelligence or Intelligible or Being, and yet many intelligences or intelligibles or beings. We shall see more of this kind of talk later on.

The role of Plato’s Demiurge is taken over by the *World Soul*. It imposes what order there is on the world at large, after the pattern of the Forms (= the Intelligences). Hence it comes into contact with matter. Just as Plotinus speaks of there being one Intelligence and yet many intelligences, so too he speaks of one overall Soul (a kind of “World Soul”) and yet of many souls, human and otherwise. Individual souls are like miniature Demiurges — they impose order on an individual’s life after the pattern of the Forms. They too come into contact with matter. (Note how Plotinus clearly separates what was mixed up in Aristotle: minds (the intelligences) have nothing to do with matter, but souls, which are quite distinct from intelligences for Plotinus, do. Nevertheless, Plotinus does not accept the Aristotelian doctrine that the soul is the form of the body.)

The role of Plato’s Form of the Good is taken over by Plotinus’ *One*, which he explicitly identifies with Plato’s Good. The One is above the realm of Being and Intelligibility (it is not an intelligence). (This resolves the question left at the end of the section on Plato above.) Hence we cannot really understand the One at all — and worse, *it does not really exist*. (This is not to say, of course, that it’s not there at all; rather, it is *above* being.) The One produces the intelligences and, through them, souls by a process called *emanation*. The One, like Plato’s Demiurge, is not “jealous.” Thus, it spontaneously but necessarily emanates all these subsequent things. Finally, there is a strong mystical overtone in Plotinus. Although we cannot understand the One, we can nevertheless come into contact with it — “return” to it by a kind of reversal of the process of emanation — but in a *non-intellectual* way.

*Note*: Plotinus is third-century CE, and so already well into the period we are studying.5

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5 See also Chapter 4, below.
D. Cosmograms

Below you will find three “maps,” describing the philosophical universe according to Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. I call them “cosmograms.”

![Figure 3-1 Plato’s World](image)

![Figure 3-2: Aristotle’s World](image)
E. **Very select bibliography**

Here are a few places to go if you want to brush up on Greek philosophy. The list is very idiosyncratic, and does not necessarily represent the best literature available. You’ll have to consult a real expert in the field (that is to say, not me) to get a list like that. But this one will do just to get us started.

1. **General histories:**


2. Primary texts


Plato, *Complete Works*, John M. Cooper, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997). A new collection, including also the dubious and spurious works. Likely to replace Hamilton/Cairns as the standard version to buy.


Plotinus, *The Enneads* A. H. Armstrong, ed. and trans., 7 vols., (The Loeb Classical Library; London: William Heinemann, 1966–88). Contains the Greek original, with a quite good English translation. Much better than the MacKenna translation. Note: There are six enneads but seven volumes, because the sixth ennead is long and takes up two volumes.


F. What about everyone else?

Finally, I realize that in the above discussion I have entirely omitted any mention of the Epicureans, the Stoics, and all those other late-ancient groups that are hard to keep track of. They certainly must not be forgotten. In fact, an argument might be made that Stoicism is the most important and all-pervasive philosophical inheritance from the pagan Greeks. On the other hand, that influence was fragmentary, diffuse and indirect, and it was perhaps not in strictly philosophical circles that it was most strongly felt. It would probably be a big mistake to treat Stoicism as a “body of philosophical doctrine” in the way one can treat the
Aristotelian and Platonic “schools” in the Middle Ages. In any case, I won’t be saying a lot about Stoicism here, and even less about the other late-ancient schools, mainly because I know very little about the details of their influence in the Middle Ages. If you want to know more about Stoic influence on mediaeval thought, I recommend the following:


Chapter 22: Boethius: Life and Works

A. Life

Boethius was born sometime around 480, and died between 524 and 526. That is, he is roughly one hundred years after Augustine. Nothing of philosophical note happened in between.¹

Boethius’s name is sometimes spelled ‘Boetius’, without the ‘h’. This spelling has some manuscript authority, but the manuscripts are not unanimous. The Latins were unaccustomed to pronouncing the Greek \( \theta \), and often just used a \( t \)-sound.² (\( \text{Boêthêo} \) in Greek means “to assist, come to the rescue.” Greek had by no means died out yet in the Latin West, and aristocratic Roman families like Boethius’s were thoroughly familiar with it.)

Boethius came from an extremely well placed old Roman family, the Anicii. His father died while Boethius was still young, and the child was more or less adopted by the even better placed household of a certain Symmachus. (Post-terity perhaps remembers another Symmachus better, a pagan who campaigned for a kind of revival of paganism in the 370s, during the time of St. Ambrose. Boethius’s Symmachus was a descendant of that earlier one.³)

Boethius had a distinguished career in public office, eventually rising to the rank of \( \text{Magister officiorum} = \) “Master of the Offices.” There is no really good modern equivalent of this position, but it was very definitely a powerful post. To give you some idea what it meant, recall that under the late Roman emperors, there were three main grades of officials in the administration. If you were of senatorial rank, you were a \( \text{clarissimus} = \) “distinguished one”. Included among the \( \text{clarissimi} \) was a subgroup called the \( \text{spectabiles} = \) “remarkable ones,” even “spectacular ones” — the Romans were not shy about this sort of thing. Even

¹ Scholars of the period may want to suggest otherwise. They are invited to tell me just how important something has to be before it counts as being “of philosophical note.” Surely they’re not going to try to tell me that anything that happened in between was as philosophically important as either Augustine or Boethius.


³ Ibid., p. 5.
more exalted, there was yet a further subgroup of the *spectabiles* called the *illustres* = “illustrious ones”.\(^4\)

The membership of the class of *illustres* varied over time, but in general it included the *consistorium* (= Imperial Consistory, Council of State, the “Cabinet”), along with various Prefects and military brass. The *consistorium* was made up of the ministers of the various administrative departments, including the wonderfully titled *comes sacrarum largitionum* = “Count of the Sacred Largesses” (that is, Finance Minister or Secretary of the Treasury), the “Count of the Privy Purse” (that is, Minister of Crown Lands or Secretary of the Interior), the *quaestor* (the emperor’s legal and judicial advisor, the Attorney General), and the *magister officiorum* (the office Boethius held).\(^5\)

In Boethius’s day, the office of *magister officiorum* combined both military and civil functions. (It had not always done so.) On the military side, Boethius had charge of emperor’s household guards (the equivalent of our Secret Service) and the arsenals, and in effect had charge of all intelligence-gathering activities as well. On the civil side, he was in control of the Post Office, looked after the various petitions made to the emperor, and then saw that the emperor’s decisions were executed. He decided who did and who did not have access to the emperor and the *consistorium*, and looked after the appointments of various provincial governors.\(^6\) In short, Boethius was a very powerful man!

I’ve referred to the “emperor” in this sketch. But strictly speaking, there was no real emperor in the West in Boethius’s time, although the above administrative structure remained largely intact anyway. In 476, the Western emperor (remember, there was also an emperor in Constantinople at this time — the Empire has split) was kicked into “retirement” by a certain Odovacar (‘Odoacer’ is an alternative form of the name), in effect a barbarian warlord.\(^7\) Odovacar tried to take over the imperial title, but his legitimacy was never recognized by the Eastern emperor. Odovacar’s *coup* is generally regarded as the official end of the Roman Empire in the West.

Now let’s turn the clock back to before the turn of the common era. Up in southern Scandinavia, there was a tribe called the Goths. (There’s an island called even today “Gotland,” in the Baltic Sea off the coast of Sweden.\(^8\))

\(^4\) See Arthur E. R. Boak, *The Master of the Offices in the Later Roman and Byzantine Empire*, p. 20. Later on, the Emperor Justinian added an even more exclusive and exalted rank: the *gloriosi*, which means just what it looks like. (Ibid.)

\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 21–22.


\(^7\) ‘Barbarian’ in this context is a semi-technical term. It refers to his ethnic stock, and doesn’t necessarily mean he was uncouth and vulgar — although he probably was.

\(^8\) For the record, it’s located at 57.30 N latitude, 18.33 E longitude.
Moved perhaps by overpopulation, these Goths left their homeland and migrated by late antiquity as far as the modern Ukraine. There they split into two groups, the Ostrogoths (= East Goths), who established themselves north of the Black Sea, and the Visigoths (= West Goths), who settled in “Dacia” just north of the lower Danube, roughly in the northeastern part of what is now modern Romania.9

In the late fourth century, the Ostrogoths were attacked and completely routed by Attila and his terrifying Huns. As a result, the defeated Ostrogoths began to migrate westward, pushing the Visigoths ahead of them. The panic-stricken Visigoths didn’t mind. They were only too happy to get out of there as fast as they could; they saw who was coming behind their eastern brothers.

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9 A point of geographical terminology. Later on in the Middle Ages, ‘Dacia’ comes to refer to Denmark. There was, for example, a scholastic figure called “Boethius of Dacia.” He did not come from this area around the Black Sea, but from Denmark. And, just to avoid confusion, I should emphasize that he had nothing at all to do with the Boethius we’re talking about now.
Although they were justifiably quite afraid of the Huns, the Goths were no pushovers. In their westward migrations, the Visigoths went down into Italy and there, under their leader Alaric, actually captured and “sacked” Rome in 410. Apparently there wasn’t much physical damage, but the psychological blow was devastating. The Eternal City, inviolate for a thousand years, had fallen! Many people thought it was the end of the world. They weren’t far wrong; the old order had decidedly passed away.10

The Visigoths had Wanderlust, however, and didn’t stay. Off they went, and ended up in southern Gaul. The Romans more or less recovered their poise, but things weren’t really the same, and in 476, as we saw, Odovacar finally put the Western Empire out of its misery.

10 As a result of this blow, some Romans began to grumble that it was all the Christians’ fault. They had deposed the good old pagan gods and set up their new-fangled religion instead, and now look at the result. It was this charge that prompted St. Augustine in North Africa to take up his pen in 413 and begin to write The City of God in reply. As he worked on it sporadically over the years, Augustine’s conception of his topic changed, and the finished work really has very little to do the accusation that originally motivated it.
Meanwhile, of course, the Ostrogoths were still out there and coming this way. In 489, under their leader Theodoric,\(^{11}\) entered Italy, and in 493 Theodoric took over. He invited Odovacar to a banquet and there murdered him.

Despite this grisly beginning, Theodoric was a very enlightened man. He was a big patron of culture, and in fact was officially a Roman citizen. He had even held the office of consul in the East. Ostrogothic Italy under Theodoric was probably the most successful and certainly the most brilliant of the “barbarian” governments that were emerging here and there in the West. It was under Theodoric that Boethius served as *Magister officiorum*.

Theodoric’s official title was ‘king’, not ‘Emperor’. And he ruled from Ravenna, not from Rome. Although he was pretty much free to do anything he pleased, he was technically subject to Constantinople, and therefore somewhat sensitive about his status.

Theodoric and his Ostrogoths, like the Goths in general, were Arian Christians.\(^ {12}\) Boethius and the Roman stock were not; they were of the “orthodox” persuasion.\(^ {13}\) This difference of religion could well have led to some problems, but apparently Boethius had a good sense of politics, and was able to play his cards right and win the favor of Theodoric.

At least for a while. Eventually, a certain Cyprian, who was in effect a kind of official private secretary, denounced the senator Albinus before Theodoric. He charged Albinus, who was something of a rich fat cat, with treasonable correspondence with persons associated with the Eastern Emperor Justin. This may very well have had something to do with plans to free the West of barbarian (and Arian) rule. At any event, Albinus denied the charge, of course, and Boethius came to his defense. Boethius wrote to Theodoric, “Cyprian’s charge is false. Nevertheless, if Albinus did it then I, and the entire Senate too, have joined [with him] in the one conspiracy. It is false, lord king.”\(^ {14}\) In other words, if Albinus is guilty, then so am I and so is the entire Senate. Well, that wasn’t quite exactly he should have said under the circumstances. Cyprian just extended his charge to include Boethius, and claimed that Boethius knew about Albinus’s treasonable correspondence and covered it up.

\(^{11}\) People of taste and discretion put the stress on the first ‘o’: Théodoric. People without taste and discretion — well, there’s no telling *where* they’ll put the stress, but they usually put it on the second ‘o’: Théodóric.

\(^{12}\) On Arius and Arianism, see Chapter 5 and Chapter 9 above.

\(^{13}\) This doesn’t mean “orthodox” in the later sense in which we speak, for example, of a Greek or Russian “Orthodox” Church. It means “orthodox” in the original etymological sense — “straight believing,” holding views that would be later be regarded as acceptable by the mainline Church.

Eventually, Boethius was arrested and thrown in jail where he languished under sentence of death. While he was there, meditating on this dramatic turn of fortune, he wrote his famous *Consolation of Philosophy*. In it, he claims he was framed. Well, maybe, maybe not. But in any event, he was eventually executed.

Now, folks, as our next lesson in the “lore and gossip” part of this *Survey*, I must tell you how Boethius died. They put a tight cord around his head and twisted it together until his eyes popped out and his skull was crushed. Then, just to be sure, they clubbed him.

**B. Works**

Boethius knew Greek quite well, and set himself the impressive goal of translating all of Plato and all of Aristotle into Latin, writing commentaries on all that material, and then writing a work showing that they really said the same thing. Unfortunately, he didn’t live to complete this lofty task. In particular, he appears not to have translated *any* Plato, despite his intentions.

He did, however, translate:

1. Aristotle’s *Categories*,
2. Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*,
3. Porphyry’s *Isagoge*.

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15 See Boethius, *Commentarii in librum Περὶ ἐρμηνείας Aristotelis pars posterior*, Meiser, ed., pp. 79–80: “If the more powerful favor of divinity grants it to me, this is [my] firm purpose: Although those people were very great talents whose labor and study translated into the Latin tongue much of what we are now treating, nevertheless they did not bring it into any kind of order or shape or in its arrangement to the level of the [scholarly] disciplines. [Hence I propose] that I turn all of Aristotle’s work — [or] whatever [of it] comes into my hands — into the Latin style and write commentaries in the Latin language on all of it, so that if anything of the subtlety of the logical art was written down by Aristotle, of the weightiness of moral knowledge, of the cleverness of the truth of physical matters, I will translate it and even illuminate it with a kind of ‘light’ of commentary. [Then,] translating all of Plato’s dialogues or even commenting [on them], I will bring them into Latin form. Once all this is done, I will not fail to bring the views of Aristotle and Plato together into a kind of harmony and show that they do not, as most people [think], disagree about everything but rather agree on most things, especially in philosophy.”

16 The Latin texts of Boethius’s writings are all published in PL 63–64. The editions there should be used with great caution. I have referred to later and more reliable editions where I know of them.

17 Edited in *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol. I.1–5. Two redactions of Boethius’s translation are edited there, together with other mediaeval translations. (In general, the various volumes of the *Aristoteles Latinus* often contain several versions of a given text.)

Note that these are the same three texts already translated by Victorinus a century or so earlier. It’s important to realize that these three texts, together with the first half of Plato’s *Timaeus*, are the only original texts of Greek philosophy generally available to the Latin West until the twelfth century. This is a tremendously important fact for the history of Western thought.

Boethius also seems to have translated the other works in the *Organon* (except perhaps for the *Posterior Analytics*), but the fate of those translations is obscure; they did not circulate widely until much later.

In addition to his translations, Boethius wrote a number of logical treatises of his own. These are, first of all, a commentary on Aristotle’s *Topics*, which is no longer extant. There may have been a commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, but if so it has not survived and did not have any influence. The same goes for a possible (incomplete) commentary on the *Prior Analytics*. More important were:

1. A commentary on the *Categories*.
2. Two commentaries on the *On Interpretation*. After he had finished his first commentary, Boethius later decided he had more to say.
3. Two commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. The first of these commentaries was “based on” Victorinus’s translation of the work, but the second one was based on Boethius’s own translation. It is not clear just how much of Victorinus is preserved in the first commentary.

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19 Edited in *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol. I.6–7. See also Boethius, *In Isagogen Porphirii commenta*, Brandt, ed., which contains Boethius’s translation interspersed with his commentary.
20 See Chapter 4 above, p. 35.
21 See again Chapter 4 above.
23 See Ebbesen, “Manlius Boethius on Aristotle’s *Analytica Posteriora*."
24 See the discussion in Obertello, *Severino Boezio*, vol. 1, pp. 230–32.
28 See Chapter 4 above, p. 35, n. 9.
A work called *Introduction to Categorical Syllogisms*, in two books.

A work *On Categorical Syllogisms*. The relation between this work and the preceding one is not certain. It has been conjectured that the *Introduction to Categorical Syllogisms* is an earlier version of *On Categorical Syllogisms*, either in whole or in part.29

A work *On Division*.30

*On Hypothetical Syllogisms*.31

A Commentary on Cicero’s *Topics*.32 (Cicero’s *Topics* is quite a different thing from Aristotle’s work of the same name, as the following entry will show you.)

*On Topical Differences*.33 That is, on the differences between Aristotle’s *Topics* and Cicero’s *Topics*.)

The translations (1)–(3), and Boethius’s own original works (4)–(12), together constitute what later came to be called the “Old Logic” (= “logica vetus”). Some of the works were more influential than others. But basically, everything the Middle Ages knew about logic was contained in these books, up to the middle of the twelfth century.

In addition to these logical works, Boethius also wrote several other things. Surely the most important of them is:

*The Consolation of Philosophy*. This is the work written while he was in prison awaiting his execution.34

Then there is a group of shorter texts, known collectively as *The Theological Tractates* (= *Opuscula sacra*), as follows

29 See the discussion in De Rijk, “On the Chronology of Boethius’ Works on Logic,” 1, pp. 6–44. De Rijk (p. 31) regards the two as distinct works.
31 Critical edition, with Italian translation and commentary, in Boethius, *De hypotheticis syllogismis*, Obertello, ed.
33 English translation by Stump in Boethius, *Boethius’s De topicis differentiis*.
34 For more on the *Consolation*, see Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 below.
(14) *On the Trinity.* A short but widely read treatise on this doctrine.\(^{35}\)

(15) *Whether Father, Son, and Holy Spirit May be Substantially Predicated of the Divinity.* An even shorter tract on a specialized topic in Trinitarian theology.

(16) *How Are Substances Good insofar as They Exist since They Are not Substantial Goods?* (= *De hebdomadibus, On the Hebdomads,* whatever the “hebdomads” are).\(^{36}\)

(17) *On the Catholic Faith.*

(18) *On Person and the Two Natures (= Against Eutyches and Nestorius, or Contra Eutychen for short).*\(^{37}\)

Finally, there are two other works of Boethius you should know about:

(19) *On the Establishment of Arithmetic.*\(^{38}\)

(20) *On the Establishment of Music.*

Other works have been attributed to Boethius from time to time, and there is perhaps some dispute about a few of them. Worse, not all of the works published under genuine Boethian titles are in fact his. With appropriate warnings, Boethius’s works are published in PL 63–64. The textual questions are especially difficult here. If you are going to do any serious work on Boethius, you must be sure you are dealing with his genuine texts. For help, consult Glorieux, *Pour revaloriser Migne.* See also the following section.

C. Bibliographical notes

The items listed here are of course are just a few of the many things available.

There is an edition and translation of the *Theological Tractates,* together with the *Consolation,* in Boethius, *Tractates, De consolatione philosophiae,* H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand, eds. & trs., (“The Loeb Classical Library”; London: Wil-

\(^{35}\) We’ll discuss parts of this text in Chapter 25 below. I have provided you with a translation of parts of it below, in part 2 of this *Survey,* Text 7.

\(^{36}\) On this treatise, see Chapter 26 below. I have supplied you with a translation of it in Part 2 of this *Survey,* Text 6.

\(^{37}\) A discussion of two Christological heresies. We’ll discuss some things in this treatise in Chapter 25 below. I have provided you with a translation from it in part 2 of this *Survey,* Text 7.

\(^{38}\) Translated by Michael Masi in Boethius, *Boethian Number Theory.*
liam Heinemann, 1918, with many subsequent reprints). The translation of the
*Consolation* found there is an old translation from 1609. There are, of course,
many other editions and translations of the *Consolation*, but you may be inter-
ested to know of a very handy on-line edition, translation and commentary, all
nicely hyperlinked, available at James J. O’Donnell’s website:

http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/.

The translation of the *Theological Tractates* in the Loeb volume varies
from good to terrible. The *De hebdomadibus* in particular is terrible, in my judg-
ment. Unfortunately, this is the translation reproduced in Hyman and Walsh, *Phi-
losophy in the Middle Ages*. On the other hand, the Latin text of the *Theological
Tractates* in the Loeb edition seems pretty reliable. Another, and much superior,
translation of the *De hebdomadibus* may be found in Wippel and Wolter, *Medie-
val Philosophy*, pp. 97–102. I have also provided you with my own translation in
Part 2 of this *Survey*, Text 6. The Loeb translation of *On the Trinity* is pretty
good. It is reprinted in Herman Shapiro, *Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 72–83.

There is a translation of an important part of the second commentary on
Porphyry in McKeon, *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, vol. 1, pp. 70–89.
We shall have occasion to refer to this passage later. I have retranslated it Spade,
*Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals*, pp. 20–25.

Note also the following:

mended.

Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, (Oxford:
Basil Blackwell, 1981). A collection of papers, many of which deal at least in part
with Boethius’s writings, questions of authenticity and such. Generally very high
quality scholarship.

Luca Obertello, *Severino Boezio*, 2 vols., (Genoa: Accademica ligure di
scienze e lettere, 1974). Life, works, doctrine — the whole business.

The surviving Boethian translations of Aristotle’s logical writings are
critically edited under the general editorship of Lorenzo Minio-Paluello in the se-
ries *Aristoteles Latinus*, published by the Union académique internationale.
See also Minio-Paluello’s studies, reprinted in a convenient collection in Lorenzo
Minio-Paluello, *Opuscula: The Latin Aristotle*, (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert,
1972). Bernard G. Dod has a chapter entitled “*Aristoteles Latinus*,” discussing of
course Boethius along with other translators, in Kretzmann, et al, ed., *the Cam-
bridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Chap. 2, pp. 45–79.
Most of the above works will supply you with more detailed bibliographical information. See also the references in Gilson’s *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, pp. 603–04.

Finally, you should also know about Arthur E. R. Boak, *The Master of the Offices in the Later Roman and Byzantine Empire*, part 1 of Arthur E. R. Boak and James E. Dunlap, *Two Studies in Later Roman and Byzantine Administration*, (“University of Michigan Studies,” Humanistic Series, vol. 14; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924). This volume will tell you just about everything you could ever want to know about the history and the development of the office Boethius came to hold. But not quite everything. Curiously, for all its erudition about how the office worked, Boethius himself does not appear to be mentioned in this study; his name certainly does not appear in the index.

D. Preview of coming attractions

The program for the rest of what I want to say Boethius in the following chapters is as follows:

- An overview of *The Consolation of Philosophy*. (Chapter 23.)
- A close look at the Consolation, Book V, on the problem of divine foreknowledge vs. human free will. Here we will look back to Augustine on the same problem. You thought we were done with Augustine, but not quite. (Chapter 24.)
- Boethius on universals. Here we will get our first real treatment of this great problem in the Middle Ages. (Chapter 25.)
- Some remarks on Boethius’s *De hebdomadibus*, a complete translation of which is in Part 2 of this Survey, as Text 6. (Chapter 26.)
- What I call Boethius’s “Philosophical Lexicon” — that is, the philosophical vocabulary he defined and bequeathed to the Middle Ages.39 (Chapter 27.)

Also, see the texts from Boethius translated in Volume II below.

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39 Please don’t be confused. Boethius never wrote a separate work called *Philosophical Lexicon*. This is just a convenient heading I came up with for grouping together several influential definitions Boethius gives in various places.
Where on Earth is Tyre?

Porphyry the Phoenician was a neo-Platonist who was born at Tyre, in what is now southern Lebanon, about 232 AD. In case you’re wondering just exactly where that is, here’s a handy map:

I’ve marked Tyre in red. Note that on modern maps you may find its name in Arabic, which is “Sur” (Şur = صور). This is not a matter of a “name change,” as in the later change from ‘Constantinople’ to ‘Istanbul’. The place was always called “Sur” in Arabic. It’s just a matter of different names in different languages.

While I was at it, I also marked Sidon (Arabic Saida = ـيـداء), as in the Biblical phrase “Tyre and Sidon.”(For example, Matt. 15:21.) It’s right nearby. Political boundaries and other details of the map are modern ones.
Two Passages from Aristotle

Aristotle’s list of categories, from *Categories* 4, 1b25–27:

… substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position,\(^1\) state, action, and affection.\(^2\)

Aristotle on “necessary accidents,” from *Metaphysics* v.30:

‘Accident’ has also another meaning, i.e., all that attaches to each thing in virtue of itself\(^3\) but is not in its essence, as having its angles equal to two right angles attaches to the triangle.

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\(^1\) Position — that is, orientation. For example, “upside down,” “right side up.” A thing can have different “orientations” without changing “place.”

\(^2\) Affection — that is, “passion,” being “passive” being “acted on,” the opposite of “action.”

\(^3\) “in virtue of itself” — that is, in virtue of the *thing* (*not* in virtue of the *accident*).
The Porphyrian Tree
Why Being Is Not a Genus

Virtually everyone in the Middle Ages agreed that being is not a genus. Porphyry, for instance, says this in his *Isagoge* (p. 5.29.8–9), and he cites Aristotle for authority. Sure enough, Aristotle does explicitly say just this at *Metaphysics* III.3 988b22.

You see this claim quite frequently, but you don’t very often see a clear explanation of the reasoning behind it. Here is what seems to be going on. (Fair warning: Don’t get too excited in anticipation.)

Consider the formula genus + difference = species. And consider the notion that real definition always involves two steps, two questions, giving you the genus and the difference, respectively. We discussed this in lecture.

Now in order to preserve and guarantee this two-step kind of real definition, the difference must be such that the notion of the genus is not already built into it. For example, when I say “Man is a rational animal,” the notion “rational” must not by itself already imply “animal.” The kind of implication or “being built in” involved here seems to be roughly a kind of “analyticity.” Thus, what we are saying is that when I think “rational,” I am not implicitly thinking “rational animal.” The notion “animal” is not analytically contained in the notion “rational.”

Why not? What would be wrong with it if it were so contained? Well, if it were, if ‘rational’ just meant “rational animal,” then I wouldn’t have to go through the two stages in defining man. I wouldn’t have to get the genus first, “animal,” and then get the difference, “rational.” I could do everything with just the latter, since the genus would already be analytically contained in the notion of the difference.

But again, what’s wrong with that? In fact, to the extent it is quicker and easier to do in one step what I might otherwise do in two, this short-cut appears to have much to recommend it.

Well, the point is not that there would be anything especially “wrong” with proceeding in this way. It’s just that it would not be what we call a “real definition.” A real definition always involves the two quite distinct steps, as we discussed. And, insofar as the notions of genus, difference, and species are closely tied to the notion of real definition, we wouldn’t have a genuine genus, difference or species here either.

The point is, then, that in the formula genus + difference = species, we are supposed to have a kind of real addition. That is, the difference is supposed to add something really to the genus, and the genus add something to the difference. Neither is analytically contained in the other; you need them both.

Well, fine. But how does all this apply to the case at hand? Why in particular can’t being be a genus, a kind of “super-category,” the highest and broadest of them all, of which the ten Aristotelian so called “categories” would then be species? The answer is: There
would be nothing to serve as the "differences" if being were a genus. Being is analytically contained in any notion you might try to use as a difference. (We'll see how in a moment.)

Thus, when I say ‘rational’, I do not necessarily mean “rational animal.” And this is true even if it is a fact — even if it is a necessary fact — that all rational things are animals. That may be a matter of fact, or even of necessary fact, but it is not a matter of analytic meaning.

On the other hand, when I say ‘rational’, I do necessarily mean “rational being.” Being is analytically contained — or at least so the theory says. This, of course, is the step that takes the most work. We will return to it below.

At any event, if this is so, then it’s clear why being cannot be a genus after all. The point is not that we do not have a clear concept of being, or that the notion of being is equivocal or analogical, and so is too unstable to serve as a genus. You may also believe any of those claims, but they are not what is involved here. The main reason being is not a genus is just that, if it were, it would not have a difference, properly speaking, and so could have no species, properly speaking. But that just means it isn’t a genus, properly speaking. And that’s that.

Now, while it’s easy to find lots of mediaeval discussions that hint at this reasoning, or say it only quickly and obscurely, it is surprisingly difficult to find any discussion that sets out it out clearly and precisely. The best statement I’ve found is contained in (Pseudo-) Thomas Aquinas, *On the Nature of Genus* (= *De natura generis*). The work has been attributed to Aquinas, but it’s generally regarded as spurious. It is edited in Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula philosophica*, R. M. Spiazzi, ed., (Torino: Marietti, 1954), pp. 175–204. The passage below is from § 476 (p. 177). The translation is my own:

Now being cannot be a genus, as is taught in the eighth [book] of the *Metaphysics*, and in the third.¹ For no difference participates [its] genus … For when I say ‘rational’, I mean “something that has reason.” Now it does not belong to the notion of “rational” that it be an animal. But what is participated belongs to the notion of what participates [it]. Now no difference can be taken such that being does not belong to its notion. Thus, it is plain that being cannot have differences as a genus has.

The nifty thing about this passage is that it suggests how the notion of being is supposed to be analytically contained in the notion of difference. (I said I would return to this.) The point is that when I say ‘rational’ all by itself, I mean “something that has reason,” but I not mean “animal that has reason” or anything like that. The subject of the ‘that’-clause is obviously serving only as a kind of syntactical place-holder here, a kind of free variable. The word then has to be ‘something’ — or another word just as broad and general: ‘being that has reason’, ‘thing that has reason’, ‘entity that has reason’. It is in this peculiar sense, therefore, that the notion of being (or of something, or thing, or entity) is contained

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in the notion of any difference — at least according to this author. It is contained there
only as a kind of place-holder or free variable.

That this really is its function will perhaps be clearer once you realize that when the dif-
ference is added to the genus, the notion of being disappears, and is replaced by the no-
tion of the genus. ‘Rational’, we said, means “being (something, thing, entity) that has
reason.” But when I say ‘rational animal’, I mean only “animal that has reason”; I do not
mean “animal being that has reason,” or “animal something that has reason,” or anything
like that. (Those phrases are probably not even syntactically well-formed.) The “place-
holder” is removed and replaced by the genus.

Now suppose being were a genus, and suppose further that rational is one of its differ-
ences. (It wouldn’t be of course; rational comes much lower on the Porphyrian tree. I am
only using it here to make a point. I had to pick some example or other.) Rational, we
said, just means “being (something, thing, entity) that has reason.” When I combine this
difference with the genus being, I replace the place-holder with the genus, and get: “being
that has reason.” But that’s exactly what we started with! That’s just the difference all
over again. There’s been nothing added. (That’s the point all this has been leading up to.)

In general, if the notion of the genus were contained in the notion of the difference, then
there would be no distinction between the difference and the species. Since the difference
would already include the genus, therefore difference = genus + difference = species.
You would have the notion of the genus, and you would have the notion of the species.
But you do not get from the former to the latter by adding something to the genus. Any
difference you might add would already be the species. In a well-behaved, genuine genus,
by contrast, the transition to its species is made by means of the differences, which — so
to speak — smooth out an otherwise quite abrupt transition. First you take the genus, then
you take the difference, and then you put them together. Only then do you have the spe-
cies.

With being, however, it doesn’t work this way. How do you get from the concept of be-
ing to the concept of one of the categories — say, substance? Well, first you take the
concept of being. Then you take the concept of substance — and that’s the end of it. You
don’t add any difference to the concept of being to get the concept of substance, for the
reasons we have just seen. There is no “constructing” the notion of the category by add-
ing something to the notion of being. It is as though the concept of being just suddenly
“exploded” into the concepts of the ten categories all by itself. And this is exactly the
way some authors put it. The notion of being just “breaks up,” “divides itself,” into the
ten categories. But it does not do so in the way a genus is broken up or divided into its
species.
Boethius against Universals: The Arguments in the Second Commentary on Porphyry

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I

Apart from his Consolation of Philosophy, perhaps the most well known text of Boethius is his discussion of universals in the Second Commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge.¹ In that passage, he first reviews the arguments for and against the existence of universal entities, and then offers a theory he attributes to Alexander of Aphrodisias, a kind of theory called in recent times “moderate realism,” according to which there are no universal entities in the ontology of the world, but nevertheless there is an objective, non-arbitrary basis for the formation of our universal or general concepts about that world. At the very end of the passage, Boethius adds the intriguing comment that he has presented this view not necessarily because it is his own, but because it is the one that fits Aristotle’s

doctrine the best, and Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, the work Boethius is commenting on, is intended after all as an introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*.²

There are many interesting things about this passage, not the least of which is that it is an early example of a form that would later be codified in the scholastic *quaestio*: a yes/no question is stated (or in general some question expressed in terms of an exclusive dichotomy), then arguments are presented on both sides, *pro* and *con*, the author gives his own answer to the question, and finally (although this part of what would become the classic form is missing from Boethius’ discussion) the arguments for the losing side of the question are answered.

I do not intend to discuss the whole of Boethius’ passage in this paper, and in fact will not even be saying very much about Boethius’ own theory of universals in the passage — if indeed it contains his own theory. What I want to focus on instead is just one part of the discussion’s *quaestio* structure: the preliminary statement of the case against universals. I have included the Latin text in Appendix 1, below.

For purposes of reference, I have divided the Latin into five sections: First (section A) there is the general statement of the question in § (10).³ Then (section B), as part of the case against universals, there is the argument in §§ (11)–(12). Third (section C), there is another and quite odd argument in § (13). Just how this latter argument is related to the rest of the passage is a delicate matter, and is one of the things I want to discuss in this paper. Then, fourth (section D), there is the very interesting discussion in §§ (14)–(18), where Boethius describes the way in which a universal is supposed to be — and, if the argument in the passage as a whole is correct, cannot be — “common to many.” And then, fifth and finally (section E), there is what appears to be a kind of summary and conclusion in § (19).

There are several things I want to discuss about these paragraphs: First, I want to make some observations about the source for Boethius’ description in section D, §§ (14)–(18). Second (although I will save most of what I want to say on this topic until the end of the paper), I want to say some things about the structure of the overall passage, how the various sections I have distinguished are related to one another. Third, I want to look at a peculiar “infinite regress” argument in the middle of the passage, section C, § (13). This infinite regress argument is one of the main things I want to focus on in this paper.

The discussion in § (13), it seems to me, is an extremely puzzling one, both from the point of view of what it is doing in the passage as a whole, and

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² See ibid., p. 25, § (37).
³ The paragraph numbers are taken from ibid., pp. 21–22.
from the point of view of what the actual argument in the paragraph is. Curiously, although Boethius’ treatment of universals in his Commentary is discussed often in surveys and secondary literature, this infinite regress argument is almost always passed over cursorily if not ignored entirely. In fact, I know of only one published account of it that is anything more than perfunctory, in Martin Tweedale’s Abailard on Universals.¹ There are, however, at least two other treatments in “unofficial” circulation, by which I mean that they have not been published by a commercial or university press. One is an interpretation I presented in my A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy,² a collection of lecture notes and course materials I have circulated privately. The other is in Peter King’s Ph.D. dissertation, where he discusses Boethius as a preliminary to Abailard.³ King’s understanding of the passage is quite close to Tweedale’s, although it is developed in more detail, particularly on the question how the argument in § (13) fits into the structure of the passage as a whole. I am not entirely happy with any of these three accounts, including my own, and therefore want to look at the whole passage again.

II

To begin with, however, let me deal with the first item on the agenda I just listed: section D of the text, §§ (14)–(18). There Boethius states what it would take to be a “universal” in the sense he is discussing. A universal, he says, would have to be, first, “common” as a whole to the various things it is said to be common to, not shared part by part like, say, a pie. Second, it has to be “common” as a whole at the same time to those things; a universal is not a kind of metaphysical “hand-me-down” that passes as a whole, to be sure, into the possession of several individuals, but only one after another. And third, it has to be “common” to those things as a whole and at the same time in some appropriate metaphysically constitutive way, not in the purely “external” way we might all be said to witness some event in common, as a whole and at the same time. (Boethius in fact says a universal must be “able to constitute and form the substance of what it is common to” — § (18). But presumably his account is meant to be generalizable to universals in other Aristotelian categories besides substance.) This third requirement, of course, metaphysical “constitutiveness,” demands a lot more explanation than is given anywhere in Boethius’ discussion.

These paragraphs are an admirable attempt to define the notion of a universal. All too often, philosophers argue about universals without ever stopping

¹ Tweedale, pp. 75–77.
² See the references in n. 1 above.
³ King, pp. 45–47.
to specify exactly what it is they are talking about, as though it were something plain and obvious and agreed upon by everyone. In fact of course, it is nothing of the kind. Boethius’ description is clear (although the last clause does require more work) and, while it was not the only notion of a universal in circulation in the Middle Ages, it was certainly an extremely influential account.

Nevertheless, as it turns out, Boethius’ description is not altogether original with him. It seems to have gone previously unremarked in the secondary literature that he got the various parts of his description from Porphyry. Not from Porphyry’s Isagoge, but from his Exposition of Aristotle’s Categories by Question and Answer. I have given you the Greek text and a translation in Appendix 2 below.

To be fair to Boethius, he is still as far as I know the first person to apply considerations of the kind we see in section D to the problem of universals. Nevertheless, the actual content of his three-part description seems definitely to have been derived from Porphyry.

In the very first lines of the Categories, Aristotle says that “equivocals” or “homonyms” are things that have a name in common, but the definition of that name they do not have in common. In the passage from Porphyry’s Exposition, the “questioner” asks what the word ‘common’ means there in Aristotle’s statement. But first, he says, “tell me in how many ways ‘common’ is said.” What we get in Porphyry then is a kind of catalogue of the various senses of the word ‘common’. Then the text goes on to ask which of those senses is the one Aristotle is using in those opening lines of the Categories.

Of course this is quite a different kind of context from the problem of universals. Porphyry and Aristotle are here talking about having a name in common, not about having some sort of universal entity in common. It remains, true, as I just said, that Boethius seems to have been the first to apply Porphyry’s distinctions explicitly to the problem of universals.

Porphyry in fact gives four senses in which things can be “common.” First, he says, “that is called ‘common’ which is divided into parts, like a loaf of bread, and wine if it is one of [the things that] are divided.” Note that this is exactly what Boethius is talking about in § (15), being “common” part by part, as a pie is “shared” by all those who take a slice. Universals, if there are any, are not common in that way.

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7 There was also Aristotle’s definition in De interpretatione 7 17*39–40, that a universal is “what is apt to be predicated of many.”
9 Categories 1 11’1–2.
10 On this last clause, see n. 35 below.
Second, Porphyry says, “That is called ‘common’ which is not divided into parts but is received by many for [their] use, like a horse or a slave [that is] common to many brothers.” The examples, a horse and a slave, are exactly the same as those Boethius uses for his own second way of being “common,” in § (16).

At first, perhaps, it does not appear that Porphyry’s second sense has anything to do with possessing something at different times, as Boethius’ second sense does. It would seem that all Porphyry is talking about is something like the legal notion of “joint ownership.” But the word I have translated here as ‘received’ is the Greek παράλαμβάνομαι, a word often used in the context of inheritance, so that whatever Porphyry himself may have meant, the notion of temporal succession could easily have been suggested to Boethius.

Oddly, Boethius omits Porphyry’s third sense of being “common.” In this third sense, Porphyry says, “that is called ‘common’ which is in someone’s possession beforehand and, after being used, is returned to common [ownership].” This is perhaps not altogether clear. In Porphyry’s second sense, as we have seen, what is “common” is passed from one individual to another, like for instance an inheritance, whereas in his third sense the predominant notion seems to be one of “joint or common ownership,” to be distinguished from actual possession and use. He gives the examples of the public baths and the theater or assembly. The idea seems to be this: even if no one is actually using the public baths at a given time, they are still “common” — they are still public. And the public theater belongs to everyone, even if no one is actually there at the moment. On the other hand, if no one person actually has possession of a slave at a given time (one of the examples both Porphyry and Boethius give of the second sense), then he or she is simply not a slave then, and certainly not a slave “in common.”

The case is perhaps a little hard to make out convincingly. It is easy, for example, to suppose a slave owned by a whole family, rather than by any one individual in the family. In any event, the distinction Porphyry seems to have in mind between his second and third senses of being “common” is that in the second sense what is received is received from another individual rather than from the “common store,” whereas the third sense allows the latter possibility as well.

The distinction is nuanced and not altogether certain, which is perhaps why Boethius ignores it and reduces Porphyry’s four senses to three.

Porphyry’s fourth and last sense once again uses the example of the theater or assembly. This is confusing, to be sure, since he had just used the very same example for his third sense.11 But in any case, in his fourth sense, “that is

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11 Perhaps the distinction is between the theater or assembly as a building and the theater or assembly as an event, what takes place in the building.
called ‘common’ which, as a whole, comes undividedly into the use of many simultaneously.” And, with the same example of the theater — or as Boethius puts it, a “stage-play, or some spectacle” — this is exactly Boethius’ third way of being “common” without being a universal (§ (17)).

The upshot, then, is that this well known passage from Boethius is not altogether original with him, although he does seem to have been the first to apply these distinctions to the problem of universals, and to make the point that a universal is not supposed to be common in any of these ways.

III

Let us now look briefly at the argument in §§ (11)–(12) — section B — of the passage from Boethius, in order to fix the context for the infinite regress argument in § (13), which is the main thing I want to focus on.

Paragraph (11) begins by stating the conclusion of the argument, that “genera and species cannot exist.” Why not? Because, Boethius says, “everything that is common to several things at one time cannot be one.” He goes on to say this is especially so ‘when one and the same thing is as a whole in many things at one time.” Note that this explicitly captures the first two of the three clauses of § (18), where Boethius lists the requirements for being a universal.

So in effect § (11) argues that the plurality of things to which a universal is supposed to be common is somehow “contagious” and “infects” the universal itself, making it plural too, and so not “one.” Paragraph (12) then draws the consequence from this: A universal “is nothing at all. For everything that exists exists for the reason that it is one.”

The two operative assumptions in this section, then, are (i) the “convertibility” of being and unity, and (ii) the view (not further explained anywhere in the entire passage) that plurality is “contagious” in the sense just described.

IV

We now turn to § (13), where we get the infinite regress argument. “But even if genus and species do exist,” the paragraph begins, “but are multiple and not one in number, there will be no last genus. It will have another genus placed above it.” Then he goes on to give an example in terms of the genus animal, and argues somehow that there would be an infinite regress of ever higher genera. Presumably this is supposed to be an unacceptable result, so that the argument amounts to a reductio.

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Notice something already. What is the unacceptable conclusion this argument is trying to derive? That “there will be no last genus.” Now even though no one I know of has ever interpreted the passage this way, the phrase ‘last genus’ certainly suggests the interpretation “highest genus,” a “most general genus” or category, so that the argument would then be that the existence of universals that “are multiple and not one in number” would violate the Aristotelian theory of the categories. Surely the argument in the rest of the paragraph doesn’t suggest this is what is going on at all, but the claim ‘there will be no last genus’, taken by itself, certainly sounds like it.

Tweedale, King and I, all of whom have written about this argument, have in effect all taken it for granted that this is not what is going on. In fact, both King and I, when we paraphrase the argument, cast it not in terms of the genus ‘animal’, as Boethius himself had done, but in terms of the species ‘man’ or ‘humanity’. It is as if we are tacitly assuming that the fact that Boethius puts his example in terms of the genus ‘animal’ is purely accidental, and that the argument is meant to apply to any universal, whether a genus, a species or whatever. And indeed, evidence that the discussion throughout this entire passage is meant to be generalizable in this way might be found in the fact that all the other arguments in the passage are put in terms of genus too, and nevertheless at the end of § (12), Boethius says “The same can be said about species.” Again, at the end of the whole passage (§ (19)), he says “And the same is to be understood for the other predicables.”

But if this is so, if there is nothing unusual about genus in this argument, then what are we to make of the very first sentence of § (13): “But even if genus and species do exist, but are multiple and not one in number, there will be no last genus”? Notice what the sentence does not say. It does not say that if genus exists and is multiple, there will be no last genus, and if species exists and is multiple, there will be no last species. Rather, on the most natural reading, in either case, there will be no last genus. That is, we will get the same result — no last genus — whether we start the argument by talking about genus or by talking about species. And if it is species we are talking about instead of genus, that result — that “there will be no last genus” — would mean that somewhere in the argument we move from species to genus, and so to something broader than we began with. If that step is repeated as the regress goes on, then the regress is not just a regress of further and further stages, but a regress that involves increasing generality. And

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12 King, p. 45; Spade, Survey, Ch. 23.
13 Tweedale does not explain the argument in terms of the species ‘man’, but — like Boethius — in terms of the genus ‘animal’ (Tweedale, pp. 75–77). Nevertheless, in Tweedale’s analysis too, there is nothing to suggest that the choice of a genus for the example is anything more than coincidental.
if that’s what’s going on, then — however the argument works in detail — we do have a regress that would do away with the Aristotelian theory of the categories as “most general genera.”

Nevertheless, it remains true, as we shall see, that the actual argument in the rest of § (13) does not seem to involve any kind of regress to ever-increasing levels of generality, and no one has ever interpreted the argument as if it did.

We are left then with an initial puzzle about § (13): Its first sentence would lead one to expect something quite different from the actual argument given in the paragraph.

V

Let us look again at the argument in § (13). At the beginning of the paragraph, it is hypothesized (for reductio) that genus and species exist “but are multiple and not one in number.” King and Tweedale interpret this as the hypothesis that universals are not numerically one, in the sense that the previous argument in §§ (11)–(12) has already refuted, but instead “one” only by a kind of looser unity, that universals are in effect “collections.”

King points to the Contra Eutychen for a clue to what is going on here. There Boethius says “Indeed, what is not one cannot exist at all; being and one are convertible terms, and whatsoever is one exists.” Here we have a reaffirmation of the convertibility of being and unity that was one of the bases for the earlier argument, in §§ (11)–(12). But then Boethius goes on: “Even those things which are combined from many, as a heap or a chorus, are nevertheless one.” Thus, according to the Contra Eutychen, being and unity are convertible, but there are two kinds of unity.

The connection the Commentary on Porphyry and the Contra Eutychen is an intriguing connection to draw, not least because it suggests that the kind of realism Boethius is arguing against in § (13) may be some form of “collective realism,” such as one finds later on at the time of Peter Abelard.

On the authority of the Contra Eutychen, therefore, anything that exists must have one or the other kind of unity, either numerical unity or at least the looser kind of unity “a heap or a chorus” has. This suggests then that the first argument (the one in §§ (11)–(12)) is directed against a realism that would make

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14 Tweedale, p. 75, puts this in terms of being “‘multiplex’ in the way pairs and triplets are multiplex,” but then goes on to explicate the latter in terms of “collections.”
15 King’s translation, p. 40. He is quoting Boethius, Contra Eutychen IV.
16 Ibid.
17 On “collective realism,” see King, Ch. 8 (= pp.187–214).
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I think this reading is a very attractive way of looking at the text. Nevertheless, some caveats should be noted. First of all, while the connection with “collective realism” is an appealing interpretive conjecture, it is a conjecture. Paragraph (13) makes no mention of “collections,” or of heaps or choruses, and conversely the Contra Eutychen does not in the relevant passage use the characteristic term ‘multiplex’ or ‘multiple’ that runs all through the argument in § (13). So the link is at best surmised, not explicit in the text.

Second, there is a very good reason to be hesitant about looking too much to the Contra Eutychen for help in interpreting the Second Commentary on Porphyry. For in a well-known passage in the Contra Eutychen, Boethius tells us how to translate certain Greek philosophical terms. He says:\footnote{Contra Eutychen III.}

> For what the Greeks call οὐσίωσις or οὐσιωθοςα, that we call “subsistence” or “to subsist.” But what they call ὑπόστασις or ὑφιστασθαι, that we translate as “substance” or “to substand.”

Yet in his translation of Porphyry’s Isagoge, when Boethius gets to the first of Porphyry’s three famous questions about universals, which he translates as “whether [genera and species] subsist or are posited in bare understandings only”\footnote{Spade, Five Texts, p. 20, § (1).} — the very passage being commented on in the text we are considering in this argument — the word he translates as ‘subsist’ is a form of ὑφιστασθαι, not of οὐσίωσις, just the reverse of the translation-policy announced in the Contra Eutychen. Whether this represent some conscious theoretical change-of-mind on Boethius’ part, or whether it is merely an indication of sloppiness or whatever, I do not know. But it does suggest that one should not to rely too heavily on the Contra Eutychen in interpreting the Second Commentary on Porphyry.\footnote{Note that the Contra Eutychen is later than the Second Commentary. The latter was written before 510 (see L. M. De Rijk, “On the Chronology of Boethius’ Works on Logic,” Vi- varium 2 (1964), pp. 1–49, 125–162, at p. 125), while the former was written not before 512 (see John Mair, “The Text of the Opuscula Sacra,” in Margaret Gibson, ed., Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), Ch. 8 (= pp. 206–213), at pp. 208–209.}

VI

Still, if the hypothesis that genus and species exist “but are multiple and not one in number” doesn’t mean they are “collections,” what might it mean in-
stead? Well, at least one other possibility ought to be considered, if only to see that it is not very plausible.\textsuperscript{21} It is possible to take Boethius here to be referring more or less to the view he himself explains and defends, on the authority of Alexander of Aphrodisias, a little later in his \textit{Commentary}.

There Boethius says “these things [genus and species] exist in singulars, but are thought of as universals.”\textsuperscript{22} Socrates and Plato, then, each has his own humanity and his own animality, so that there are \textit{two} humans and \textit{two} animalities there. They are, in an obvious sense, “multiple and not one in number.” Nevertheless, through a process of abstraction, or what Boethius sometimes called “division,” the mind views these numerically distinct humanities as one universal thing, and so too for animalities at the level of genus.

There are notorious — and, I think, frankly insuperable — difficulties with such an “abstraction” theory, what is sometimes called “moderate realism.” But the success or failure of Boethius’ theory is not the issue here. The point instead is that the theory can be expressed without appealing to collections, without thinking that genus and species are like a “heap” or a “chorus.” Humanity, on this view, is “multiple and not one in number,” and so is animality, but that does not mean they are collections.

So there is a perfectly straightforward way of interpreting the phrase ‘multiple and not one in number’ without turning genera and species into collections. On this interpretation, the phrase in effect means nothing more than that the generic and specific terms it describes are common names. Being a common name is, after all, not the same as being a proper name of a collection.

But if this interpretation of the phrase is reasonable in general, it is not a very plausible one in the present context. First of all, if the view Boethius is hypothesizing at the beginning of § (13) is the one he himself defends a little later in the \textit{Commentary}, according to which genera and species are not numerically one, and not one in the way a collection is one either, then why does this argument appear in the text as part of the case \textit{against} realism? It would seem that the theory the argument is attacking is not a realist theory at all in any metaphysical sense.

Second, if § (13) is addressing the theory Boethius defends later in the \textit{Commentary}, then what is the \textit{answer} to the argument against that theory here? Later on in the text, Boethius presents his theory of abstraction and argues in effect that a basically nominalist metaphysics is not incompatible with a basically realist epistemology, so that to deny the reality of universals in the external

\textsuperscript{21} Plausible or not, I confess that I held it in Spade, \textit{Survey}. For the reasons I am about to give, I no longer hold it and in fact now wonder why I ever did.

\textsuperscript{22} Spade, \textit{Five Texts}, p. 25, § (31).
world does not threaten the legitimacy of our general knowledge. All that is fine if it works, but it is answering a different question: the epistemological questions posed by a nominalist metaphysics. Nowhere in the text is the argument in § (13) answered.

Does this mean then that Boethius regarded the argument in § (13) as sound, and the theory hypothesized there as refuted? That would be something of an embarrassment if we take that theory to be the one Boethius means to defend!

These difficulties make it unlikely that Boethius has that theory in mind in § (13). And this fact in turn might be taken as negative evidence in favor of reading the argument in terms of collections, as Tweedale and King do. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the last part of this paper, there are considerations that perhaps count against the latter reading.

VII

Let us now look at the actual argument in § (13). In the end, there is not much difference between Tweedale, King and me over how the argument goes, although there are some differences in presentation.

Consider several animals — say, Socrates, Plato and Brunellus the Ass. They are “not the same” (see Appendix 1 below, line 20), since there are three of them, and yet they have “a certain similar something” (Appendix 1, lines 19–20) — Socrates’ animality, Plato’s animality and Brunellus’ animality, let us say. “For that reason” (line 20) we look for their genus. That is to say, likeness is a matter of falling under the same universal, in this case a genus.

But the genus itself, by the hypothesis of § (13), is just as “multiple” as our three animals were to begin with. That is, Socrates’ animality, Plato’s animality and Brunellus’ animality are three animalities that are “not the same,” just as Socrates, Plato and Brunellus themselves were three animals that were not the same. But these three animalities are alike in being animalities, and therefore they too “have a certain similar something,” so that we must look for their genus in turn. And off we go on our regress.

King and Tweedale put the regress in terms of “collections”: Individuals are alike; likeness implies sharing somehow the same universal; and universals are thought of as “collections” of their individual instances. And while we have seen that this may be the right way to look at it, notice once again that there is really nothing in the text itself that implies collections.

23 Ibid., pp. 23–25, §§ (23)–(32).
24 Notice how this account take the fact that it is a genus as merely a consequence of the example, not as essential to the argument.
If we do think of the argument in terms of collections, then it is important to note that the regress requires abstract names to get it going, not concrete ones. For example, if we say

Individual animals are alike and so fall under the common genus *animal* (concrete noun), which genus is in turn the collection of all individual animals (concrete noun again)

we are right back where we started, with individual animals, and there is no regress. In order to get a regress, we need to say something like:

Individual animals are alike and so fall under the common genus *animality* (abstract noun), which genus is in turn the collection of all individual animalities (abstract noun again).

Here we have gone up one level of abstraction, from *animal* to *animality*. And since all those animalities are alike too, our infinite regress is under way.

Tweedale was the first to make this point, although he expresses it in somewhat different terms.²⁵

King, Tweedale and I are therefore in substantial agreement about the actual form of the argument in § (13), although the role of collections is perhaps negotiable. In any case, notice that as I remarked earlier,²⁶ on this reading the argument does not proceed in terms of a regress of increasing generality. If there are three animals, then there are three animalities and three of that “similar something” those animalities have — call it “animalityhood” or whatever. And so it goes: three all the way up, never anything more general than that.

If this is indeed the form of the argument (and I do not see any other way to read it), then it is worth noting that the argument relies crucially on the notion of what we might call “higher-order properties.”²⁷ We have not only animals, but

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²⁵ Tweedale, p. 75: “In following the reasoning one must be careful to distinguish single items that make up the genus in question from the single items that fall under it. Individual animals fall under the genus *animal*, but they make it up only if we consider the genus *animal* to be simply the collection of all animals. Since Boethius is thinking of a genus as a collection of single items each of which is ‘in’ an individual animal, it does not appear that he thought of these single items as identical with individual animals.”

²⁶ See pp. 7–8, above.

²⁷ I do not here mean “property” in the technical sense from Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, a real metaphysical characteristic that is not an essential ingredient of the members of a species but nevertheless belongs to all and only the members of that species, as risibility was said to be a “property” of man. I am instead using the term in its modern-day, looser sense in which any metaphysical feature of a thing is a “property” of it. There is no good mediaeval word for this.
animalities, and then animalityhoods (as we called them a moment ago), and “animalityhoodships” (or whatever we want to call them\textsuperscript{28}), and so on.

The picture here is one of higher-order properties, not just of higher-order predicates. It is a matter of metaphysics, not just of language. Animals each have some real metaphysical feature, an animality, in virtue of which they are animals. These animalities in turn each have another metaphysical feature, an “animalityhood” we called it, in virtue of which they are animalities, and so on. Animalityhood is a real feature of an animality; indeed, it is what makes it an animality. But it is not a feature of an animal, since an animal is \textit{not} an animality.

Such a picture, involving iterated “properties of properties,” reflects certain recent metaphysical views quite well. But it is not usually part of mediaeval discussions. For example, with respect to the Aristotelian distinction between things “present in” a subject and things “said of” a subject,\textsuperscript{29} one never finds talk of some things’ being “present in” others that are in turn “present in” yet further things, and so on. And while it is true that \textit{animal} is “said of” \textit{man}, which is in turn “said of” Socrates, it is also true that \textit{animal} is “said of” Socrates,\textsuperscript{30} whereas on the picture Boethius presents, while higher-order properties can belong to the properties immediately below them, they do \textit{not} belong to the things the latter properties belong to: animalityhood is a feature of animality, but not of any animal.

I find it noteworthy, therefore, that Boethius appeals to such higher-order properties in his infinite regress argument in §(13). Of course that argument, and the higher order properties appealed to in it, are part of a \textit{reductio}, so that Boethius is not committing himself to such a theory. Still, the fact that he even raises it is striking.

\section*{VIII}

Finally, I said I wanted to say something about the overall structure of the passage from Boethius’ \textit{Second Commentary on Porphyry}, how its various sections hang together. In particular, I want to comment on the odd placement of section D, §§(14)–(18).

\textsuperscript{28} Ordinary vocabulary is of course lacking, and the artificial vocabulary becomes increasingly strained as one progresses up the infinite regress to ever higher levels of abstractness.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Categories} 2 1’20–9.

\textsuperscript{30} Compare \textit{Categories} 3 1’10–15: “When one thing is predicated of another as of a subject, all that is said of what is predicated is also said of the subject. For example, \textit{man} is predicated of \textit{this} man, but \textit{animal} [is predicated] of \textit{man}. Accordingly, \textit{animal} will also be predicated of \textit{this} man.”

\begin{flushleft}
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Commentators who have discussed this passage previously, and who have addressed this point, all seem to have agreed in taking section D as a kind of elaboration and filling in of the argument in section B. In other words, it is as if the overall structure of the passage goes like this: First, we get the statement of the question in section A. Then we get one two-part argument against the reality of universals, in sections B and C. Then, in D, we get an elaboration of the argument back in B. And finally, we sum it all up in section E.

But if D is an elaboration of the argument in B, why is it delayed until after the infinite-regress argument in C, to which it seems to be totally irrelevant?

This odd placement of section D is not all that surprising, of course. Experienced mediaevalists are after all quite used to seeing much stranger arrangements than this in mediaeval arguments. Still, it is worth noting, and makes one wonder whether perhaps there is another way of organizing the passage.

The usual way of organizing it, the one I have just described, is the natural interpretation if we take sections B and C as two parts of a single, two-case argument. This reading is reinforced by King’s attractive suggestion linking these passages with the distinction in the Contra Eutychen between two kinds of unity, numerical unity and collective unity.

On this reading, the argument in the entire passage — and so Boethius’ whole case against universals — depends crucially on the convertibility of being and unity, the first operative assumption listed in section III above. But there are two kinds of unity. Numerical unity is discussed in section B, and collective unity in section C. Then we get a kind of afterthought in section D, and a conclusion in E.

But if one looks at § (11) it is clear that, although numerical unity is indeed explicitly mentioned at the very end of the paragraph, the actual argument in the paragraph is applicable to collective unity as much as to numerical unity. Just as numerically one thing cannot be wholly in two things at once, according to this argument, so too one chorus, let’s say, cannot be both wholly in Carnegie Hall and wholly in Yankee Stadium at the same time.

But if the first part of the two-case argument covers both kinds of unity like this, then the argument in section C is unnecessary and the structure of the whole passage becomes all the more mysterious; the argument in section B covers both cases.

I want to suggest an alternative structuring of the passage. Look at the end of § (12), and likewise at the end of § (19). They both look like concluding summaries. Both conclude that genus does not exist, and then go on to say that

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31 See the references in n. 1 above.
the same thing holds for species (§ (12)), or for “the other predicables” (§ (19)). Both passages, that is, offer a summary and then a generalization.

Now look at the beginning of § (13) and the beginning of § (14): “But if genus and species do exist, but are multiple and not one in number” (§ (13)), and “Now if a genus is one in number” (§ (14)). While it is perhaps not fully explicit, this looks very much like a conditional excluded middle — the condition being that genus (or species) does exist.

What I want to suggest then is that in this passage as a whole what we really have is not one two-case argument plus an afterthought, but rather two separate arguments against the reality of universals, the second of which is a two-case argument. The first argument is in section B, and depends on the convertibility of being and unity; it ends in § (12). The second argument, the two-case argument, takes up sections C and D, and does not depend on the convertibility of being and unity at all, but only on an excluded middle.

If genus and species are not numerically one, that case is handled by the infinite-regress argument in section C. And note that on this reading there is no longer any special reason to take that argument in terms of collective unity or indeed in terms of any kind of unity. In fact, if sections B and C are not two parts of a single, two-case argument, but instead belong to two entirely unrelated arguments, then the passage from Contra Eutychen about the two kinds of unity is irrelevant to interpreting the text.

On the other hand, if genus and species are numerically one, that case is handled in section D, by an argument that looks very much like the first argument, back in section B, except that it is somewhat more developed and conspicuously makes no mention of the convertibility of being and unity.

There is another reason too why this restructuring of the passage is an appealing one, this time a philosophical reason. For one might well have thought that without the convertibility of being and unity, there simply is no problem of universals. If Socrates’ humanity and Plato’s humanity, which are wholly, at the same time and in the appropriate metaphysically constitutive sense present in Socrates and Plato respectively, can be counted as satisfying Boethius’ three-clause definition of a universal in § (18) even though they are two humanities and not one, then what possible objection can there be to admitting the reality of universals?

But if we read the structure of Boethius’ passage in the way I have indicated, then there is a suggestion in the passage that it is possible to argue against the reality of universals even without assuming that every being is one being. For while the first argument, in section B, does assume that, the second argument, the two-case argument in section C–E, conspicuously does not assume it. This second part of the argument, section D, handles the case where a universal is one,
but the first part, in section C, allow the case where it is not. Neither alternative is assumed, and both are covered.

The philosophical assessment of this intriguing suggestion is a topic for another paper.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Many of the ideas in this paper, particularly those in the last section, about structural matters, were prompted by discussion with Christopher Vaughan. An earlier version of this paper was read at the workshop on Boethius held at The Ohio State University, May 28–29, 1994. I am grateful to the participants in that workshop for their insightful and penetrating comments.
Appendix 1:
Boethius’ Text

Section A (p. 161.14) (10) Genera et species aut sunt atque subsistunt aut intellectu et sola cogitatione formantur,

Section B

(11) sed genera et species esse non possunt. hoc autem ex his intellegitur. omne enim quod commune est uno tempore pluribus, id unum esse non poterit; multorum enim quod commune est. praesertim cum una eademque res in multis uno tempore tota sit. /\ quantae cumque enim sunt species, in omnibus genus unum est, non quod de eo singulare quasi partes aliquas carpant, sed singulare uno tempore totum genus habent. quo fit ut totum genus in pluribus singulis uno tempore posita unum esse non possit; neque enim fieri potest ut, cum in /\ plurius totum uno sit tempore, in semet ipso sit unum (p. 162) numero.

(12) quod si ita est, unum quidam genus esse non poterit, quo fit ut omnino nihil sit; omne enim quod est, idcirco est, quia unum est. et de specie idem conuenit dici.

Section C

(13) quodsi est quidem genus ac species, sed multiplex neque unum \^ numero, non erit ultimum genus, sed habebit alium superpositum genus, quod illam multiplicatem unius sui nominis vocabulo includat. ut enim plura animalia, quoniam habent quiddam simile, eadem tamen non sunt, idcirco eorum genera perquiruntur, ita quoque quoniam genus, quod in pluribus est /\ atque ideo multiplex, habet sui similitudinem, quod genus est. non est uero unum, quoniam in pluribus est. eius generis quoque genus alium quaerendum est, cumque fuerit inuentum, eadem ratione quae superius dicta est, rursus genus tertium uestigatur. itaque in infinitum ratio procedat necesse est, cum /\ nullus disciplinae terminus occurrat.

Section D (14) quodsi unum quiddam numero genus est, commune mul-

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33 From Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii In Isagogen Porphyrii commenta, Samuel Brandt, ed., (“Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum,” Vol. 48; Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1906). I have divided the text into sections in conformity with the discussion above. Paragraph divisions are my own, and are numbered in accordance with the translation in Spade, Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals, pp. 21–22.

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torum esse non poterit. una enim res si communis est, aut
(15) partibus communis est et non iam tota communis, sed partes
eius propriae singulorum, aut
(16) in usus habentium etiam per tempora transit, ut sit commune
aut seruus communis uel equus, aut
(17) uno tempore omnibus commune fit, non tamen ut eorum
quibus commune est, substantiam constituat, et est theatrum uel
spectaculum aliquod, quod spectantibus omnibus commune est.
(18) genus uero secundum nullum horum modum commune esse
speciebus potest; nam (p. 163) ita commune esse debet, ut et to-
tum sit in singulis et uno tempore et eorum quorum commune est,
constituere ualeat et formare substantiam.

Section E
(19) quocirca si neque unum est, quoniam commune est, neque
multa, quoniam eius quoque multitudinis genus aliud inquiren-
dum est, uidetur genus omnino non esse, idemque de ceteris in-
tellegendum est.
Appendix 2: Porphyry’s Text

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<tr>
<th>Porphyry’s Greek</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>/\ ^17 'Ε. Τὸ κοινὸν πῶς εἶληται; πρῶτον δὲ εἰσὶ, ποσσαχῶς λέγεται τὸ / κοινὸν; /</td>
<td>[Question:] How is ‘common’ taken [in Aristotle’s definition]? But first, tell [me] in how many ways ‘common’ is said.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ἄ. Λέγω ὅτι πολλαχῶς κοινὸν γὰρ λέγεται καὶ τὸ εἰς μέρη διαρετόν /\  ὡς ἄρτος καὶ οἶνος, εἰ εἰς ἑαυτὸν διαιροῦντων, καὶ τὰ χρήματα κοινὰ τῷ / εἷς μέρη εἰναι διαιρετὰ τῶν ὄντων. λέγεται δὲ κοινὸν καὶ τὸ εἰς μέρῃ / μὲν οὐ διαιρετόν, εἰς δὲ τὴν χρήσιν ὑπὸ πολλῶν παραλαμβανόμενον ὡς / ἔπος καὶ οἰκεῖς κοινὸς πλείοσιν ἄδελφοῖς. λέγεται κοινὸν καὶ τὸ ἐν προ- / καταλήψει τινὸς γινόμενον καὶ μετὰ τὴν χρήσιν ἀναπεμπόμενον εἰς τὸ κοινόν /\  γόν, ὁδὸν δὴ τί ἔστι τὸ βιαλανεῖν καὶ τὸ θεατρὸν. λέγεται πάλιν ἄλλος / κοινὸν τὸ ὁδὸν ἀμα εἰς χρήσιν ἔρχόμενον πολλῶν ἀδιαιρέτως;</td>
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35 are divided: The Greek has the active participle here, although the passive seems to be required. “If it is one of [the things that] are divided”: The purpose of this clause seems to be to contrast wine, and perhaps bread earlier in the sentence, which are often divided up in this way, with items under sense (2), which cannot be divided up part by part without destroying them. To cut up a loaf of bread or divide a flask of wine among all partakers is just good hospitality; to cut up a horse or a slave spoils their usefulness.

36 according ... participants: Following Busse’s conjecture (καθ ἐκαστόν τῶν μετεχόντων for τῶν ὄντων) at p. 62.21. The Greek has ‘of the beings’, which seems senseless here.

37 received: The Greek παραλαμβανόμενον means “received from another,” and is used in cases of inheritance (among other usages). It is this receiving from another individual, rather than from the common or public store, that distinguishes senses (2) and (3).
such a thing. Again in another sense, (4) that is called “common” which, as a whole, comes undivided into the use of many simultaneously. For in this way, through the voice of the crier, the use [of the theater] is common to those in it, although the voice is not divided up in the least among each of those present.  

[Question:] So in which sense is ‘common’ taken [in Aristotle’s definition]? 

[Answer:] I say [it is] according to the last [sense], according to which there comes to be a use common to many simultaneously, although the same whole remains undivided. For the word ‘Ajax’ is used both for the son of Oïleus and for [the son] of Telamon,  

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38 The word ‘theater’ means not only a place where drama was performed, but also an “assembly”, where a “crier” made proclamations and kept order.  
39 These are called, respectively, Ajax the Less and Ajax the Greater. They are characters from the Iliad.
[48e] This new beginning of our discussion of the universe requires a fuller division than the former; for then we made two classes, now a third must be revealed. The two sufficed for the former discussion: one, which we assumed, was a pattern intelligible and always the same; and the second was only the imitation of the pattern, generated and visible. [49a] There is also a third kind which we did not distinguish at the time, conceiving that the two would be enough. But now the argument seems to require that we should set forth in words another kind, which is difficult of explanation and dimly seen. What nature are we to attribute to this new kind of being? We reply, that it is the receptacle, and in a manner the nurse, of all generation. I have spoken the truth; but I must express myself in clearer language, and this will be an arduous task for many reasons, and in particular because I must first raise questions concerning fire and the other elements, and determine what each of them is; [49b] for to say, with any probability or certitude, which of them should be called water rather than fire, and which should be called any of them rather than all or some one of them, is a difficult matter. How, then, shall we settle this point, and what questions about the elements may be fairly raised?

In the first place, we see that what we just now called water, by condensation, I suppose, becomes stone and earth; [49c] and this same element, when melted and dispersed, passes into vapour and air. Air, again, when inflamed, becomes fire; and again fire, when condensed and extinguished, passes once more into the form of air; and once more, air, when collected and condensed, produces cloud and mist; and from these, when still more compressed, comes flowing water, and from water comes earth and stones once more; and thus generation appears to be transmitted from one to the other in a circle. [49d] Thus, then, as the several elements never present themselves in the same form, how can any one have the assurance to assert positively that any of them, whatever it may be, is one thing rather than another? No one can. But much the safest plan is to speak of them as follows:—Anything which we see to be continually changing, as, for example, fire, we must not call ‘this’ or ‘that,’ but rather say that it is ‘of such a nature’; nor let us speak of water as ‘this’; but always as ‘such’; nor must we imply that there is any stability in any of those things [49e] which we indicate by the use of the words ‘this’ and ‘that,’ supposing ourselves to signify something thereby; for they are too volatile to be detained in any such expressions as ‘this,’ or ‘that,’ or ‘relative to this,’ or any other mode of speaking which represents them as permanent. We ought not to apply ‘this’ to any of them, but rather the word ‘such’; which expresses the similar principle circulating in each and all of them; for example, that should be called ‘fire’ which is of such a nature always, and so of everything that has generation. That in which the elements severally grow up, and appear, and decay, [50a] is alone to be called by the name ‘this’ or ‘that’; but that which is of a certain nature, hot or white, or anything which admits of op-
posite qualities, and all things that are compounded of them, ought not to be so denominated. Let me make another attempt to explain my meaning more clearly. Suppose a person to make all kinds of figures of gold and to be always transmuting one form into all the rest;—somebody points to one of them and asks what it is. [50b] By far the safest and truest answer is, That is gold; and not to call the triangle or any other figures which are formed in the gold ‘the-se,’ as though they had existence, since they are in process of change while he is making the assertion; but if the questioner be willing to take the safe and indefinite expression, ‘such,’ we should be satisfied. And the same argument applies to the universal nature which receives all bodies—that must be always called the same; for, while receiving all things, she never departs at all from her own nature, [50c] and never in any way, or at any time, assumes a form like that of any of the things which enter into her; she is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her are the likenesses of real existences modelled after their patterns in a wonderful and inexplicable manner, which we will hereafter investigate. For the present we have only to conceive of three natures: [50d] first, that which is in process of generation; secondly, that in which the generation takes place; and thirdly, that of which the thing generated is a resemblance. And we may liken the receiving principle to a mother, and the source or spring to a father, and the intermediate nature to a child; and may remark further, that if the model is to take every variety of form, then the matter in which the model is fashioned will not be duly prepared, unless it is formless, and free from the impress of any of those shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without. [50e] For if the matter were like any of the supervening forms, then whenever any opposite or entirely different nature was stamped upon its surface, it would take the impression badly, because it would intrude its own shape. Wherefore, that which is to receive all forms should have no form; as in making perfumes they first contrive that the liquid substance which is to receive the scent shall be as inodorous as possible; or as those who wish to impress figures on soft substances do not allow any previous impression to remain, but begin by making the surface as even and smooth as possible. [51a] In the same way that which is to receive perpetually and through its whole extent the resemblances of all eternal beings ought to be devoid of any particular form. Wherefore, the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any way sensible things, is not to be termed earth, or air, or fire, or water, or any of their compounds or any of the elements from which these are derived, [51b] but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible. In saying this we shall not be far wrong; as far, however, as we can attain to a knowledge of her from the previous considerations, we may truly say that fire is that part of her nature which from time to time is inflamed, and water that which is moistened, and that the mother substance becomes earth and air, in so far as she receives the impressions of them.
Let us consider this question more precisely. Is there any self-existent fire? and do all those things which we call self-existent exist? or are only those things which we see, or in some way perceive through the bodily organs, truly existing, and nothing whatever besides them? And is all that which we call an intelligible essence nothing at all, and only a name? Here is a question which we must not leave unexamined or undetermined, nor must we affirm too confidently that there can be no decision; neither must we interpolate in our present long discourse a digression equally long, but if it is possible to set forth a great principle in a few words, that is just what we want.

Thus I state my view:—If mind and true opinion are two distinct classes, then I say that there certainly are these self-existent ideas unperceived by sense, and apprehended only by the mind; if, however, as some say, true opinion differs in no respect from mind, then everything that we perceive through the body is to be regarded as most real and certain. But we must affirm them to be distinct, for they have a distinct origin and are of a different nature; the one is implanted in us by instruction, the other by persuasion; the one is always accompanied by true reason, the other is without reason; the one cannot be overcome by persuasion, but the other can: and lastly, every man may be said to share in true opinion, but mind is the attribute of the gods and of very few men. Wherefore also we must acknowledge that there is one kind of being which is always the same, uncreated and indestructible, never receiving anything into itself from without, nor itself going out to any other, but invisible and imperceptible by any sense, and of which the contemplation is granted to intelligence only. And there is another nature of the same name with it, and like to it, perceived by sense, created, always in motion, becoming in place and again vanishing out of place, which is apprehended by opinion and sense. And there is a third nature, which is space, and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended without the help of sense, by a kind of spurious reason, and is hardly real; which we beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that it must of necessity be in some place and occupy a space, but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence. Of these and other things of the same kind, relating to the true and waking reality of nature, we have only this dreamlike sense, and we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth about them. For an image, since the reality, after which it is modelled, does not belong to it, and it exists ever as the fleeting shadow of some other, must be inferred to be in another (i.e. in space), grasping existence in some way or other, or it could not be at all. But true and exact reason, vindicating the nature of true being, maintains that while two things (i.e. the image and space) are different they cannot exist one of them in the other and so be one and also two at the same time.

Thus have I concisely given the result of my thoughts; and my verdict is that being and space and generation, these three, existed in their three ways before the heaven; and that the nurse of generation, moistened by water and inflamed by fire, and receiving the forms of earth and air, and experiencing all the affections which accompany these, presented a strange
variety of appearances; and being full of powers which were neither similar nor equally balanced, was never in any part in a state of equipoise, but swaying unevenly hither and thither, was shaken by them, and by its motion again shook them; and the elements when moved were separated and carried continually, some one way, some another; as, when grain is shaken and winnowed by fans and other instruments used in the threshing of corn, the close and heavy particles are borne away and settle in one direction, [53a] and the loose and light particles in another. In this manner, the four kinds or elements were then shaken by the receiving vessel, which, moving like a winnowing machine, scattered far away from one another the elements most unlike, and forced the most similar elements into close contact. Wherefore also the various elements had different places before they were arranged so as to form the universe. At first, they were all without reason and measure. [53b] But when the world began to get into order, fire and water and earth and air had only certain faint traces of themselves, and were altogether such as everything might be expected to be in the absence of God; this, I say, was their nature at that time, and God fashioned them by form and number. Let it be consistently maintained by us in all that we say that God made them as far as possible the fairest and best, out of things which were not fair and good. And now I will endeavour to show you the disposition and generation of them by an unaccustomed argument, which I am compelled to use; [53c] but I believe that you will be able to follow me, for your education has made you familiar with the methods of science.
I. “Essential” and “accidental” properties: A modern version.

Let me begin then by introducing you to a distinction between what I will call a broadly “Platonic”-style and a broadly “Aristotelian”-style metaphysics. The guiding thread will be the notion of the essential and non-essential (accidental) features of a thing. Perhaps you will find what I am here calling an “Aristotelian” view unfamiliar and even foreign, because there is a kind of metaphysical “common denominator” in some philosophical circles today, left-over perhaps from the days of “analytic” philosophical insularity, but in any case quite unlike what I am here calling an “Aristotelian” metaphysics. Instead it is much closer to what I regard as a Platonic approach.

In analytic philosophy, there is a view called “Aristotelian essentialism” — by both its supporters and its opponents — that in fact has nothing to do with Aristotle. It may be found, for example, in the following passage from Quine’s Word and Object:

Perhaps I can evoke the appropriate sense of bewilderment as follows. Mathematicians may conceivably be said to be necessarily rational and not necessarily two-legged; and cyclists necessarily two-legged and not necessarily rational. But what of an individual who counts among his eccentricities both mathematics and cycling? Is this concrete individual necessarily rational and contingently two-legged or vice versa? Just insofar as we are talking referentially of the object, with no special bias toward a background grouping of mathematicians as against cyclists of vice versa, there is no semblance of sense in rating some of his attributes as necessary and others as contingent. Some of his attributes count as important and others as unimportant, yes; some as enduring and others as fleeting; but none as necessary or contingent.

Curiously, a philosophical tradition does exist for just such a distinction between necessary and contingent attributes. It lives on in the terms ‘essence’ and ‘accident’, ‘internal relation’ and ‘external relation’. It is a distinction that one attributers to Aristotle (subject to contradiction by scholars, such being the penalty for at-
tributions to Aristotle\(^1\). But, however venerable the distinction, it is surely indefensible.\(^2\)

You can also find “Aristotelian essentialism” in this sense discussed in Quine’s “Reference and Modality,”\(^3\) and in lots of other places.

In the passage just quoted, there are two parts. First Quine identifies a certain theory as “Aristotelian essentialism,” and then he goes on to reject it. His reasons for rejecting it do not concern me here. I’m interested for now only in what the doctrine is.

According to this doctrine,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{essential property} & = \text{necessary property} \\
\text{accidental property} & = \text{contingent property}
\end{align*}
\]

So, in this context, essential = necessary, whereas accidental = contingent. The kind of “necessity” involved here is a hypothetical necessity. That is, an “essential property” of a thing is one such that if the thing exists at all, it has to have that property. Likewise, a “contingent” property of a thing is one such that if the thing exists, it may or may not have that property.

The idea that this view is really Aristotle’s can be dismissed right away once we recall the authentically Aristotelian notion of a “necessary accident,” found for instance in *Metaphysics* v.30. It is easy to see, therefore, that Quine’s quick identification of the accidental with the contingent is not an altogether Aristotlean notion, so that it’s not surprising that he finds “scholars” contradicting him.

II. The “Platonic” approach.

In fact, Quine’s view is much more what I regard as a Platonic view of things. On such a view, here is what you have: First of all, you have an object, which has certain properties that are somehow attached to it. The nature of that connection will vary, depending on the particular theory. You can call it “exemplification,” “participation,” or whatever you want.

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1 Anyone who says silly things like that about Aristotle deserves whatever penalty he is made to pay!
The important point is that some of these properties are, so to speak, “permanently” attached to the object; they are the so called essential properties. Others can be removed from the object without destroying it; they are the accidental properties. The distinction between these two kinds of properties is, of course, the feature of the doctrine Quine finds arbitrary, and therefore unjustified.

Now it may very well be arbitrary and unjustified. But it’s plainly not incoherent. In fact, it’s fairly easy to picture how this goes:

The object is a little like a “pin cushion.” The properties are so to speak the “pins” in the pin-cushion.4

The accidents are so to speak the “straight” pins. They can be inserted or removed from the pin cushion without damaging anything.

The essential properties are like “fish hooks.” You can’t take them out without ripping the whole thing open and destroying the pin cushion.5

So much for the distinction between essential and accidental properties of a thing on this “Quinean/Platonic” approach. The properties are simply the pins in the pin cushion, attached in various ways to the cushion.

The other side of the picture is of course the object: the pin cushion itself.

Now watch closely. By itself, all on its own, the object has no properties. The properties are all “attached” from outside. By itself, the object then is a kind of “bare particular.” It has no internal structure, no features of its own whatsoever.

Note: The terminology can be rather fluid here. You may want to call the whole complex the “object” — the pin cushion (or “core”) plus the pins or properties. Or maybe you will want to reserve the word ‘object’ for the core plus the permanent or essential properties. The terminology in the end doesn’t matter; the point is that, however you want to distribute your terminology, the picture is the same.

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4 This is your introduction to “Spade’s famous pin-cushion model,” which I use a lot in the classroom.
5 You may find that last part overly dramatic, but never mind. You get the point.
This picture is one that is represented very nicely in first-order logic — so it is probably no coincidence that Quine approached metaphysics in this way, since he was very much taken with “the logical point of view.” On this view, the relation between the pins and the pin cushion, between properties and objects, is represented quite nicely in predication: Predicates are to their subjects as properties are to their objects.

If you know Quine’s work (and if you don’t you should), you will be aware that he argues that we don’t really need proper names in our language, and that in fact in some cases it may be philosophically confusing and misleading to have them there. The proper name ‘Aristotle’, for instance, can be struck out of our language and replaced by the predicate ‘aristotelizes’ (or something like that). If we do that, then whenever we want to say something about Aristotle, we now speak about “every x such that x aristotelizes.” Obviously, we can do this with any proper name at all, so that proper names can be systematically eliminated from our language and replaced by predicates. Since we’re no doubt going to need predicates anyway, we can therefore economize on the number of syntactical types we have in our vocabulary if we systematically adopt a policy of such replacement.6

What we do need, however, even if we do eliminate proper names, is individual variables — like the ‘x’ in ‘every x such that x aristotelizes’.

In logic, individual variables are about as “featureless” as you can get. They are, so to speak, the linguistic counterparts to bare particulars. An individual variable is the logical analogue of the metaphysical “pin cushion” that has no properties at all by itself — all properties are pins in the cushion, attached from outside.

So the fact is, then, that first-order logic fits very nicely with this basically “Platonic” picture of metaphysics. That is no doubt why this picture has been such an “orthodox” one in analytically-minded philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century.

II.1. Problems with the “Platonic” approach.

Of course, there are obvious problems with the picture. How are these bare particulars, these featureless “pin cushions,” differentiated from one another?7 As far as their built in features go (namely, there aren’t any), one bare particular is

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6 Obviously, this will make things more cumbersome and inefficient. But the point here is not to recommend such a reworking of language for practical use. Rather, the point is to uncover the theoretical presuppositions of what we say.

7 This is not the epistemological question how we can tell them apart, but rather the metaphysical question what distinguishes them.
exactly like another. Hence, if you push this line of thinking very hard, you might begin to worry about the principle of “Identity of Indiscernibles.”

So you see there is some pressure on this basically Platonic way of looking at things toward the view that there is really only one underlying object, one “pin cushion.” The pressure comes from the Identity of Indiscernibles.

On the other hand, there is also a contrary pressure, this time arising from the Law of Non-Contradiction — which, insofar as it is supposed to be a law about what properties can be possessed by the same thing at the same time, is also a law involving “identity.”

The pressure in this cases arises because, if there is really only one substrate underlying all properties, then that substrate, that “pin cushion,” will have contrary properties at the same time, since contrary properties plainly do exist in the world around us. Socrates is a rational human being, but Fido is an irrational dog. Since all properties, on this view, inhere in the same one substrate, it appears that the contrary properties humanity and caninity, rationality and irrationality, inhere in that same one substrate at the same time. How can that be?

So this “Platonic” approach is pushed in two opposite directions at once by considerations having to do with the identity of the pin cushion or underlying object. The Identity of Indiscernibles would lead us to say there is only one such object. On the other hand, the Law of Non-Contradiction would lead us to say there are several “bare particulars” that play this role. Neither alternative solves the problem once and for all. Each one just moves the problem to the other side.

II.2. The Timaeus.

Why have I been calling this picture “Platonic”? Well, consider Timaeus 48e–53c.9 (More or less the same view can perhaps be seen in the Seventh Letter 342a–343c, although it is not very clear or explicit there.)
The *Timaeus* is Plato’s account of the origin of the cosmos. The passage 48e–53c contains a discussion of what he calls the “Receptacle” (= ὑποδοχή, *hypodochē*) or “receptive.”

Now we all know that for Plato, things in the sensible world are but pale imitations of the “Forms” or “Ideas.” So we have two poles: (1) the Forms, and (2) imitations of Forms. We also know that, as early as the *Parmenides*, the exact nature of the relation between Forms and their imitations bothered Plato. The theory of the Receptacle or “receptive” in the *Timaeus* is an attempt to work this out.

The Receptacle is, according to the analogy developed there, like sealing wax, the sort of thing people used to use to seal envelopes. Often a *signet ring* or other form of seal bearing an identifying design was impressed onto the wax, leaving its outline there. This served as a form of authentication. If the impression in the wax had been tampered with, it would be pretty easy to see, and in that the case the recipient of the letter would know that the envelope had been opened in transit, and the contents probably altered.

That’s the guiding metaphor here. The Receptacle is like sealing wax. The Forms, on the other hand, are like the seal ring itself. Just as a seal ring leaves a number of distinct impressions in different blobs of sealing wax, so too a Form leaves a number of distinct “impressions” in the Receptacle. The word translated ‘impression’ here is ἔκμαγείον (= *ekmageion*), and is in fact the Greek word commonly used for impressions of a seal. With that background, consider now *Timaeus* 50c–d:

Now the same account, in fact, holds also for that nature which receives all the bodies [= the Receptacle]. We must always refer to it by the same term, for it does not depart from its own character in any way. Not only does it always receive all things, it has never in any way whatever taken on any characteristic similar to any of the things that enter it. Its nature is to be available for anything to make its impression upon, and it is modified, shaped and reshaped by the things that enter it. These are the things that make it appear different at different times. The things that enter and leave it are imitations of those things that always are [= the Forms], imprinted after their likeness in a marvelous way that is hard to describe.

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10 Here we see for the first time the crucially important “seal ring metaphor.” It is used here by Plato in a cosmological context. It will be used by Aristotle in an epistemological context. (To this day, we still speak of being “under the impression that …”) And it will be used throughout the Middle Ages in a variety of philosophical contexts. Plato does not actually talk about sealing wax and rings here, but later authors sometimes do, and Plato’s vocabulary indicates that this was the root metaphor.
This is something we shall pursue at another time. For the moment, we need to keep in mind three types of things: that which comes to be [= the impression in the Receptacle], that in which it comes to be [= the Receptacle itself], and that after which the thing coming to be is modeled, and which is the source of its coming to be [= the Form]. It is in fact appropriate to compare the receiving thing [= the Receptacle] to a mother, the source [= the Form] to a father, and the nature between them [= the impression] to their offspring. We also must understand that if the imprints are to be varied, with all the varieties there to see, this thing upon which the imprints are to be formed [= the Receptacle] could not be well prepared for that role if it were not itself devoid of any of those characters that it is to receive from elsewhere. For if it resembled any of the things that enter it, it could not successfully copy their opposites or things of a totally different nature whenever it were to receive them. It would be showing its own face as well. This is why the thing [= the Receptacle] that is to receive in itself all the elemental kinds must be totally devoid of any characteristics.11

Apart from the metaphor, note the argument in the last part of the passage. In order to do its job properly, sealing wax has to be pretty shapeless stuff all by itself. If it had a built in shape or outline all its own, that would get in the way of its taking on any other shape or outline from a seal ring. It would always “be showing its own face as well.” Hence — note the last sentence of the quotation — the one underlying substrate of all impressions (in terms of the picture in Figure 1 above, the one underlying object that bears all properties) is by itself completely featureless.

Given this situation, it is perhaps not hard to see why the historical Plato identified his underlying substrate — the so called “Receptacle” — with space.12

Space, after all, is pretty odd stuff. It is in a sense one thing, and yet it is made up of distinct parts — regions — that are effectively indistinguishable from one another, insofar as we are talking about empty space. Plato’s suggestion, then, was not a bad try.

Let’s look a little more at the Timaeus. At 49d–50b, we find an extremely obscure passage:


12 Timaeus 52b.
… Rather, the safest course by far is to propose that we speak about these things [= the “impressions”] in the following way: what we invariably observe becoming different at different times — fire for example — to characterize that, i.e., fire, not as “this,” but each time as “what is such,” and speak of water not as “this,” but always as “what is such.” And never to speak of anything else as “this,” as though it had some stability, of all the things at which we point and use the expression “that” and “this” and so think we are designating something. … Rather, “what is such” — coming around like what it was, again and again — that’s the thing to call it in each and every case. So fire — and generally everything that has becoming — it is safest to call “what is altogether such.” But that in which they appear to keep coming into being and from which they subsequently pass out of being [= the Receptacle], that’s the only thing to refer to by means of the expressions “that” and “this.” A thing that is some “such” or other, however, — hot or white, say, or any one of the opposites, and all things constituted by these — should be called none of these things [i.e., “this” or “that”].

Translations of this passage differ widely, because the Greek is far from clear. But I think we can make some headway in understanding the passage as follows. Consider:

(1) The Platonic Form of “fire” (to use one of Plato’s own examples.
(2) The Receptacle.
(3) The product of the two, this-worldly imitations of the Platonic Form of “fire” — i.e., ordinary, familiar, mundane fire.

Now, the passage asks, should we talk about (3), ordinary, mundane fire as “this” or as “what is such”? Plato’s answer is that we should call it “what is such” (line 5). That is, I suggest, strictly speaking we should reserve the word ‘fire’ for (1) — the Form. What we commonly call “fire” should instead be called “fiery,” or something like that.

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13 Zeyl translation again. This time the last insertion in square brackets is the translator’s; the others are mine.
14 I’m extrapolating, to be sure. Plato doesn’t actually say anything here about how we should use the term ‘fire’. But note that his examples of “such”-words (line 15) are ‘hot’ and ‘white’ — adjectives and not nouns. In short, I am taking the expression ‘what is such’ as a kind of variable expression, to be replaced by adjectival expressions like ‘fiery’ or ‘watery’.
Why? Because what we commonly call “fire,” the familiar sort, is simply not stable enough to be called “this” (lines 6–8). Things in the sensible world around us are constantly changing into other things, after all, so that (3), the product of (1) and (2), is simply too “iffy” to be called “this.” Whatever you may think of that consideration, let’s just grant it for the moment and go on.

Is there anything, then, stable enough and having the permanence Plato thinks is suggested by the word ‘this’? Well yes, the Receptacle. At lines 14–15, he explicitly says the Receptacle can rightly be called “this.”

So what happens when we try to describe (3), ordinary, this-worldly “fire”? We have to say something like “This is fiery.” But notice: Despite what we might think at first, the ‘this’ here does not indicate (3) itself, which is what we thought we were talking about. We’ve just seen Plato say that (3), ordinary, mundane “fire” is not “this.” Instead, the ‘this’ indicates the Receptacle!

When we say ‘This is fiery’, therefore, the predicate ‘fiery’ describes what kind of impression is pressed into the Receptacle (the sealing wax in the seal ring model) — the impression produced by the Platonic Form of fire (the seal ring).

Well, that’s all very obscure, to be sure, and the details are not terribly important for us. But do look over the passage in the quotation, and my remarks on it, because I think we can see something happening. Watch closely.


Later on in the Platonic tradition, talk about the Receptacle came to be interpreted as talk about matter. With that in mind, I think we can see in this passage the roots of a traditional mediaeval theory: the theory that in discourse about the world around us, the distinction between subject and predicate matches the distinction between matter and form. Hence, we have the origins of the doctrine of matter as the subject of predication.

This perhaps explains why Plato goes on to say that the Receptacle is “perplexing” and “extremely difficult to comprehend” (51b), that it can be “apprehended” only by a kind of “bastard reasoning” (52b). There is something after all ineffable about matter (the Receptacle) all by itself. Anything you might want to say about it would involve a Form or an impression in matter — something besides the matter all by itself. Hence when we try to talk about the Receptacle, or

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15 One might also think the Platonic Form of fire would surely have the required permanence. But Plato says the Receptacle is the only thing that can be called “this” (lines 14–15).
16 More about this in a moment.
17 Or matter and impression in the matter, depending on how one wants to develop the theory. Note that while this was a “traditional mediaeval theory,” it was by no means universally accepted. We’ll see a competing theory later on.
empty space, or pure matter, all by itself, we get one of those awkward situations where we’re trying to say what cannot be said.

Now, what about the identification of the Receptacle with matter? Well Plato, as we know, didn’t make that identification (and in fact he identified it with space instead), but Chalcidius did, not in his translation of the *Timaeus* but in his commentary on it.\(^{18}\)

Chalcidius’s term for matter is ‘*silva*’, which literally means “wood,” and is an excruciatingly literal translation of the Greek ὕλη (= hyle, pronounced “hoo-lay”), which also strictly means “wood” but, curiously, in philosophical usage came to mean matter.\(^{19}\) This use of ‘*silva*’ to mean “matter” in Latin philosophical texts is almost always evidence of the influence — and the fairly immediate influence — of Chalcidius.\(^{20}\)

Chalcidius also has a term for the impressions left by the seal ring. He calls them “native forms” (*formae nativae*) — i.e., inborn forms. This expression will also be used later in the Middle Ages, for example by certain figures in the so-called School of Chartres in the twelfth century. Sometimes the expression ‘impressed form’ was also used for the same notion.

**II.3.i. Boethius.**

Boethius, *De trinitate*, § 2, has what is in effect the same doctrine. Here’s what he says\(^{21}\):

\(^{18}\) On Chalcidius, see n. 9 above.

\(^{19}\) This was the word Aristotle used. Note that this may be simply a result of starting with a different metaphor. Instead of viewing physical objects as the result of stamping impressions into something like sealing wax, and therefore as a case of *adding* something to matter, think of them as the result of “whittling away” (and therefore “subtracting”) from something like a block of wood. While we’re talking about words for matter, it’s probably worth noting that the English word comes from Latin *materia* = “matter,” which is etymologically related to Latin *mater* = “mother” (they are derived from the same Indo-European root). And while Plato does not call his Receptacle by the same name Aristotle used for matter, he does explicitly compare it to a mother. (See the passage quoted above from *Timaeus* 50\(c–d\).)


For every being is from form. For a “statue” is not so called because of the bronze that is its matter, but because of the form by which the likeness of an animal is impressed on the bronze. [And] the “bronze” itself is so called not because of earth, which is its matter, but because of the configuration of bronze. “Earth” itself is also so called not because of the dryness and heanness, which are forms. Thus nothing is said to be because of matter, but because of its proper form.

But the divine substance is a form without matter, and therefore one...

... Neither can it be a subject. For it is a form, and forms cannot be subjects. When another form, like humanity, is a subject for accidents, it does not take on accidents insofar as it is, but insofar as matter is subjected to it. For, as long as matter, subject to humanity, takes on any accident, humanity itself appears to take it on. But a form that is without matter cannot be a subject, and cannot be in matter. For it would not be a form but an “image.” From the forms that are outside matter come the forms that are in matter and make a body. We misuse the others, which are in bodies, when we call them “forms” while they are images. For they are made like those that are not constituted in matter.

At the end of this passages (lines 15–20), Boethius distinguishes what he calls “forms” from what he calls “images.” Images are imitations of the Platonic Forms, in effect the impressions of the signet ring in the sealing wax, what Chalcidius called “native forms.” Boethius reserves the term ‘form’ for the Platonic Forms. But of course Boethius is a Christian, and so does not believe in the Platonic Forms in exactly Plato’s original sense. (Platonic Forms are changeless and uncreated. This conflicts with the Christian doctrine of creation, according to which everything besides God is produced — created — by God.) He therefore “fixes” the theory a bit. For Boethius, God alone is a pure “form.” But God has thoughts, and these thoughts are the paradigms or patterns according to which God fashioned the world. They play the role of Platonic Forms. In short, for

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22 ἔστι ὡς ἔλθην = “unqualified matter.”

Boethius the Platonic Forms have been moved into the mind of God, where they become “divine ideas.”

This doctrine of “divine ideas” was by no means a novel view. It was already present in St. Augustine, in Plotinus, and in Philo of Alexandria (= Philo the Jew), who lived c. 20 BCE–40 CE. Indeed, it was the “standard” view throughout the entire Middle Ages. Incidentally, the term ‘idea’ in the Middle Ages always means a divine idea; it never means just any old concept in my mind or yours. That is a later usage.

If God (together with his ideas) is the only pure “form,” then — following out the seal ring analogy — everything besides God must be either (a) matter, or else (b) the product of matter together with one of the “native forms” or impressions that Boethius calls “images.” In short: Everything besides God has matter.

This doctrine is accordingly called universal hylomorphism (= universal “matter/form-ism”). The term ‘universal’ in this phrase has nothing directly to do with the “problem of universals,” but simply means “applicable in all cases (except God, of course, who is special).”

Also, at the end of our passage (lines 11–15), Boethius remarks that “forms” (= divine ideas) are not the substrates (“subjects”) for accidents. Rather, matter is the real substrate for accidents.

For example, if a person is tall, it is not the Platonic form humanity that takes on the accident of being tall. It is not even, strictly speaking, the “image” that takes it on. Rather, Boethius says, it is the matter that does this. Here again, then, we have something like the picture we arrived at in our discussion of the Timaeus: Matter is the subject of predication.

Note another important consequence of this view: There are no second-order properties. Properties do not in turn have properties of their own. Impressions are not the substrates of further impressions. The pins in the pin cushion do not have yet other pins sticking in them. No, matter (= the Receptacle, the sealing wax, space) is what receives all the pins.

For any creature, therefore, what we have is, as it were, a lump of sealing wax on which several rings have left their impressions at once. If you really insist, you can in a sense say it is the earlier impressions that take on later ones. So talk about “second order properties” is not entirely senseless. But it’s also easy to see that what is really going is that it is matter that underlies them all.

The complete creature, then, is of a kind of “laminated” structure, consisting of matter on which a whole series of forms have been impressed. This doctrine has a name too. It is called the Plurality of Forms.

\[24\] This of course does not mean that everyone accepted it. William of Ockham, for instance, did not. For more on the theory of divine ideas, see my Survey, Vol. 1, Chap. 19.
II.4. The binarium famosissimum.

The doctrine of plurality of forms is a correlative of universal hylomorphism. Historically, the two theories are almost always found together. So true is this that the two are now sometimes called the binarium famosissimum (= the “most famous pair”).

Although both doctrines were more or less in circulation in the early Middle Ages (we have just seen them in Boethius), they became more systematic and explicit later on. They are particularly prominent, for instance, in Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c. 1022–c. 1051 or 1070). Ibn Gabirol was a Jewish philosopher who wrote an important book translated into Latin under the title Fons vitae (= Fountain of Life) by the translating team of Dominic Gundissalinus (= Gonzales) and John of Spain in twelfth century Spain. Because he wrote in Arabic, he was often taken to be a Muslim, although some people thought he was a Christian. Mediaeval Latins also weren’t too sure about his name, which got transliterated into Latin (really just “approximated”) as: Avencibron, Avencibrol, or other variants. In short, they weren’t very sure just who this man was.

In the thirteenth century, the binarium was maintained by St. Bonaventure (1221–1274), the famous and profound general of the Franciscan order. Largely through him, the doctrine came to be associated with the Franciscan/Augustinian tradition in general.

Let’s elaborate the binarium a bit more, and go over the reasoning one more time.

If you take the point of view that matter is the subject of predication, then anything you can talk about, anything you can predicate something of, is going to have matter, and so be a “composite” of matter and form (in Boethian terms, matter plus an “image” — I’m no longer talking about Platonic forms).

This composite structure, this possessing of matter, therefore, was regarded as a mark of a creature. It was what (among other things) distinguished all creatures from God, who alone is absolutely simple and incomposite. Even angels, on this theory, had a kind of matter — called “spiritual matter.” The expres-

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25 I used to think this was a mediaeval label for this pair of doctrines. But Professor Christopher J. Martin, of the University of Auckland, has convinced me this isn’t so. Although the expression was indeed used in the Middle Ages, it was apparently not used for this particular pair of doctrines at all, but for something altogether different. In fact, it’s use as a name for this pair of metaphysical theories is a relatively recent development. I was by no means the first to use it in this new way, but I fear I am at least partly to blame for popularizing the usage (if “popularize” is the right word). In any case, the expression is too useful to give up, and so I will continue to use it in its new sense, to mean the regular pairing of the theories of universal hylomorphism and plurality of forms.
sion ‘spiritual matter’ may at first sound like an oxymoron, but it isn’t. On this view, matter comes in two varieties: corporeal matter and spiritual matter. Corporeal matter is the familiar kind. To be sure, angels don’t have anything like that. But even they have a “spiritual” matter that is what makes them composite and provides a subject of predication. Only God has no matter at all. This is what Boethius is talking about when he says (lines 11–12) that “form” without matter cannot be a substrate. He’s talking about God.

It is also why, on this basically “Platonic” approach, God is so hard to talk about, why we have to resort to metaphor and circumlocution at best. It is because God has no matter, so that there is no subject of predication there. There is no subject of predication, not in the sense that God doesn’t exist so that there’s nothing to talk about, but in the sense that we can’t predicate anything of him. He just doesn’t fit into subject position!

Recall that Plato himself had something similar about the Receptacle. It was “perplexing” and “extremely difficult to comprehend” (*Timaeus* 51b), and can be “apprehended” only by a kind of “bastard reasoning” (52b). But that was for the opposite reason. In the case of God, there are lots of things we might want to say about him, but there is no subject matter we can predicate them of. In the case of matter (or the Receptacle), there is a subject of predication, all right, but there just aren’t any predicates we can predicate of it.26

This then is how we get the doctrine of universal hylomorphism out of the basically “Platonic” picture of matter as the subject of predication. The other half of the *binarium*, the plurality of forms, is just the correlate of this. If matter is the subject of predication, forms (= Boethian “images”) are the predicates of predication. And just as you can say many things about any given object, so too it has many forms.

Some of those forms are going to be “included” in others, in an appropriate sense. For example, you can say of Socrates that he is a human being, and so has the form *humanity*. But you can also predicate of him the more general predicate ‘animal’, and so he has the more general form *animality*. And so on. Ultimately, you come to the form *corporeity* — the form that makes Socrates a physical body — as the last form before you get to bare matter.27

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26 Be careful, In a sense, any predicate can be predicated of matter. That’s the only thing they can be predicated of on this theory. What we are talking about now is matter just by itself. There is nothing we can say to describe matter considered apart from the impressed forms or images, the pin cushion considered all by itself apart from the pins in it. There’s a long story to be told here, but I’m not going to do it now.

27 As a good rule of thumb, whenever you see an author talking about the “form of corporeity,” you can be pretty sure you are dealing with the doctrine of plurality of forms and are in a basically Platonic framework.
So you get, once again, a kind of laminated picture, of so to speak “concentric” forms. And this is the picture people generally have in mind when they talk about the “plurality of forms.” That is, it’s not just the view that things can have more than one form at once. Lots of people who wanted nothing to do with the binarium would nevertheless cheerfully say that much. Rather, the expression ‘plurality of forms’ usually refers to special picture of laminated or “concentric” forms.

III. The “Aristotelian” approach.

Now, after wading through all that, I hope you won’t be discouraged to learn that the Aristotelian tradition rejects this entire picture. We have to start over.

Consider, for example, Thomas Aquinas. In his question On Spiritual Creatures, he asks in Article 1: “Whether a spiritual substance [= an angel or Aristotelian separated substance, or else a human soul] is composed of matter and form.” His answer is: No. In short, he rejects universal hylomorphism.

The article is written in the classic quaestio-format, with preliminary arguments pro and con, the author’s (in this case, Aquinas’s) own resolution of the issue, and finally replies to the losing preliminary arguments. If you go look at some of the preliminary arguments in this first article, you’ll find many of them that bring out the themes we have just been discussing. For example, preliminary objections 1, 2, 4, 13, 14, etc. In objection 1, the argument is taken from Boethius’s De trinitate, the very passage we’ve just looked at.

In Article 3 of the same work, Aquinas asks: “Is the spiritual substance that is the human soul united to the body through a medium?” Now you may not recognize it from that, but in fact what Aquinas is asking here is whether there is some intervening form. Again, his answer is: No. In short, he denies the doctrine of plurality of forms too. The same thing is also at stake in his Summa theologiae, q. 76.

So Aquinas’s view — and the view of the Aristotelian tradition in general — is going to be different. In order to see what is involved, let’s go back and change the picture we drew at the very beginning.

28 Thomas Aquinas, On Spiritual Creatures (De Spiritualibus Creaturis), Mary C. Fitz-Patrick, trans., (“Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation,” Vol. 5; Milwaukee, Wis.; Marquette University Press, 1949).
29 Preliminary objections 15 and 17 fit nicely into our earlier discussion.
In the Platonic tradition we have been discussing up to now, the core object was a bare particular. Whether there was one or many of them was a sticky question, but in any case that core object:

- **(a)** had no internal *structure* of its own, and
- **(b)** had no internal *features* of its own either. (The “features” were the pins in the cushion.)

What’s the difference between an internal “structure” and internal “features”? Well, the terminological distinction is entirely my own, and perhaps it’s a bit artificial, but I need to draw attention to the point some way. As I am now using these terms, **(a)** and **(b)** are not the same claim at all. Sometimes people think they are (whatever terminology they use), and that a thing cannot have any internal “features” of its own that distinguish it from other things unless it also has some kind of internal “structure” — internal *parts*. That may well be true, but if it is, it is not at all obvious on the face of it, and will take some arguing.

**Ad (a):** To say a thing has an internal “structure” (in my present sense) is to say it has metaphysical *parts* that are somehow distinct from one another in a way that does not depend solely on our point of view, our manner of talking about it. In short, it is to say the thing is metaphysically *complex*.

**Ad (b):** To say a thing has internal “features” of its own (in my present sense) is only to say we can *describe* it, we can predicate predicates of it, in a way that will serve distinguish it from other things that would be described differently. (I am not concerned here with the epistemological question how we might come to *know* which descriptions truly apply to which things.)

Now it probably is true that having an internal “structure” in my sense implies having “features.” That is, if a thing has a structure, is metaphysically complex and made up of parts, then it can be described in terms of those parts; something can be about it that will distinguish it from other things, with a different structure. But to think that a thing’s having internal “features” in my sense implies its having an internal structure, its having metaphysical parts, seems to be to pre-
suppose exactly the kind of Platonic close link we have been discussing, between
predication and metaphysics, a link such that the distinction between subject and
predicate, and for that matter the distinctions among the predicates, are mirrored
exactly by metaphysical distinctions in what you are talking about. In short, the
Platonic picture we have been building up to now assumes that language is a reli-
able guide to metaphysics. That’s a big claim. Is it right?

Aquinas, as we have seen, and before him Aristotle, are going to reject the
Platonic framework, and with it they are going to reject the Platonic view of
predication that would prevent a thing from having internal “features” of its own
(and so being distinguishable from other things) unless it has an internal structure
of its own too. In fact the Aristotelian tradition is going to claim, for reasons that
will become clear later, that the “core object” does have features of its own. There
will be things you can truly say about an object that will not be reflected on the
part of reality by any “pins in the pin cushion.”

So the whole picture has to be renegotiated from the very beginning.
Predication can no longer be viewed as reflecting the “attachment” of things to
what you are talking about. Note, incidentally, that on this view the problem about
whether you have just one “core object” or many disappears. There is no reason
not to have lots of such core objects. They can be distinguished from one another
by their own internal features, so that there is no problem with the Identity of In-
discernibles.

A moment ago, I distinguished the question whether a thing has internal
features of its own (can be described) from the question whether it has an internal
structure of its own (has metaphysical parts). For the Aristotelian tradition, the
core objects or “pin cushions” do have internal features of their own, as we have
seen. Do they also have an internal structure? That is, are they metaphysical com-
posites of parts? Answer: Some are and some aren’t.

For Aristotle, the ones that aren’t are the so called “separated substances,”
the movers of the celestial spheres. For Aquinas, they are angels and human souls
(both of which he likewise calls “separated substances”). God is, as always, a spe-
cial case.

Those that do have an internal structure are, for both Aristotle and Aqui-
nas, the physical objects in the world around us. Such objects are said to be com-
posites of matter and form. In Aquinas, at any rate, they are composites of what
he calls prime matter and substantial form. Together, matter and substantial
form constitute the physical substance.

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30 See section II.1 above.
31 This may or may not be so in Aristotle. He certainly did have a notion of substantial
form. But there is some controversy over whether he had the notion of what the Middle Ages
So, just as those who accept the *binarium famosissimum* believe in two kinds of matter (corporeal matter and spiritual matter), the Aristotelians likewise have two kinds of substances, physical substances and “separated substances” — so called because they are separated from matter entirely.\(^{32}\) Physical substances are composites of matter and form. Separated substances consist of substantial forms only — no matter. Our “pin cushion” picture now looks different than it did:

The pin cushions by themselves (that is, apart from the pins sticking in them) are no longer “bare particulars,” the featureless somethings of the Platonic theory. They have features, they can be described, and so can be distinguished from one another. Some of them even have an internal *structure* — parts.\(^{33}\)

Now let’s bring all this back to the question that got the whole thing started: essential properties and accidental properties. The features of a thing that are involved in its substantial form are the “essential” features of the thing, according to the Aristotelian terminology. In a human being, for example, the substantial form involves rationality\(^{34}\); so we say rationality is “essential” to a human being. Likewise the substantial form involves animality; so we say animality is “essential” to the human being.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{32}\) The Aristotelian tradition does not accept the notion of spiritual matter.

\(^{33}\) But you have to be careful here. Sometimes the word ‘from’ is used in a more restricted sense, to mean the substantial form of a *physical* substance only. See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 76, a. 1, obj. 2. (Don’t worry about cryptic references like this. They’re simply included in case you want to track things down in the future.) Also, I should perhaps take this opportunity to warn you that, although I’ve talked about Aristotle and Aquinas, and about the broad Aristotelian “tradition,” that tradition was by no means a monolithic, homogenized one; people disagreed on details, sometimes on quite important details. Here I’m simply drawing a sketch in broad strokes, for the sake of getting you oriented. You can refine things later.

\(^{34}\) “Man is a rational animal,” remember, although my experience does not confirm it.

\(^{35}\) I’ve been deliberately vague here, and put this in terms of the substantial form’s “involving” this or that. That’s all I want to say about it for now.
Thus the essential features of a substance are the features of the "pin cushion" — the ones it has on its own. Everything else — everything that is "attached" as something extra, the "pins" — are what are called "accidents." Some of them may be permanently and necessarily attached, given that the substance exists at all, some not. That makes no difference. They are all still "accidents."

In short, the distinction between the essential and the accidental for the Aristotelian tradition is not the distinction between the necessary and the contingent, but rather the distinction between the internally and the externally attached, the pin cushion and its pins.

In fact, we have to be careful of our vocabulary. There really is no good term in the Aristotelian lexicon to cover all the things we typically mean by ‘property’ nowadays. That’s because our modern philosophical vocabulary is secretly Platonic in outlook. ‘Property’ in modern parlance includes both the essential and the accidental features of a thing. But there is no one word in the Aristotelian tradition that includes both these things without dangerously wrong connotations. The word ‘property’ itself (= *proprium*) is one of the five Porphyrian “predicables,” and so is not general enough. ‘Predicable’ is not bad. It at least covers all the right things, but it has connotations from mediaeval logical theory that are inappropriate here. ‘Attribute’ may work too. But that is frequently used to translate the Latin ‘*passio*,’ which is just another term for “*proprium.*” ‘Accident’ covers only some of the cases we want. ‘Quality’ is even worse, since according to the *Categories*, quality is just one of nine kinds of accident.

As a result, I have used the neutral term ‘characteristic’ or ‘feature’ here, which really has no Aristotelian counterpart.

**III.1. Change.**

Now why do you suppose the Aristotelians held the views they did about substances? Why did they think substances (the pin cushions) have internal features of their own, and why did they go even further and say that some substances, at any rate, also have a real internal structure of matter and form?

Well, with respect to the first point, you — speaking now for the Aristotelian — might argue like this: Look, this is the only way out of the problem of “one or many” we had on the Platonic view earlier. (Was there one core object or several?) This is the only way to avoid violating the Law of Non-Contradiction without running afoul of the Identity of Indiscernibles. We have many cores or pin cushions, but they are all distinguishable from one another in virtue of their internal features.

That’s perhaps a powerful consideration, as far as it goes. But still, why postulate a composition of matter and form in at least some substances? In other
words, if you are going to reject the theory that completely indeterminate, featureless matter is the subject of predication in every case, why do you need to retain the notion of matter at all in some cases? Plainly, matter is going to have to play a different role in the Aristotelian tradition than it did in the Platonic tradition. And in fact, the Aristotelians argue, we need matter in order to account for certain kinds of change.

We are now shifting gears to a quite new topic. Previously, we talked mainly about predication. That is still in the background, but now I want to talk about change.

III.1.i. A philosophical myth.

Let be begin by telling you a myth about the history of philosophy. It’s a common myth, and — like most good myths — there is a lot of truth in it. Here it is:

Once upon a time, long ago, the main philosophical problem was how to do justice to both Parmenides and Heraclitus. Parmenides, according to the story, had held that the senses are untrustworthy, that the dictates of reason must be followed, and that reason dictated, among other things, that reality is undifferentiated and static. There is no change.

Heraclitus, on the other hand, had held that one must accept the testimony of the senses, since they are all we have to go on, and that the senses tell us that reality is constant and chaotic change and flux. There is no stability.

Plato, the myth continues, solved this problem by adopting both views: each was true of a different realm. The visible world of Becoming, the familiar world we live in, is indeed a world of constant and chaotic change and flux. There is no stability to be found there. But, in addition to this world, there is also another realm, a world of Being populated by the eternal and changeless Forms or Ideas.

Aristotle, on the other hand, solved the problem differently. According to the story, Aristotle thought that while it is true that the world around us is in constant flux, there are nevertheless limits to that flux and change. The change is not jchaotic; it is ordered. If I plant an acorn, I will get, under favorable conditions, an oak tree by a process of growth and constant change. But I won’t get a cow or a rhubarb plant, much less a diamond or an iceberg. In short, there are limits to the constant change in the world. These limits, whatever they are, are tied up with the “natures” of things, and this notion of “nature” is in turn tied up with the notion of essence in ways that will take some working out.

So, the story goes, Aristotle in effect brought the Platonic Forms down out of their separated heaven, and implanted them in the interior structures of things here in the visible, sensible world; they become substantial forms.
That is the myth, nice and neat. The story then is that while Plato gives us only a kind of juxtaposition of Parmenides and Heraclitus, each in his own realm, Aristotle presents us with a real compromise. Each side must give up something:

(a) Heraclitus gets his constant change. But it is not chaotic change. There is pattern to it.

(b) Parmenides gets his stability and firmness, in the “natures” of things. But there is still room for constant change.

Now, this story will provide a motive for introducing “features” or “characteristics” into what we previously thought of as bare particulars. Such features will be the essential features of a thing, and pertain to its very core, the pin cushion. They account for Aristotelian natures.

What then is wrong with the myth? Well, you ought to be able to tell there is something wrong, at least with what it says about Aristotle, because if this were all there is to the story, then there would be no reason to introduce structure into the cores, no reason for a composition of form and matter. In short, if the considerations raised so far are all Aristotle is concerned with, then why bring matter into the picture at all?

Suppose you had these Aristotelian substantial forms without matter. (That is, suppose you have Aristotelian “separated substances.”) You could still have change — at least nothing we’ve said so far prevents it. It would be change with respect to the accidents. Some accidents would be permanently attached to their pin cushions. Which ones they are would presumably be determined in some way by the substantial forms. But the other accidents could come and go. There could well be change, then. But there would be limits to it, based on the natures or essences of things. Why then bring matter into the picture?

This suggests that something is not quite right with our myth. And that’s so. The myth makes the Aristotelian “compromise” between Parmenides and Heraclitus look altogether too neat. On the contrary, in actual fact, Heraclitus comes off far better than Parmenides does in the Aristotelian theory. Parmenides has to give up more. And this what is not reflected adequately in the myth.

According to the myth, the essential features of a thing are fixed and not subject to change. If any change does occur, it will be a case of the shifting of accidents. And in fact Aristotle does allow for accidental change. He even provides a kind of “catalogue” of the kinds of accidental change, of what he calls “motion”:

- Change of quantity = augmentation (growth) or diminution (shrinking).
• Change of quality = alteration.
• Change of place = locomotion.

(We generally reserve the word ‘motion’ for the last kind.) See Aristotle, *Physics* v.1–2, repeated in abbreviated form in *Metaphysics* xi.11–12. (Note: Here’s an interesting question for you: Aristotle allows nine categories of accidents in the *Categories* — although in *Physics* v he lists only seven. Why then are there not nine — or at least seven — kinds of accidental change instead of only three?)

But in addition to the above three kinds of accidental change that Aristotle calls “motion,” he also has a fourth kind of change that cannot be accounted for on the sketch we’ve just given in our myth:

• Change of substance = generation or corruption.

See *Physics* v.1 and *Metaphysics* xi. In fact, Aristotle wrote a whole book on this kind of “substantial” change, the *De generatione et corruptione*.

In short, for Aristotle, *the pin cushions can change too!*

The mythological picture we have sketched so far is therefore not radical enough for what Aristotle actually did. When he says there are “limits” to change, all that really means is that there are limits to *accidental* change. That is, there are limits to how much a thing can change and *still be the same thing*. Those limits are accounted for by the substantial form of the thing.

On the other hand, with respect to change here in the visible, sensible word (the separated substances are another case altogether), there are *no* limits to *substantial* change. The four so called “elements” — earth, air, fire and water — are constantly changing into one another, and they are the ingredients of all other physical objects (the so called “mixed” bodies). Thus, any kind of physical thing can change into any other kind of physical thing whatsoever.

Here then is the picture: If, at the end of a change, you are left with *the same object you started with* — it’s changed in some respects, of course, but it’s still identically the same thing — then what we have is an accidental change, and the thing that endures through the change is called a “substance.” But if the change results either in the production of an entirely new individual that wasn’t there before or in the destruction of an individual that was there before, then we have *substantial* change: generation or corruption.

Of course, this distinction depends crucially on the notion of a thing’s retaining or losing its identity. Just how does that work? Well, that is an excellent question, but let’s not demand an answer to it just yet. For the present, let’s just take it that this *is* what is meant to be the distinction between substantial and accidental change, and let’s move on.
In any change, either substantial or accidental, you need two factors:

(a) something that differs, and  
(b) something that stays the same.

If there were nothing at all different at the end of the change, nothing different from what we had at the beginning, then no change would have taken place; everything would be just as it was. Hence the need for (a). On the other hand, if there were nothing that stayed the same and endured throughout the change, we would not have “change”; we would have mere succession For example, if I die and you are born, we would not say I have become or changed into you. We would have a mere succession here: first me, and then not me but you instead. But we would say I had become or changed into you provided we believe in something like the transmigration of souls — or in general, provided there is something that stays the same and endures, something that is first me and later on you. Hence the need for (b).

In the case of accidental change, the factor that stays the same is obvious. It is the substance, the individual object, the pin cushion. The whole idea of accidental change is that it is the kind of change that can take place while the underlying object remains the same thing.

What then is the enduring ingredient in a substantial change? We need one, in order to have genuine change and not mere succession. But this enduring factor cannot be a fully constituted individual in its own right, because then we would accidental change all over again, not substantial change. This underlying, enduring factor, whatever it is, is going to be what the Aristotelians call “matter.”

On the Platonic theory we sketched earlier, matter was the subject of predication. Here matter is introduced for a different purpose: as the underlying, enduring substrate of substantial change. For the Aristotelian pedigree of this theory, see *De generatione et corruptione* I.4 319.31–320a8.

There are two observations to make at this point:

(a) This approach means that Aristotelian separated substances (Aquinas’s angels) do not undergo substantial change; they are immaterial, after all.

(b) Aquinas and many other mediaeval Aristotelians will talk about “prime matter” — a kind of ultimate substrate that underlies all form in the visible world and that has no form whatsoever all by itself. (To this extent, it is like the notion of matter we saw earlier, in the Platonic tradition.) On the other hand, it is not so clear whether Aristotle himself ever
had this notion of prime matter — ultimate matter — or whether matter for him was a more relative notion: the clay is “material” with respect to the statue made out of it, and the four elements are “material” with respect to the clay that results from a particular mixture of them. And so on, but with no completely featureless matter anywhere in the analysis. There is controversy over the proper way to interpret Aristotle on this point. The passage I just referred you to from De generatione 1.4 certainly seems to indicate a doctrine of prime matter. In any event, for present purposes we’ll just take Aristotle as having had such a view, since that is the way he was interpreted in the Middle Ages.

So far, we have only a “functional” account of prime matter. We have specified a kind of “job description,” and agreed that whatever does that job will be called “prime matter.” But we have said nothing at all about what kind of entity we are going to hire to fill that job. We do not yet know what matter is or what it is like. All we know is what it does.

So let’s look more closely at prime matter. What can we say about it? Well, it turns out to be exceedingly strange stuff.

### III.1.ii. Prime matter.

To see just how strange it is, let’s go back and consider change once again. (On this analysis, compare — loosely — Aristotle, Physics I.7–9.)

Consider two terms ‘A’ and ‘B’ (I’m talking about terms here, pieces of language, not other things) that can be truly predicated only of things that exist, of beings. That is, they are “existence-entailing” terms. (I impose this restriction only because I don’t want to be troubled by such “funny” terms as ‘imaginary’, ‘dead’, etc.) Then consider sentences of the form:

\[ A \text{ has become (or changed into) } B. \]

Any real change can be expressed in such a form.

There are two kinds of cases here, depending on the particular choice of terms ‘A’ and ‘B’:

**Case (1)**: ‘A has become B’ can be read as: A was not B, and now A is B. For example, ‘The food has become cold’. It wasn’t cold before, but now it is.
If we want to be formal about it, we can express this as: There exists an \( x \) such that \( x \) was \( A \) but not \( B \), and now \( x \) is \( A \) and \( B \).

In a case like this, the continuous factor that remains throughout the change is clear. It’s \( A \) (or the \( x \) that is ), the food that remains the same food before and after its becoming cold. Now contrast this with:

Case (2): in which ‘\( A \) has become \( B \)’ cannot be analyzed as before, in Case (1). For example, ‘Earth has become fire’ (the substantial change among the Aristotelian elements), or ‘The bread has become flesh’ (that is, it has been eaten and assimilated — I’m not talking about Eucharistic doctrine).

Here it is not so easy to identify the continuous factor throughout the change. It’s not the earth, since in the process of becoming fire it ceases to be earth. So too the bread ceases to be bread as it is assimilated and becomes flesh.

Now all cases of kind (1) are instances of accidental change. There is an underlying individual entity — the \( A \), the food, or the \( x \) in our formal version — that stays the same throughout the change.

What about cases of kind (2)? The examples I actually gave of kind (2) were both cases of what Aristotle would call substantial change. But not all cases of kind (2) are like that. For example, consider: ‘The body has become the man’, ‘The vice president has become chairman of the board’. These cases of kind (2) change can analyzed, and in a sense “reduced” to kind (1) change by just pushing a little deeper:

There exists a person (Socrates, say) who was a boy and not a man, and who is now a man and no longer a boy.

Likewise in the other example:

There exists a person (S. Julius Bloodworth-Bigdome, let’s say) who was vice president and not chairman of the board, and who is now chairman of the board and no longer vice president.

In cases like this (let ‘\( C \)’ be an existence-entailing term like ‘\( A \)’ and ‘\( B \)’),

Case 2a: ‘\( A \) has become \( B \)’ can be read as: There is a \( C \) such that \( C \) was \( A \) and not \( B \), and now \( C \) is \( B \) and not \( A \).
Plainly, this too is a case of accidental change, since we can identify an identically the same existing substrate that endures throughout the change — the C.

### III.1.iii. Atomism.

Now, here’s a question for you: Are all cases of kind (2) change also cases of kind (2a) change? If so, then all changes are accidental changes and there is no substantial change at all, and Aristotle was misled.

If that is so, then under pain of infinite regress, whenever we have a change, we can always find (if we look deeply enough) an ultimate substrate-substance — call it Z — that does not change according to kind (2), but if it changes at all, changes only according to kind (1).

That it, if all instances of case (2) are instances of case (2a), then there must be ultimate substances such that all change is accidental change in such substances. There are two forms of such a view.

(a) You might hold that the same substrate underlies every change, that in any change whatever, if you just push the analysis hard enough, you always end up at the same place. In that case you have the notion of a kind of single substance — like Plato’s Receptacle, or “matter” in the Platonic tradition — that underlies all change (as well as underlying all predication). The problem with that view is one we have already seen: it would require the same substance to have contrary properties at the same time.

(b) Alternatively, you might say there are several such ultimate substances. This view is in effect “atomism.” There are two subcases

(i) You can say these substrates or atoms have no distinguishing features at all, that they are all just bare particulars. There problem here we have likewise already seen: the Identity of Indiscernibles.

(ii) Or you can say these substrates or atoms do have features of their own. Then you might say there are four — earth, air, fire and water — or you might say there are an infinite number of them, as Democritus did, or you might say something else along these lines.
On any of these atomistic alternatives, the upshot is the same: all real change is accidental change in these ultimate substantial atoms. Generation and corruption, in Aristotle’s sense, is just an illusion. All change is to be accounted for by the alteration and rearrangement of atoms.

Now Aristotle and the tradition following him not only reject the Platonic alternative — for pretty good reasons (the Law of Non-Contradiction). They also reject atomism. Aristotle does this, for instance in the *Physics* and the *De generatione et corruptione*. Accordingly, the Aristotelians must reject the claim that all kind (2) change is also kind (2a) change. In other words, they must say there are some cases where A has become B, but where there is no underlying existing entity that remains identically the same throughout the change. These will be the substantial changes.

On the other hand, we know that every change requires a substrate of some kind or other to remain the same, in order to distinguish from mere succession.

So here we are. The Aristotelians insist there are genuine substantial changes, and these changes require an enduring substrate. But that substrate cannot be a fully constituted entity that exists in its own right. In short, it doesn’t exist! And that’s what prime matter is.

Now what on earth are we going to do about this fine fix? Note the dual pressure:

(1) On the one hand, we cannot say the substrate of substantial change doesn’t exist — just like that. Insofar as we are talking about substantial change, and not just a mere succession, there is a job for the substrate to do: a unifying job. It has to stay the same one substrate both before and after the change. Given the traditional “convertibility” of being and unity, therefore, the substrate must exist to the extent that it stays the same one thing, and it must do the latter in order to do its job.

(2) On the other hand, we cannot say the substrate does exist either, as an entity with its own enduring identity. That would make all change accidental change in that substrate, and we would be back to either Plato’s Receptacle, or else some form of atomism — both of which alternatives the Aristotelian tradition rejects.

So what do we do?
III.2. Being in potency.

Well, we could just push the point and insist that what we have here is a blatant contradiction, and this shows there simply is no substantial change of the kind Aristotle is thinking about, so that therefore either Plato or the atomists are right. And, as long as we’re pushing points, let’s push further: Since Plato, as we’ve seen, runs up against the Law of Non-Contradiction, this means that what we have here is a proof of atomism — atomism in the sense that all change is accidental change in a variety of ultimate substances.

But that isn’t what the Aristotelians do. They insist on the reality of genuine substantial change. And so they come up with the exquisitely delicate notion of prime matter as a being in potency.

Here we see the first appearance of the notion of “potentiality,” and the distinction between “actuality” and “potentiality” or “potency.” The doctrine is extremely important, and also extremely difficult and obscure.

The fact that the dual pressure — (1) and (2) just above — looks as if it leads to an out and out contradiction adds a certain urgency to the important question here: Why are the Aristotelians so confident there really are substantial changes? In short, what’s wrong with atomism after all? I have some thoughts on this, but let’s not develop them here.

III.3. Final thoughts on the “Aristotelian” approach.

The time has come to draw all this to a close. Here is a quick summary of the Aristotelian picture we have come up with so far:

The pin cushion here has both

(a) internal features of its own, so that we can have several distinguishable such pin cushions — “core objects,” substances. Hence no Platonic Receptacle, “Platonic” matter, bare particulars. The substantial form is what is responsible for these internal features;
(b) an internal structure of its own too, made up of prime matter and substantial form. It is the prime matter that allows each such pin cushion to change into a different and new one.

The composite of these two is the individual substance. (There are also “separated” substances that do not have matter. But for now we’re confining ourselves to material substances.)

In addition to prime matter and substantial form, other forms can be “externally” attached to the substance. Some may be permanently attached, some not. But all of them are accidental forms.

On this picture, the grammatical distinction between subject and predicate is not a reliable guide to the ontological structure of a substance. Some predicates answer to the internal features of the substance, the substantial form. They are the essential predicates; other predicates answer to the accidental features, permanent or otherwise.

Thus predication does not answer to a single kind of ontological relation, but to at least two quite different kinds.

Étienne Gilson, the great patriarch of historians of mediaeval philosophy, often distinguished between a so called “logical” approach to reality and a “metaphysical” approach, and often criticized — even ridiculed — the “logical” approach. For a long time I couldn’t figure out what he meant. But now I think I know. His criticism of the “logicians” doesn’t mean he preferred bad arguments to good ones (although there may be other reasons to think that). It means that he rejected the “Platonic” view that looks to the facts of predication for a guide to reality. (It is perhaps not completely out of place to compare the “Platonic” view with the early Wittgenstein’s “picture”-theory of the relation between language and the world.) For Aristotelians, Gilson included, there is no such neat relation as this.

IV. A final point of terminology.

Finally, let me give you a point of terminology. In addition to the metaphysical notion of accident I have stressed so far, there is also a “logical” usage in which accidents are just the things that are contingently predicable of a thing. Aristotelians as well as Platonists use this notion. This can result in some pretty confusing passages if you’re not careful. This “logical” notion of accident doesn’t indicate anything whatever about the metaphysical structure of a thing. It is metaphysically an entirely neutral usage, compatible with lots of different metaphysical positions.
For an example of this usage, see Aquinas, *In Boethii De trinitate* (= his commentary on Boethius’s *De trinitate*), q. 4, a. 2, obj. 3. The question Aquinas raises here is “Whether the variety of accidents makes a diversity according to number.” Obj. 5 of the question states, “Moreover, when the cause is removed, so is the effect. But every accident can be removed from its subject, …” Don’t worry about the rest of the argument; here I’m only trying to illustrate the usage of the term ‘accident’. As we know, in the metaphysical sense of ‘accident’, there are necessary accidents, so that not every accident can be removed from its subject. In Aquinas’s question on Boethius, therefore, it is plainly a different sense of ‘accident’ that is at stake.

This “logical” notion of accident is associated with Porphyry, who defines it in his *Isagoge*. For its authentically Aristotelian pedigree, see *Topics* i.5 102b4–8 and *Metaphysics* v.30. In both passages, Aristotle describes both the metaphysical and the logical senses of ‘accident’.

Finitum hoc totum,
Da mihi potum.
Chapter 45:

Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

Around the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries, the works of Aristotle and the Arabs began to appear in the West in Latin translations, as described in Chapter 44 above. And with them came a whole new outlook. For the first time, the Latin West was exposed to a technical philosophy. (There were some beginnings of this sort of thing around the time of Abelard, independent of the new translations, but what we are talking about now was something of an altogether different order of magnitude.) For the first time, we get a serious theoretical challenge to what had become the standard Augustinian way of looking at things (tempered here and there with a dose of Pseudo-Denis). At the same time, the universities began to emerge from the old educational institutions. (See Chapter 44 again.) Henceforth in the Middle Ages, philosophy would be an increasingly academic affair, in a way it was not for Augustine or even for Anselm and Abelard.

It cannot be emphasized too much how great a shock the recovery of Aristotle was to the Middle Ages. Recall how the Augustinian tradition basically had a very low opinion of the powers of the unaided human intellect (Chapter 19 above). It was incapable, by itself, of attaining any knowledge at all worthy of the name. It needed some assistance from outside - by illumination. This notion was common doctrine by the twelfth century. And as we have seen when discussing the theory of illumination in Augustine (Chapter 19 above), it was hard in practice to explain just how illumination differed from revelation. We saw this even as long ago as Justin Martyr (Chapter 8), with his view that everything true in Plato was stolen from Moses. Put in not quite so crude a form, the standard view was that no knowledge worthy of the name could be had without faith. Even Anselm, who thought he could find necessary reasons for the truths of the faith, said "Unless I believe, I will not understand".
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

Into this context came Aristotle, a pagan, who did not have faith. He presented a doctrine in which the human mind was thought of as having much more power in its own right. He had a very high opinion of the unaided intellect. So here for the first time we have a theoretical challenge to the accepted view. And the details of that challenge had been fairly well worked out in Aristotle himself.

But more. Not only did Aristotle present a theory that challenged the accepted one, he also seemed himself to be living proof (well, actually he was dead, but you get the idea) of that theory. In other words, he seemed to have been able, without the aid of faith, and solely on the basis of his unaided intellect, to arrive at some pretty important truths well worthy of the name.

Note: You don't get this problem with Plato in the Middle Ages. You might have thought that people would be worried about the fact that, while Plato's view is more congenial to them, nevertheless Plato thought it up without the aid of faith - he was a pagan too, after all - and how is that possible? The reason you don't get this problem is that the Middle Ages had almost nothing of Plato's own writings. Platonism was everywhere, as Gilson says, but Plato was not to be found (with the small exception of the first half or so of the Timaeus). The Platonism that was in circulation was already thoroughly mixed with the Church Fathers, with Augustine - in short, with Christian doctrine. It had, so to speak, been "baptized". There was nothing scandalous about it. With Aristotle, on the other hand, you get a whole new batch of texts from his own hand, as it were, and this puts the issue into much sharper focus.

Thus we have in the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries a crisis of sorts in mediaeval thought. Here is this upstart Aristotle, whose doctrine calls into question the old and venerable views that were commonly held (and remember, there were good reasons for holding them - recall the problems the doctrine of illumination was designed to solve). Furthermore, he seemed to be able to support his doctrine, both with his own example and by rigorous arguments. What are you going to do about it?

This problem was especially aggravated, because some of Aristotle's positions were outright heresy. Among the most blatant were: (a) the eternity of the world; (b) the claim that the separated substances (which could only be interpreted as God and the angels - what else could they be?) have no concern for the world and in fact don't even know about it; (c) the dubious state of the soul in Aristotle (is it immortal or not?). (See Chapters 3 and 5 above.) Some people - for example, Bonaventure in the thirteenth century - said that all this just went to show that unaided reason wasn't enough to reach the truth. Look what happens!
Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

Aristotle's Theory

It is this last point that I want to address, by looking at how the Aristotelian theory developed at the hands of Aristotle's successors in the late classical and in the Arab world, up to the time it reappeared in the Latin West along with the Arabic commentaries.

Let's go back and look at Aristotle himself on how the soul known. The basic passages are from De anima, Books II and III, especially Book III, Chs. 4-5. They are translated in Volume 2, Text 15, below. An excellent and very clear account of the development of the tradition may be found in David Knowles, The Evolution of Mediaeval Thought, Ch. 17, part 1. (If you read those pages, you will find out where I learned a lot of what I will be saying below.)

The basic theme of Aristotle's epistemology is this: Understanding is to be thought of after an analogy with sensation. Intellection is like sensation. This is crucial to understanding Aristotle on these matters.

Well, what then happens in sensation? Look at passage (1) in Text 15. An external, physical individual acts on the sense organ, for instance, on the eye. The organ is an organ of a sense faculty or power of the soul. The object acts on the organ and leaves in the faculty (which uses the organ as a tool - 'ξυλεῖν = 'tool' in Greek) an impression.

Note: The object acts on the organ, which is part of the body, and as a result leaves an impression on the sense faculty, which is part of the soul. This is already totally non-Augustinian. For Augustine, recall, bodies cannot act on the soul at all. (See Chapter 16 above.)

Aristotle explicitly uses the signet-ring analogy here. We have used it before in connection with the theory of universals (see Chapters 23 and 40). This is an analogy that gets used a lot to illustrate all kinds of doctrines.

Now what is this impression? In the Latin Middle Ages it was called a species, or a sensible species. This is not to be confused with 'species' as opposed to genus. From the sense of the word 'species' we are talking about now, we get the English word 'specious', meaning "apparent", and referring to the appearance of the thing. (Actually, the word 'species' as opposed to genus is also derived from this more basic sense. But don't let that confuse you.)

Basically, this species or impression on the sense faculty is everything involved in the individual - essentially or accidentally - except for the matter. The matter is "left behind". Consider the seal-ring analogy again. The ring implants an exact duplicate of the formal structure of itself on the wax, but it does not leave its matter there, the gold or the bronze, for example. If the ring is round, the impression is round. If the ring has serrated edges, the impression
has serrated edges. But even though the ring is gold or bronze, the impression is still just wax.

The sensible species is just as individual as the original object was. Although matter - so called prime matter (that is, completely indeterminate stuff - it is a topic of some dispute whether Aristotle himself had anything like prime matter in his doctrine. In my own view, he certainly should have had it if he didn't, and in any event his doctrine was frequently interpreted in terms of prime matter, which is enough for us.) - is left behind, the image that remains, the sensible species or impression, keeps all the detail of the original. It is an exact duplicate of the individual object that caused it, and of no other.

(Technical note: There is a sense in which accidents individuate on this view. But this is not the same sense as in Boethius' strongly realist view, or in William of Champeaux's first view - see Chapters 23 and 40 above. In those theories there was no real role for matter - that is, real matter, not "matter" in the analogical sense of a "material essence").

Recall how, when we were talking about Abelard (Chapter 40), I said that the object of thought, whether individual or universal, had a different kind of existence than the real objects did. I said that later on that kind of existence or reality would come to be called esse intentionale as opposed to esse reale. Well, the same thing seems to be going on here, as early as Aristotle.

Every essential or accidental form that exists really in the object, exists mentally, intentionally, in the sensible species or impression in the sense faculty. Just as, in the real world, all these essential and accidental forms are grounded in, inhere in, prime matter, so too in the intentional world of sense impressions, they all inhere in the sense faculty, which therefore acts like prime matter. It is not prime matter, of course, but it plays a similar role. The sense faculty then is a kind of mental analogue of prime matter.

In this way, then, the sense faculty becomes formally its object. That is, it takes on the formal features of its object. Not just similar features, but identically the same features. What exists in the mental mode in the sense faculty is not just something more or less similar to the object that caused it. It is exactly that object, just as individual and detailed as the external object. If it were not, then it would not be a representation of that object, but of another one more or less similar to it.

This is not to say, of course, that when I look out and see a tree, there is a tree growing in my visual faculty. Of course not. The difference is one of the manner of being. In the external object, all these detailed formal features exist really in prime matter. In sensation, identically the same forms exist mentally or intentionally in the sense faculty.

This approach grounds the objectivity of sensation. This is not a "representational" theory in the sense that any inference is required to get you
Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

from your impression to the external object. The species in the sense faculty just is the external object - "formally" speaking, of course.

Recall how in Augustine (Chapter 13) we learned that, in the case of any real and certain knowledge, the object must be present in person and not by proxy. Aristotle is in effect saying the same thing here about sensation, although he confines it to the formal features of the object. You don't have to infer from the fact that your sense power is actualized in a certain way to the fact that some external object is acting on it. See passage (3) in Text 1.5.

This is just an application of the general Aristotelian claim that the cause's causing is identical with the effect's being caused. It is the same process. The fire's heating the water is the very same process as the water's being heated by the fire. So too, the sense power's being actualized by some external object is identically the same process as that external object's actualizing the sense power. No inference is involved, and therefore all the traditional "representational" problems of, say, Cartesianism, are neatly sidestepped.

Now let us extract some features from the theory as it has been developed so far.

(1) The sense faculty is totally passive to begin with. It is potentially its objects - always "formally speaking", of course.

(2) Then it takes on the sensible species, and is "reduced, as they say, from potentiality to act. Before, it was potentially the object; now it is actually so, just as the sealing-wax to begin with is potentially the fully formed seal, and when it takes on the impression it becomes actually so.

(3) Here is a general Aristotelian principle: Whenever you have something reduced from potentiality to actuality (that is, whenever you have some actualizing process going on), you need a cause. In the case of sensation, it is the external object that acts on the sense organ. That is the cause.

Remember the guiding thread that I introduced above: Intellection is like sensation. Therefore, analogously, a similar thing must happen in intellectual cognition, in the formation of concepts.

Of course, intellection is not sensation; it is only like sensation. What is the difference? Here we get an important slogan that people threw around in the Middle Ages: Sensation is of particulars, but understanding of universals ("Sensus est particularium, intellectus autem universalium.") Commit that to memory. It will be very important.
Just as the *sense* faculty takes on the formal features of the external object - both the essential and the accidental ones - stripped of prime matter, so too the *intellect* takes on, receives, the *universal* form of the same object, and becomes *formally identical* with its object. Identical with its object, note, but not identical with *all* its object. It takes on the universal form, but not all the accidental forms that serve to distinguish this individual object from that one. I leave it as homework to the reader to figure out just what kind of identity relation this is. It is certainly *not* the kind of "identity" that is talked about in first-order logic nowadays. But it is *not* nonsense.

Just as this notion grounded the objectivity of sensation, so too it grounds the objectivity of intellection. There is no basis for skepticism here.

Just as the product of this taking on of forms was called, at the level of sensation, a *sensible species*, so too at the level of concept-formation it is called the *intelligible species*. How then does the intelligible species differ from the sensible species?

Just as the *sensible* species left behind prime matter, but *not* the peculiar and identifying accidents, here the *intelligible* species leaves behind the peculiar and identifying accidents and ends up with only the *universal* or *essence*.

On all this, see passage (3) in Text 1.5 below.

Given this framework, there is an argument that comes in here for the *separability* of mind from body. ("Mind" here is Greek νοῦς. See Chapter 3 above on the puzzling difference between νοῦς and ψυχή, mind and soul, in Aristotle.)

Consider sensation - for example, vision. As a *faculty*, it is supposed to be like prime matter, capable of taking on all (visible) forms. Like prime matter, therefore, it cannot then *itself*, by *nature*, have any of those (visible) forms. If it did, it would no longer be potential and indeterminate like prime matter, but rather determinate and already reduced to act - and so incapable of doing its job. Hence, the visual faculty does not by itself have any visible form. In short, it is invisible. And similarly for the other senses.

Now the intellect, likewise, is capable of knowing *all physical objects*, capable of taking on their forms. (For the purposes of this argument, it does not matter whether the intellect is *also* capable of knowing *immaterial* objects.) Thus it acts *like* prime matter in a way, just as the visual faculty did. And like prime matter, it cannot by nature have *any* of these forms that it is able to take on. Conclusion: The intellective faculty, or mind, does not by *nature* have any corporeal form. It simply doesn't need any, and in fact could not do its job if it had one. That is why Aristotle says it is not "mixed with the body". See passage (4) in Text 1.5.
Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

What we have here is an argument for the separability of the intellective faculty. It doesn't need a physical body, which is where you find corporeal forms. And since it doesn't need a physical body, it can survive death - that is, the separation of the soul from the body. See passages (5) and (6) of Text 1.5.

There are three problems with this argument - at least problems of interpretation, if not outright problems with the doctrine itself:

(1) Does the argument contain a quantifier mistake? That is, does it argue like this: Since for all corporeal forms \( F \), the intellective power can do without \( F \), therefore, it can do without all corporeal forms whatever? (Similarly, I can do without any particular kind of food, since I can substitute another kind to get all my "essential nutrients". But it does not follow that I can do without all foods whatever.)

(2) Does it confuse the intentional with the real? To say that the intellective faculty does not need to be intentionally what any physical object is really is not automatically to say that the intellective faculty need not be really what some physical object is really - that is, that it need not really be a physical object. Or is it? In other words, if the mind were really a physical object, "mixed with the body", as Aristotle puts it, and so had a corporeal form of its own, would it follow that it also had that form in the intentional sense of "having a form"? Some such assumption seems to be required if Aristotle's argument is going to work.

(3) Would not exactly the same kind of argument show that prime matter likewise "is not mixed with the body", and that therefore prime matter too is separable from, could exist apart from, any physical object? But that of course would be definitely non-Aristotelian. If Aristotle held a theory of prime matter at all, he certainly did not think it could exist separately, on its own, apart from physical bodies. Prime matter is a distinct metaphysical ingredient, but it only exists in combination with a corporeal substantial form.
A Survey of Medieval Philosophy

Let us just set these problems aside. Perhaps they are really more problems of interpretation than they are real sore points in the theory itself. (Perhaps they aren't.) Instead, I want to turn to two other questions that can be asked of this theory:

(1) If sensation is of particulars or individuals, but understanding is of universals, how is it possible to have any intellectual knowledge of singular things, of individuals? This is an important sticking-point for Aristotelian epistemology. In part it was difficulties over just this question that led to the abandonment of Aristotelian epistemology in the fourteenth century.

(2) How is the intellect reduced from potency to act? What causes the indeterminate matter-like intellect to become to some extent determinate, to take on a form? What is the agent cause here? (Remember from above, we always need an agent whenever we have something reduced from potentiality to actuality.)

In sensation, the agent cause was the physical, external object, which acted on the senses. Recall the signet-ring metaphor again.

The point of the ring metaphor is that each impression leaves the same individualized form in different substrates. So we can't just say that it is the same physical object, which acts like the ring and leaves an impression on the sense faculty, that also acts like a ring and leaves an impression in the same way on the intellect. For then the intelligible species would be just as individualized as the sensible species, and there would be no distinction between sensation and intellection.

Hence we need a different agent cause in the case of intellection. Something has to be done to the object's individualized form - the accidents have to be stripped off - to make it ready to be impressed on the intellect.

Now it turns out there are really **two functions** to the intellect. The intellect, or that function or part of the intellect, which is passive and receptive is called the "possible" intellect or "material" intellect by various later people. But the job of preparing the form to be impressed on this possible or material intellect is performed by something else, something called the "agent" intellect. And this is a new ingredient. See passage (?) in Text 1.5.

The idea is that individual forms, the things that get impressed on the sense faculty, are only potentially intelligible, just as colors are only potentially visible until light shines on them. The agent intellect then is the "Light of the Mind". This terminology goes back to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, and his metaphor of the sun, in the Republic, and it sounds a bit like Augustinian illumination. It is quite a different theory, of course, despite the terminological similarities. Nevertheless, keep an eye on these terminological resemblances.
Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

On the other hand, material objects are actually sensible, and therefore there is no need for a separate agent sense to reduce the passive sense-faculty from potentiality to act. The object itself can do that. (The external object may be said to be only "potentially sensible" insofar as, for example, a visible object needs to have light cast on it before it can be actually seen. But the point still stands. We don't need to introduce a new side to the sense faculty itself, an agent sense. I should mention here that some later authors in the Middle Ages did in fact speculate about whether this was correct, about whether an agent sense was needed just as much as an agent intellect was. But I don't want to get into their reasoning now.)

Later on in the same passage (passage (7) in Text 1.5), Aristotle says that it is mind (νοημα) in this sense - that is, the agent intellect - that is separable and unmixed, and it alone. Passive mind, he says, is corruptible. It dies with the body.

But now we have a problem. What about the argument Aristotle just gave us in the previous chapter (De anima, III, 4, rather than III, 5 - see passage (4) in Text 1.5), that mind, by which he there meant passive mind, was unmixed and separable?

On the basis of this apparent conflict in the Aristotelian texts, there were two problems inherited by his successors:

(1) Is only the agent intellect, or are both the agent and passive intellect, separable? This was the problem of immortality, or part of it. Just what is it that survives death?

(2) Is the agent intellect in the soul, even though it is separable? Or is it something outside the soul, and for that matter something one and the same for all people, just as (to use Aristotle's own metaphor) the light of the sun, which reduces potentially visible objects to actually visible ones, is the one and the same for everyone? (You begin to see at least one reason why some people might think that the cases of the agent intellect and an "agent sense" are not all that different.) This is the problem of personal immortality, or part of it. If the only part of my soul that is immortal is one and the same for everyone - or worse, if it was never really in my soul at all, but is rather some odd external thing - then I can hardly speak of my own personal immortality. Once again, see Chapter 3 above on the distinction between νοημα and ψυχη, mind and soul.
A Survey of Medieval Philosophy

Precisely because Aristotle had so little to say in the end about all this, it became a focal point for a long and involved tradition of interpretation. Let's look at that tradition.

First of all, I must give you the following table for convenient reference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aristotle</th>
<th>active, agent</th>
<th>passive</th>
<th>*</th>
<th>**</th>
<th>***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themistius</td>
<td>agent (immortal, in the soul)</td>
<td>material, possible (immortal, in the soul)</td>
<td>speculative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander of Aphrodisias</td>
<td>agent (God)</td>
<td>material (mortal, in the soul)</td>
<td>acquired (aedes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfarabi</td>
<td>agent (10th intelligence)</td>
<td>potential (mortal, in the soul)</td>
<td>(not the same)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avicenna</td>
<td>agent (10th intelligence, Datur formarum)</td>
<td>material (mortal, in the soul)</td>
<td>in effectus = given</td>
<td>in habitu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averroes</td>
<td>agent (separated)</td>
<td>material, possible ≠ passive (separated)</td>
<td>( = imagination, in the body)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Aristotle has no special term here.
** Aristotle has this notion, but again has no special term for it.
*** Aristotle does have the notion of habitual knowledge, but does not distinguish a new kind of intellect for it.

Table 45-1: The Terminology of Aristotelian Epistemology

As you may suspect from this table, the terminology is going to get a bit thick.
Let us look first at Themistius, an important fourth-century Greek commentator on Aristotle. Themistius has three kinds of intellects. Or more precisely, he has three terms for what are really two different kinds of things.

Themistius distinguishes the active or agent intellect from the material or possible intellect. These correspond to Aristotle's active and passive intellects. He answered question (2) - just before the above table - by saying that both are in the soul, and that each person has one of each, his own one of each. That is, for Themistius, νοῦς is in ψυχή, the mind is a part of the soul. And furthermore, we each have our own mind. We don't share one. This holds for agent mind as well as for material or possible (Aristotle's passive) mind. Themistius also answered question (1) - just before the table - by saying that both are separable. This is going to be essentially Aquinas' position in the thirteenth century. Note that it violates Aristotle's explicit statement (in passage (7) of Text 1.5) that passive mind is corruptible.

Themistius also talks about something called the "speculative" intellect. This is not a third entity. The "speculative" intellect is just what the possible intellect is called after it has been acted on by the active or agent intellect. It is what you end up with after the whole business is completed and we actually have a concept successfully formed and in our thought. (Similarly, remember, for Augustine a "man" was not a different entity from a soul. Rather it is just that the soul is called a "man" when it satisfies certain conditions. See Chapter 14 above.)

Alexander of Aphrodisias

So much for Themistius. Now let's look at Alexander of Aphrodisias, a major Greek commentator on Aristotle from around 200 a.d. He was earlier than Themistius, but I wanted to treat Themistius separately, since Alexander's doctrine begins the more influential tradition. His commentary on the De anima was strongly influenced by Platonic and neo-Platonic considerations, so that what you end up with is hardly pure Aristotle.
A Survey of Mediæval Philosophy

The main features of Alexander's position are these:

1. The soul or ψυχή is the form of the body, and therefore is corruptible, like all forms of corporeal objects.

2. There is a passive intellectual faculty in the soul, called the material intellect (this was also Themistius' term for it), and there is a distinct one of these for each person. This much is like Themistius. But, unlike Themistius' doctrine, Alexander's has it that the material intellect dies with the body, since it is part of the corruptible soul or ψυχή.

3. There is also an agent intellect outside the soul, which activates the material intellect, reduces it from potentiality to act. It acts like the light of the sun. This is not at all like Themistius' version of the agent intellect, which was in the soul.

4. The action of the agent intellect on the material intellect results in the "acquired intellect" (intellectus adeptus). This is the same notion as Themistius' speculative intellect; only the term is different. Is it immortal? Probably not.

5. There is only one agent intellect. It services all people. Furthermore, and this is something new, the agent intellect is identical with God.

It is interesting to go back and compare this doctrine with the Aristotelian texts, to see how the theory fits them, and also to see what Alexander has to add to get a coherent picture.

This kind of theory prevailed in later Greek philosophical circles, and influenced Augustine. It was more or less "in the air" in intellectual circles in Augustine's day, even though he himself certainly never read any Alexander. (His Greek was terrible, as he himself admits.)

Notice some of the main features of this doctrine:

First, there is no personal immortality. There is nothing unique to a given individual human being that survives his death. Augustine of course won't be able to buy that.

But there is also the theme that the intellectual powers that belong to a person as his own are quite incapable of arriving at any knowledge by themselves. They need help from outside. The human mind needs to be illumined by the agent intellect, which is God. Recall Aristotle's own "light" metaphor. Alexander is here interpreting Aristotle's words in a way that sounds very Platonic. (Remember the allegory of the cave.)
Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

This of course should sound suspiciously like the good old doctrine of illumination, as we saw it in Augustine (Chapter 19 above). Let us pause to look at this a bit.

Recall one of the differences between Plato’s theory of reminiscence and Augustine’s theory of illumination. For Plato - or at least for a strong element in Platonism - human souls were lesser gods. And so when they came in contact with the Forms, which were eternal and immutable and so had the characteristics of divinity, they could under their own power acquire knowledge of those Forms by acquaintance. There was no unbridgeable difference of rank or station. In Augustine, however, there was a clear gap between creator and created mind. The latter could never under its own power acquire knowledge.

Alexander’s position fits more closely with Augustine’s than with Plato’s on this point. There is an important difference between God and everything else. God is the agent intellect, and the only one there is. Every other intellect requires the action of the agent intellect in order to know. It cannot know under its own power. And that inability is not just a matter of degree, but a matter of kind. Augustine, of course, did not pick up the Aristotelian technicalities and terminology. But the basic idea remains. The unbridgeable gap between creator and created intellect on his view mirrors the unbridgeable gap between the agent and the material intellects for Alexander. The latter can never do the job of the former all by itself.

In this connection, it is curious that Aristotle, who on the whole has a very strong opinion of the unaided human intellect, should have been interpreted in a way that makes it impossible for the unaided intellect to have any knowledge at all.

Alexander’s interpretation was not only indirectly influential on Augustine and his Latin successors. It was also influential on the Arabs. That is why you get something very like an Augustinian doctrine of illumination in Arabic philosophy; they had a common source. It is also why when, in the thirteenth century, the Arabs began to be widely read by the Latins, the Latin Augustinians could so readily absorb what they read. Gilson has coined the term “Avicennizing Augustinism” for this. But before we get to Avicenna, there is a preliminary episode in our story, namely, Alfarabi (870-950).
Alfarabi lived shortly after Eriugena. He enriches and embellishes Alexander's doctrine, but basically stays in the same line of interpretation. Whereas Themistius and Alexander had three intellects (or at least three terms - the third intellect is just the result of the interaction of the other two), Alfarabi has no fewer than four intellects. They are:

(a) The potential intellect. This is Alexander's "material" intellect, Themistius' "material" or "possible" intellect, and Aristotle's "passive" intellect. It is like matter. Alfarabi uses Aristotle's analogy of the wax (see Hyman and Walsh, p. 215). The potential intellect is in the soul, and there is a different one for each person.

In discussing the potential intellect, Alfarabi seems to introduce a distinction we haven't seen yet. There are two senses in which the potential intellect for Alfarabi can be said to be potential: (i) in an absolute sense - that is, when it has no forms impressed on it yet at all; (ii) in a relative sense - after it has a form impressed on it, it still remains potential with respect to other forms. This does not by itself entail, but it nevertheless suggests something I think Alfarabi in any case accepts, namely that the potential intellect can take on several forms simultaneously. He talks about this kind of thing when he is working up to the third kind of intellect, which I'll discuss in a moment. See Hyman and Walsh, p. 216. (It does not entail this, any more than the fact that a lump of clay that in fact has a certain shape is nevertheless still potential with respect to other shapes entails that the lump of clay can have two shapes at once. It is potential with respect to those other shapes in the sense that it can take them on, but only by losing the shape it now has.)

Notice, incidentally, how the doctrine that the potential intellect, which is like prime matter, can take on a plurality of forms at once, is just the epistemological correlative to the metaphysical doctrine of the plurality of forms discussed in Chapter 43 above. That metaphysical account was a characteristically Platonic/neo-Platonic one.

Notice also that if the potential intellect can take on several forms simultaneously, then the argument for the separability of that intellect, why it cannot be 'mixed with the body', loses much of its efficacy. (See passage (4) in Text 15.) We shall see below what Alfarabi has to say about immortality.
Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

(b) When the potential intellect takes on a form (or several forms), it becomes the *actual* intellect. This is Alexander's "acquired" intellect, or Themistius' "speculative" intellect. It is not the agent intellect.

(c) Alexander also has something he calls the "acquired" intellect (Hyman and Walsh, pp. 216-217). Although we have seen this term in Alexander, Alfarabi's notion is one we haven't seen yet. It's pretty strange, so hang on. Let's start by considering the kinds of things that actually exist in the world.

(i) There are, first of all, material objects. They can be understood insofar as they have in them individual forms, which, until they are made intelligible by abstraction (the agent intellect), are only potentially intelligible.

(ii) So we understand material objects by abstracting their forms. Such a form then becomes an intelligible, not just in potency, but in act - that is, it becomes actually intelligible. Hence it is now one of the "actually" existing things of the world, and so I can understand it too by a kind of reflex act.

In short, first I understand the form insofar as it comes from matter. Then, I understand it insofar as it is intelligible in act.

Now the intelligible form in act, that is, as actually understood, is formally identical with the intellect itself - the actual intellect, in Alfarabi's sense of the term. (This is just good old Aristotelianism. The knower is the known. See Chapter 3 above.) Thus when the intellect understands the forms in the second of the two ways just distinguished, it in fact understands itself. See Hyman and Walsh, p. 216.

When it does this, it becomes what Alfarabi calls the "acquired intellect". But this is not the "acquired intellect" in Alexander's sense of the term. Alfarabi seems to say that this comes about only after the intellect gets all the forms in actuality. That is, the acquired intellect for Alfarabi is the intellect that has reached a complete and thorough understanding of the material world.

All of this sounds pretty strange, to be sure. Nevertheless, you may be surprised to learn, it does have an authentically Aristotelian text to back it up. See passage (8) in Text 1.5 below. Whatever that text meant to Aristotle, this is what happened to it at Alfarabi's hands. Alfarabi wasn't just making it up out of whole cloth.
A Survey of Medieval Philosophy

It is the acquired intellect, in this sense, that for Alfarabi is immortal. With the acquired intellect, we begin to understand things insofar as they are separated from matter. This is the lowest degree of such understanding of immaterial things. As we shall see, there is a kind of neo-Platonic hierarchy here.

(d) Finally, there is the agent intellect. This is separated from matter, as it is for Alexander. And, again in agreement with Alexander, it is one and the same for all people. But, in contrast with Alexander’s doctrine, for Alfarabi the agent intellect is not God.

Here is where the neo-Platonism that gets mixed up into later Aristotelianism becomes quite plain. The neo-Platonic One is identified with Allah or God. It contemplates itself and produces an intellect, which is the first emanation. This intellect is the First Intelligence, which acts as a final cause of the motion of the outermost, all-encompassing celestial sphere.

This First Intelligence in turn produces a Second Intelligence, which moves (as final cause) the sphere of the fixed stars.

And so on. Just exactly how many stages there are in this process is an astronomical question, but here is the basic idea. The First Intelligence is the final cause of the motion of the outermost sphere. The Second Intelligence is the final cause of the motion of the sphere of the fixed stars. In the same way, we have a Third Intelligence going with the sphere of Saturn, a Fourth with the sphere of Jupiter, a Fifth with the sphere of Mars, a Sixth with the sphere of the Sun, a Seventh with Venus, an Eighth with Mercury, a Ninth with the moon, and the Tenth and last Intelligence, which is the final cause of motion down here in the so-called sublunar world.

The sublunar world is the world below the moon in the astronomy of the time. In other words, it is our world, down here on earth. It is the world of generation and corruption. The celestial spheres are subject to local motion, but not to generation or corruption. The Tenth Intelligence is the final cause of the generation and corruption in this sublunar realm. It is the cause of the succession of forms that come and go here. Hence, Avicenna later on would call it the “Dator Formarum” – the “Giver of Forms”. (Actually, he called it something in Arabic, which was then translated as “Dator Formarum”.)

Now why do we need all these stages? Well, there is of course a general neo-Platonic difficulty with seeing how to get plurality out of unity. Lots of people felt that there was something conceptually wrong with doing this in one step. You cannot do it directly. Plurality has to be far removed from the direct activity of the One. Of course, Judaic-Christian doctrine will have none of this. God acts directly on his creation. There is no need for these intermediary intelligences - at least not for this kind of job.
Aristotelian Epistemology and its Arabic Developments

The details of all this are obscure, and need not detain us. But there is one other very important point to notice. This Tenth Intelligence, which Avicenna will later on call the "Dator Formarum", is also the agent intellect for Alfarabi. In short, the Tenth Intelligence not only puts forms into matter, it also puts them into minds, into potential intellects. What it does on the physical level with generation and corruption it does also on the epistemological level too.

Here are two things to notice about Alfarabi's theory:

(1) There is one agent intellect for all people. It is the Dator Formarum or the Tenth Intelligence. It is not God.

(2) Alfarabi's view allows personal immortality in a rather unusual form, via the acquired intellect. But notice that the theory does not guarantee personal immortality. If you don't spend your life getting all those forms into your intellect, you won't make it.

Avicenna

Moving right along, after Alfarabi we come to Avicenna (980-1037). He was about twenty years older than Peter Damian. Anselm was four years old when Avicenna died.

Avicenna was arguably the greatest of all the Arab philosophers, and for that matter one of the greatest philosophers of all time. In his interpretation of Aristotelian psychology, however, he depended almost entirely on Alfarabi. Basically, his schema is the same as Alfarabi's, with the following changes:

(1) Alfarabi's potential intellect is called the "material" intellect, following the earlier terminology of Alexander and Themistius.

(2) Alfarabi's actual intellect is called the intellect in effectu. I'm not sure whether this is really a difference or not - even a terminological one, since I've not yet seen the Latin text of Alfarabi on this point. This peculiar use of the phrase 'in effectu' to mean "actual" or "in act", as opposed to "in potency", is a characteristic Arabism. When you see it in Latin texts, you know that some Arabic influence is operating behind the scenes.
(3) Avicenna has nothing like Alfarabi's acquired intellect.

(4) He does, however, have an intellect in habitu. That is to account for "habitual knowledge", knowledge in the sense in which I can be said to know Latin even when I am asleep and not actually exercising that knowledge. Alfarabi has nothing like this. Aristotle of course has the notion of habitual knowledge, but he doesn't reserve a special kind of intellect for it. I am not sure how Avicenna relates this intellect to the others.

(5) Avicenna also has something called the "given" intellect (intellectus accommodatus), which is the material intellect as receiving the form. Again, I am not clear how this differs from the intellect in effectus except perhaps insofar as a process differs from its result.

Let us now look at some problems with this "Alfarabic-Avicennian" theory:

(a) On this view, how is it that we have to work to acquire knowledge? Why not just sit back and wait on the agent intellect to do its job? Recall that we had exactly the same problem with Augustinian illumination (Chapter 19 above).

Alfarabi tries to answer this (Hyman and Walsh, p. 220, toward the bottom of the page). He says that the matter (that is, the potential intellect) must be "prepared" and "impediments" must be removed. He's right, of course. We do have to work hard to prepare our minds to know. But this is not much of an explanation of that need. Avicenna also talks like this.

(b) The agent intellect does not act on impressed forms received from external physical objects in sensation (the sensible species). It does not do something to them (to wit, make them abstract and universal) and then impress the result on the potential intellect. In other words, the form the agent intellect impresses on the potential intellect is not one it originally got (before "doing something" to it) from the activity of the external, physical object. Rather, it takes it from its own store. That is why is a "Dator Formarum".

In short, the whole tone of this view has changed. We started off with Aristotle, for whom all our knowledge comes ultimately from the senses, and for whom the agent intellect operates on the sensible species acquired from external objects, makes them abstract and then impresses them on the passive intellect. Now the whole thing is turned around. No intellectual knowledge comes from the senses. It is all implanted by the agent intellect, which got it from its own store of forms. The agent intellect did not have its own store of forms for
Aristotelian Epistemology and its Arabic Developments

Aristotle. It was not a warehouse but a processing plant. The whole job of the agent intellect has been radically altered.

What has happened is that Aristotelian texts and Aristotelian terminology have been used to come up with a doctrine that is a virtual duplicate, in more technical terminology, of Augustinian illumination. The only thing that's been added is the hierarchy of intermediary emanations.

Averroes

Finally, let us look at Averroes (1126-1198). Averroes (pronounced Uh-VAIR-oh-case) lived in Moorish - that is, Islamic - Spain, at least for part of his life, whereas Avicenna and the others lived in the Eastern part of Islam.

Averroes was the last of the great Islamic philosophers in the Middle Ages. And, unlike his predecessors, he was a strict Aristotelian, or at least he wanted to be. He wanted to purify Aristotle from the Platonic and neo-Platonic elements that had come to be associated with it.

Averroes wrote a number of commentaries on Aristotle. These commentaries became so well known in the Latin West that Averroes was referred to simply as "the Commentator". (What is the one exception? See Chapter 44 above.)

Averroes thought things had got out of hand. Aristotle's psychology had got just totally turned around by Avicenna and his predecessors.

Averroes argues that, since Aristotle in some places says that the passive intellect is separable from the body and capable of surviving death, and in other passages seems to deny this, obviously he must have had distinct things in mind.

For Averroes, there is indeed an agent intellect and a passive intellect, which he calls the material or possible intellect (using Theismius' terms). They are distinct from one another, as Aristotle had argued. But neither of them is in the soul as one of its faculties. The soul is the form of the body, and like all bodily forms, is destroyed when the body of which it is the form is destroyed. Thus, the soul is not immortal - as a whole, or in any part. The agent and material or possible intellects, therefore, since they survive the death of the body, were never forms of the body or parts of that form. They are separated all along.
Furthermore, Averroes thinks that the agent intellect and the material or possible intellect are both one for all men. It is not that I have my own separated agent and material intellects, and you have yours. We have both have the same agent intellect, and we both have the same material or possible intellect, which is distinct from the agent intellect. I do not know his argument for this.

Furthermore, when Aristotle talks about a passive intellect that is part of the soul and corruptible with the body, he is not talking about the agent or material (possible) intellect. Instead, he is talking about the imagination, the faculty of storing up and presenting sensible species or phantasms. (Imagination here is not just the fancy - it is a combination of that and sensory memory.) This faculty is intimately tied up with sensation. I can imagine in the visual mode - that is, I can picture to myself things I have seen or things I have made up. Similarly, I can imagine aurally, run through a tune in my head. And, since it is so intimately tied up with sensation, and so with the physical organs of sensation, the faculty of imagination dies or is destroyed when those organs die.

Hence, we have a new intellect with Averroes. He calls it the "passive intellect". It is identical with imagination. It is the only thing in the entire psychological apparatus that is personal and private. I have my imagination or passive intellect and you have yours - they are distinct. Just as our bodies are distinct, so too our passive intellects. But the passive intellect is also corruptible. Therefore, there is no personal immortality for Averroes. The only thing personal here is not immortal.

What is the connection between the separated agent and material intellects and the individual knower? Aristotle had held that human knowledge always requires the presence of a sense image, a phantasm or sensible species. (See De anima III, 7, 431a14-17.) For Aristotle, knowledge is derived from these sensible species.

This is so not only for our originally acquiring a concept, but also whenever we use a concept already acquired. There is always some sense image or other that accompanies our thoughts, and from which we read off the abstract concept. Just as geometers use figures, so too here. This is so even when we are dealing with things of which no sensible representation will be adequate or accurate - for instance, the separated substances or geometrically perfect circles.

Now Averroes thinks that the agent and material intellects, which are separated, come into contact with the soul only through the phantasms (images). He realizes the radically non-Aristotelian element in Avicenna's claim that the agent intellect has its own store of concepts. He rejects that view entirely.

For Averroes, the agent intellect has no forms of its own. It takes as its materials, not any forms from its own store, but the phantasms. It acts on them,
Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments

abstracting the universal concept and implanting it in the separated possible intellect.

The materials worked on here are private and personal. They are my own personal sense images (sensible species). The processing plant, however, and the material intellect, where the results are ultimately sent, are common and public, and separated from me. The only connection with me is this very tenuous one: they are my sense images that are being worked on.

The weak spot in this theory is of course the exact nature of the connection between the separated intellects and the imagination. Averroes never works this out very well, and some Latin authors, especially Aquinas, will hit him hard on this very point.
Text 2: Passages from Aristotle’s De anima

The following passages are translated from Aristotle’s De anima, W. D. Ross, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956). They illustrate important features of Aristotle’s epistemology. As always, the translations are my own.

A. II.12 424a17–24

In general, with respect to each sense-modality we must take it that the sense is what is receptive of sensible forms without the matter, as the wax receives the sign of the ring without the iron or gold. It takes on the golden or the brazen sign, but not insofar as [it is] gold or bronze. Likewise too, each [person’s] sense is affected by what has a color or a flavor or a sound, not insofar as each of these is called [by the name of what has the color or flavor or sound], but insofar as it does so, and in proportion [to its doing so].

B. III.2 425b26–426a1

The activity of the sense-object and [that] of the sense-faculty are one and the same, but the being is not the same in the two cases. I mean like the actual sound and the actual hearing. For it is possible for one who has hearing not to be hearing, and what has a sound is not always sounding. But when what is able to hear actually does so and what is able to sound does sound, then the actual hearing and the actual sound come to be together. One might say that the one of these is a “giving a hearing” and the other a sounding.

C. III.4 429a13–18

Now if thinking is like sensing, [then] either it is a being affected by the thought-object or else it is something else similar to this. Hence it must be unaffected and yet receptive of the form [of the object], and potentially this [sense-object] but not [actually] this. As the sensitive [power] is to sense-objects, so too [must] mind [be] to thought-objects.
D. III.4 429a18–25

(Immediately after passage C.)

Hence, since [the mind] thinks all things, it must be unmixed, as Anaxagoras says, in order to rule — that is, in order to know. For [anything] foreign appearing there in addition prevents and blocks [the process of thought]. Thus, it has no nature other than this, that it be able [to receive forms]. Thus, what is called the soul’s “mind” — I mean the mind by which the soul is put in mind [of something] and understands — is in actuality, before it thinks, none of the things that are. Therefore, neither is it reasonable for it to be mixed with the body.

E. III.4 429b4–5

For [there is] no sensitive [power] without the body, but this [mind] is separable.

F. III.4 429b21–22

Therefore, in short, insofar as objects are separable from matter, so it is also with things pertaining to the mind.

G. III.5 430a10–25

(That is, all of Chap. 5)

Since in the case of nature as a whole, there is on the one hand a matter for each genus (this is what [is] potentially [all] those things), [and] on the other hand something else, a cause and maker, since it makes all of them — as for example the art is related to the matter — so too there must be these differences in the soul. there is on the one hand a mind [that is] such by becoming all things, [and] on the other hand [a mind that is such] by making all things, like a certain state such as light. For in a certain way light also makes things that are potentially colors into colors actually. This kind of mind is separable and unaffectable and unmixed, being an activity by its [very] being. For the active is always more worthy than the passive, and the source [more worthy] than the matter. Actual knowledge is the same as [its] object. but in the individual case, potential [knowledge] is prior in time, although as a whole it is not [prior] in time. Rather, [mind] is
not thinking at one time and not thinking at another. When separated, it is only that which it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal. But we do not remember [then], because this [kind of mind] is unaffected, whereas passive mind is corruptible. And without this it thinks about nothing.

H. III.4 429b5–9

But when [the mind] in this way becomes all things, as the actual knower is said [to do] (this occurs when he is able to act on his own), it is even then potential in a way, but not in the way [it was] before learning and discovering. Then it is also able to think about itself.¹

¹ Reading δὲ αὐτὸν instead of the emendation δὲ τ' αὐτοῦ.
Chapter 34: 

The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century 
(And Slightly Before)

In connection with this Chapter, the following are relevant readings. They come to you very highly recommended.


Haskins' book is a classic, quite literally a "celebrated" book. In 1977 there was a symposium celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its publication.

Recall how, in Chapter 28, above, we talked about the revival of almost everything around the year 1000. By the late-eleventh and early-twelfth century, this revival was in full swing. One of the main features of this period of renaissance was the renewal of learning and the emergence of educational institutions. In the Middle Ages, at least after the time of Boethius or thereabouts, there were four main kinds of educational institutions. All but the last are encountered in Peter Abelard's Story of My Adversities. Please read that volume in connection with the present section. We won't be talking about Abelard directly for a while yet, but we are already talking about his time. The four main kinds of educational institutions were:

(i) Monastic Schools. From the earliest days of monasticism, there were schools associated with the monasteries. This was largely due to the influence of Cassiodorus (the successor of Boethius as Magister officiorum), who wrote on the monastic ideal. Basically, these monastic schools were for the training of young monks, and also for the education of children entrusted to their care - for
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

example, by noblemen - whether destined for the religious life or not. Under Charlemagne in the ninth century, there was an attempt made to encourage educational institutions in general, including monastic schools. While these monastic schools have never entirely disappeared even to this day, their period of greatest importance ended around 1150. Anselm’s school at Bec in Normandy was one of these monastic schools. The Monologion and Proslologion were written in the context of that school.

Recall from Abelard’s Adversities how William of Champeaux was driven out of Paris by Abelard’s dialectical skills, and retired to the abbey of St. Victor, where he “founded” (actually, he just reorganized) the School of St. Victor. This was another one of the monastic schools. The masters of this school became quite well known in the late-twelfth century. They are collectively known as the “Victorines”. The most important of them are:

(a) Hugh of St. Victor, the author of a Didascalicon on the various liberal arts. (This has been translated into English by Jerome Taylor, The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts.) Hugh (or Hugo in Latin) was a theologian and an antidialectician. He was also a “speculative mystic” - that is, a mystic who wrote serious theoretical treatises about what was going on in mysticism. (Note: The tradition we call “speculative mysticism” goes back to include Bernard of Clairvaux, the Cistercian monk who attacked Abelard so strongly.)

(b) Richard of St. Victor, who succeeded Hugh as master of the school. Richard wrote an important treatise on the Trinity, the first serious alternative to Augustine’s approach in the latter’s own De trinitate. Like Hugh, Richard too was also an important speculative mystic. But, unlike Hugh, Richard was much more of a dialectician. He apparently even wrote a treatise of his own on logic but, at last report, it has not survived. (I put it that way because these things are constantly being recovered by scholars.)

(2) Cathedral Schools, or Episcopal Schools. The terms mean the same thing. These were schools associated with a cathedral. A "cathedral" is not just any big church; a "cathedral" is the official home-church of a bishop. Cathedrals were not monasteries, and bishops were not abbots. Monasticism belonged (and still does belong) to an entirely different hierarchical structure. Monks were part of the "regular" clergy - that is, the clergy who lived under a regula or "rule", such as the Rule of St. Benedict. Bishops and ordinary parish priests belong to what is called the "secular clergy" (a term that often baffles people) - that is, those who
do not live under a common "rule", generally in a kind of retirement from the world, but rather live out there among the flock, in the world, who belong to the "age" (saeculum = "age, generation"). In theory the monasteries were independent of the bishops. But then in theory they were independent of the local feudal lord too.

Part of Charlemagne's educational legislation stipulated that every bishop was to have his school. In fact, however, this seldom really happened until much later. These schools were run by a school "master". They were intended for the education of the (secular) clerics destined for the priesthood. There was a group of priests associated with the cathedral, who functioned in various administrative capacities. They were called "canons", and the group as a whole was called a "chapter". Often the chapter followed a kind of rule, very much like monks. (The distinctions tend to get a bit technical at this point.) The canons usually had charge of the school.

Such cathedral or episcopal schools flourished from roughly 1000 to roughly 1200. William of Champeaux ran the cathedral school at Paris when Abelard went to study under him. See Abelard's Adversities, p. 12. Also the school of Anselm of Laon (not the same as Anselm of Canterbury), where Anselm went to study theology, was a cathedral school. See Adversities, p. 21. The very important School of Chartres, of which we will be hearing more later, may have been another important cathedral school. (I say "may have been". It was definitely important. The question is whether it was strictly a cathedral school, or even whether there was a real school there at all. There is some scholarly dispute over this.)

(3) Individual masters. In some cases, individual scholars would go off somewhere and found a school. They would hire a hall and advertise for students. Such "individual masters" relied entirely on their own skills and popularity. Often the masters moved around from place to place, sometimes taking their students with them. Abelard's own school at Melun (about 1107) was an "individual masters's" school of this kind. Apparently, Roscelin had run a similar school earlier. This peculiar kind of institution flourished from around 1050 to around 1150.

(4) Universities. Frequently, universities grew out of cathedral schools, as happened for instance at Paris. Basically, what makes a university distinct from a cathedral school is an official charter, from either a royal or an ecclesiastical authority. Universities began to grow up from c. 1150 on in Italy - the first one was at Bologna - and from around 1200 on in France. The great English universities were somewhat later, first Oxford and then Cambridge.
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

The university is one of the two great mediaeval institutions to survive more or less intact to the present day. The other one, of course, is Parliament.

The great classic work on the history of the universities is by Hastings Rashdall (yes, he is the same as the philosopher who wrote on ethics), *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*. The original edition was in 1895, but it was reprinted in 1936. This work is now quite dated, of course, and flawed in many ways. But never mind, it is still a great work. All subsequent work on this topic owes a big debt to Rashdall.

By the mid-twelfth century, a number of works of Greek learning were being translated into Latin, not all of them by any means philosophical works. There were basically four points of contact between the Latin West and the Greek East during this period:

1. Syria, after the first crusade (1076). Things that came from this source were most exotic and occult works.

2. Sicily, which was a melting-pot of Latins, Greeks, Hebrews and Arabs. Euclid was translated here, and other mathematical works. Also some medical texts.

3. Constantinople. A few Western scholars went there, notably one James of Venice in the twelfth century, a major translator of the rest of Aristotle's logical works. (Recall that the first bits of Aristotle came via Boethius.) There were other translations of these works too, but James of Venice's became pretty much the standard versions. By and large, despite James of Venice, the political climate prevailing between the West and Constantinople did not favor this kind of contact at this time. Furthermore, as far as philosophy was concerned, things were pretty bleak in Constantinople in the twelfth century.

4. Spain. Ah yes, there's a big story to be told here. I will tell it later, together with more on Sicily and Constantinople.
Chapter 44:

Translations and the Rise of Universities

Note: It's going to be hard to keep all these names straight. But do it anyway.

Select Bibliography


F. C. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Ch. 10. (Much of what I say below about the universities comes from here.)


Bernard G. Dod, "Aristoteles latinus", in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Ch. 3, pp. 80-98.
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

Translators

See also Chapter 33 above.

At Constantinople

James of Venice (Johannes Venetus), translated c. 1128 Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics and Sophistical Refutations. Abelard at one point notes that he has actually seen a copy of the new translation of the Sophistical Refutations. These texts completed the translation of Aristotle's logical works - collectively known as the Organon (Greek for "tool"). The newly translated works were called the logica nova (= "new logic"), in contrast to the works available before the middle of the twelfth century, including Aristotle's Categories and De interpretatione, Porphyry's Isagoge, and Boethius' commentaries and original works, all of which were collectively known as the logica vetus (= "old logic"). (See Chapter 20 above.) James of Venice's translations were made directly from the Greek. Boethius himself appears to have translated the Aristotelian works that came to be included in the logica nova, but his translations were never in wide circulation.

Sicily

Henricus Aristippus (d. 1162), Archdeacon of Catania, translated Book IV of Aristotle's On Meteors directly from Greek into Latin. He also seems to have translated Plato's (NOTE THIS!) Meno and Phaedo - although I don't know of anyone who ever cited them.

Also at Sicily in the twelfth century, there were translations done of Ptolemy, Euclid, and of Proclus' Elementaria physica. All of these were done directly from the Greek.

Spain

There was a very important school of translators at Toledo, under the direction of Archbishop Raymond (1126-1151, although the school survived him). These very important and famous translators included:
John of Spain (Aveadeath, or Avendahuth - accent on the second syllable), who translated Avicenna's *Logic* from Arabic into Latin via Spanish. The Spanish was a *vocal link*. There were two people involved here. One would read the Arabic text, translating it aloud at sight into Old Spanish. The other would listen to the Old Spanish and translate it on hearing into Latin. You can imagine what kind of translation this yielded.

Dominic Gundissalinus (Gundisalvi, the old form of "Gonzales"). He translated Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, part of his *Physics*, *De sufficiencia, De caelo et mundo*, and his *De mundo*. Also Alghazi's *Metaphysics* and Alfarabi's *De scientiis*. Together with John of Spain, Gundissalinus translated Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae*. All of this was done from Arabic into Latin. Gundissalinus was also the author of some original philosophical works of his own.

Gerard of Cremona, who began work at Toledo in 1134, and died in 1187. He translated Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* together with Themistius' commentary on it. This had already been translated by James of Venice directly from Greek. Gerard also did Aristotle's *Physics* (this too was preceded by a translation directly from Greek), the *De caelo et mundo, De generatione et corruptione* (also preceded by a translation from Greek), and his *On Meteors*, Books I-III (see above on Henricus Aristippus at Sicily for Book IV). He also translated Alkindi's *De intellectu, De somno et visione*, and *De quinque essentiae*. Also the very important *Liber de causis*, falsely attributed to Aristotle. In fact, this work was a commentary on certain theses extracted from Proclus' *Institutio theologica*. The fact that for a long time people thought this text was genuine Aristotle goes to show how little historical sense they had for Aristotle's thought - *but only at first*. (See below on William of Moerbeke.) All these texts were translated from *Arabic* into Latin.

Note that, in the case of the Aristotelian texts, these translations from Latin involved quite a long and circuitous route from the original Greek. Recall how, after the closing of the pagan schools at Athens by the Christian Emperor Justinian after the death of Proclus, the Greek pagan scholars fled eastward, to Persia and Syria and that vicinity. (See Chapter 26 above.) Many of the texts of Greek philosophy were then translated into Syriac. Later, during the great period of Arabic culture, they were further translated from Syriac into Arabic. (Some were translated directly from Greek into Arabic, skipping the Syriac link.) Now we see that they are translated once again, from Arabic into Latin, with perhaps in some cases a *vocal link* through Old Spanish. (See above on John of Spain.) It is not hard to guess how the texts fared after all this.
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

Michael Scot (Scotus), died 1235. A later member of the Toledo school. He did Aristotle's *De caelo et mundo*, *De anima* (there was an earlier translation directly from Greek), *Parva naturailia* (the 'Little Naturals' - that is, Aristotle's zoological works), and probably his *Physics*. (That is, probably it was Michael Scot who did this version. There was a distinct translation done by Gerard of Cremona.) He also translated Averroes' commentary on the *De caelo et mundo* and on the *De anima* (an immensely important commentary). Also Avicenna's compendium of *De animalibus*. All these were done from Arabic into Latin. (See the remarks above on translations of Aristotle's works from the Arabic.)

Either Michael Scot or Gerard of Cremona translated Aristotle's *Metaphysics* from Arabic. There had been an earlier version from the Greek, which then became known as the *Metaphysica vetus* (= the 'Old Metaphysics'), as opposed to the new translation from the Arabic, which was known as the *Metaphysica nova* (= the 'New Metaphysics'). This new translation lacked Books K, M and N.

Herman the German (his name also rhymes in Latin: Hermanus Alemannus - died 1272 as bishop of Astorga). He translated Averroes' "middle commentary" on the *Nichomachean Ethics*. (Averroes wrote short commentaries or "epitomes", middle-length commentaries, and full-blown, no-holds-barred commentaries, frequently one of each kind on a given work.) Herman also translated Averroes' compendium of the *Nichomachean Ethics* and his commentary on the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* of Aristotle. All these were done from Arabic.

*Other important translators*

Robert Grosseteste. His name means "fathead". Some people prefer to say it means "Greathead", but they probably also prefer to say that 'Mardi Gras' means "Great Tuesday". Grosseteste was Bishop of Lincoln, and so is often cited in the manuscripts simply as "Lincolnensis". He died in 1253. Grosseteste translated (or saw to it that a translation was done of) Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* in its entirety directly from Greek. This was done c. 1240. Books II and III of the *Ethics* were extant in Latin as early as the twelfth century in another translation from the Greek. (These may actually be translations by Boethius.) Book I was translated already in the early-thirteenth century. Books II-III were called the *Old Ethics* and Book I was called the *New Ethics*. Grosseteste also translated the commentary on the *Ethics* by the Greek author Eustatius of Nicae. Get his name down! Whenever you see the someone described simply as "the Commentator" on Aristotle in a mediaeval text, it is Averroes who is being
Translations and the Rise of Universities

referred to. Averroes' commentaries were so impressive that he was known simply as "the Commentator", just as Aristotle himself came to be known simply as "the Philosopher". But there was one exception: the Nichomachean Ethics, where the "Commentator" was Eustratius of Nicaea, and not Averroes. If you ever run across a reference that goes "as the Commentator says on the Ethics", that's not Averroes but Eustratius. (Just a little trick of the trade.)


William of Moerbeke (c. 1215-1286). An extremely important translator late in the game. Moerbeke reworked existing translations, translated several works all over again, and translated several works for the first time. In all cases, he worked from the Greek, not from the Arabic. His translations are fairly reliable and pretty good. William was an associate of Thomas Aquinas. There is some doubt about whether the two ever actually met, but in any event many of Aquinas' own commentaries on Aristotle were based on William's translations. He translated Aristotle's Metaphysics, c. 1260. When this new translated appeared, it usurped the title "Metaphysica nova" from the earlier translation by Gerard of Cremona (or Michael Scot, whichever it was). William also translated the De anima (see Michael Scot), and the Politics (which had not previously been translated). Finally, he translated Proclus' Elements of Theology. It was this latter translation that enabled Aquinas to come to the realization that the Liber de causis (see Gerard of Cremona) was in fact not by Aristotle. Aquinas was apparently the first person to realize this. For some reason, however, it wasn't until the Renaissance that Lorenzo Valla realized, on the basis of this same work of Proclus, that Pseudo-Denis was not who he purported to be.

Note that Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle did not begin to make themselves felt in the intellectual community (which, for practical purposes, meant the University of Paris) until the 1230s. Avicenna, on the other hand, was influential on the Latins somewhat earlier.
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

Universities

See also Chapter 33 above.

Universities grew out of cathedral schools. An important cathedral school drew students from all over Europe. Such a school became known as a studium generale. Some of these studia generalia survived and became known as "universities". At first, the term 'universitas' referred to the "entirety" or "universality" of the faculty and students. As the term gradually came to be used, a "university" was one of these major, international schools that was distinguished from others by its possessing an official charter (granted by the king or by the Church), a set of statutes, and an established form of governing itself.

The University of Paris was the premier university in Europe in the thirteenth century. Its statutes were officially approved by Robert de Courçon, the papal legate, in 1215. The official founding of the University is usually put at this date, although it is clear that the statutes existed earlier. Oxford and Cambridge also date from the early-thirteenth century, although their period of greatest vigor came in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth century. Toulouse was founded in 1229 by papal charter. Salamanca was founded by royal charter in 1200. There were also universities in Italy - indeed, Bologna was the first university in Europe. (Bologna had the peculiarity of being a student-run university.)

Universities were divided into "faculties". The four most common ones were the faculties of arts, law, medicine and theology. Most universities had arts faculties, in addition to one or more of the others. The arts faculty was for the basic training of students, before they proceeded to one of the "higher" faculties. Bologna was primarily a law-university. Others were primarily for medicine. Paris had all four faculties. At Paris, theology was considered the highest of the four. You were quite a somebody if you succeeded in getting a doctorate in theology at Paris.

Students started in the University much earlier than is the custom today - around fourteen or fifteen years of age. They studied in the arts faculty for six years. Although this turn in the arts faculty was in theory supposed to ground the student in all the "liberal arts", it in fact was mostly concerned with the arts of grammar and logic - particularly Aristotle, of course. The study of literature had practically disappeared. During this six year stint, a student could become a "bachelor" (the origin of our "bachelor's degree"), which entitled him to perform certain teaching tasks of a menial nature. After his training, he could become a
"master", but not before he was twenty. The masters were the teachers in the arts faculty. One who was awarded a master's chair was obliged to teach actively for a period of time (some two years) before he left it to enter one of the "higher" faculties - which he almost always did. There were very few career-masters in the faculty of arts. One of the conspicuous exceptions in the fourteenth century was John Buridan, who taught in the arts faculty at Paris for some forty years or so. There was, on the whole, a constant turnover in the teaching staff of the faculty of arts.

After fulfilling his obligations as a Master of Arts, a student could proceed to one of the other faculties. If he went into theology, his training lasted for another eight years, a period which was later made even longer. Four years were spent on the Bible, and another two commenting on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, a standard textbook compiled in the twelfth century, and consisting of a compilation of texts from the Church Fathers (especially Augustine) on various matters. (For Peter, see Chapter 36 above.) After these six years, the student became a "bachelor" of theology (as distinct from a bachelor of arts, of course), lectured for two years on the Bible and another year on the *Sentences*. After another four or five years he could become a master or doctor of theology - if he still had the energy and was not yet in his dotage. All these regulations were of course constantly being changed, but this is enough to give you the general idea.

When the newly translated works of Aristotle first appeared at the University of Paris, it was in the faculty of arts. The works were clearly not law or medicine (some of them might be stretched a bit to count as medicine, but they were not the ones that were influential first), and they were not theology in the traditional sense of "Sacred Doctrine", although of course some of Aristotle's writings had theological consequences. Some of these consequences were thought to be dangerous and heretical (and they were). So in 1210, a provincial synod at Paris ruled that Aristotle's "natural theology" could not be "read" in the faculty of arts at Paris. To "read" here means to "lecture on", either in public or in private tutorials. It doesn't mean that students and masters couldn't study these works in the privacy of their own chambers. In 1215, when Robert de Courçon approved the statutes of the University of Paris, there was a statute forbidding the arts professors from lecturing on Aristotelian metaphysics and natural science, or "summaries" of them (this probably refers to Avicenna's "compendia" of Aristotle, since it was far too early for Averroes to have been meant). In 1231, Pope Gregory IX ordered that the works prohibited in 1210 not be used until they could be examined by a theological commission to remove any errors. In 1245, Innocent IV extended the prohibitions of 1210 and 1215 to the University of Toulouse. Oxford was never affected by this ban. For that matter,
neither was Paris, really. By the 1250s, people were openly lecturing on everything they had of Aristotle's.

Why were these prohibitions issued? In part it was out of a genuine concern for the purity of the faith. Aristotelianism was thought, and rightly so, to be theologically suspect. And remember, people were just getting acquainted with Aristotle. They weren't altogether sure yet just what he meant and just what the implications were. The Church authorities, and the people in the faculty of theology, didn't want the teenagers in the faculty of arts to get all carried away with this new philosophical pagan - at least not until the theologians had had a chance to think about it a bit for themselves, and to assimilate it.

That's the good part, the genuine concern for the "care of souls". But there was also a great deal of just plain jealousy involved too. A popular arts master who gave exciting lectures on this new philosophical daredevil, Aristotle, was likely to find his wings clipped by the higher-ups in the University hierarchy. Keep the basic ideas of this University structure in mind when we get to the extremely important Condemnation of 1277 - coming soon to this theater.
FOREWORD

Often the hearts of men and women are stirred, as likewise they are soothed in their sorrows, more by example than by words. And therefore, because I too have known some consolation from speech had with one who was a witness thereof, am I now minded to write of the sufferings which have sprung out of my misfortunes, for the eyes of one who, though absent, is of himself ever a consoler. This I do so that, in comparing your sorrows with mine, you may discover that yours are in truth nought, or at the most but of small account, and so shall you come to bear them more easily.

CHAPTER I

OF THE BIRTHPLACE OF PIERRE ABÉLARD AND OF HIS PARENTS

Know, then, that I am come from a certain town which was built on the way into lesser Brittany, distant some eight miles, as I think, eastward from the city of Nantes, and in its own tongue called Palets. Such is the nature of that country, or, it may be, of them who dwell there — for in truth they are quick in fancy — that my mind bent itself easily to the study of letters. Yet more, I had a father who had won some smattering of letters before he had girded on the soldier’s belt. And so it came about that long afterwards his love thereof was so strong that he saw to it that each son of his should be taught in letters even earlier than in the management of arms. Thus indeed did it come to pass. And because I was his first born, and for that reason the more dear to him, he sought with double diligence to have me wisely taught. For my part, the more I went forward in the study of letters, and ever more easily, the greater became the ardour of my devotion to them, until in truth I was so enthralled by my
passion for learning that, gladly leaving to my brothers the pomp of glory in arms, the right of heritage and all the honours that should have been mine as the eldest born, I fled utterly from the court of Mars that I might win learning in the bosom of Minerva. And since I found the armory of logical reasoning more to my liking than the other forms of philosophy, I exchanged all other weapons for these, and to the prizes of victory in war I preferred the battle of minds in disputation. Thenceforth, journeying through many provinces, and debating as I went, going whithersoever I heard that the study of my chosen art most flourished, I became such an one as the Peripatetics.

CHAPTER II

OF THE PERSECUTION HE HAD FROM HIS MASTER WILLIAM OF CHAMPEAUX — OF HIS ADVENTURES AT MELUN, AT CORBEIL AND AT PARIS — OF HIS WITHDRAWAL FROM THE CITY OF THE PARISIANS TO MELUN, AND HIS RETURN TO MONT STE. GENEVIÈVE — OF HIS JOURNEY TO HIS OLD HOME

I came at length to Paris, where above all in those days the art of dialectics was most flourishing, and there did I meet William of Champeaux, my teacher, a man most distinguished in his science both by his renown and by his true merit. With him I remained for some time, at first indeed well liked of him; but later I brought him great grief, because I undertook to refute certain of his opinions, not infrequently attacking him in disputation, and now and then in these debates I was adjudged victor. Now this, to those among my fellow students who were ranked foremost, seemed all the more insufferable because of my youth and the brief duration of my studies.

Out of this sprang the beginning of my misfortunes, which have followed me even to the present day; the more widely my fame was spread abroad, the more bitter was the envy that was kindled against me. It was given out that I, presuming on my gifts far beyond the warranty of my youth, was aspiring despite my tender, years to the leadership of a school; nay, more, that I was making read the very place in which I would undertake this task, the place being none other than the castle of Melun, at that time a royal seat. My teacher himself had some foreknowledge of this, and tried to remove my school as far as possible from his own. Working in secret, he sought in every way he could before I left his following to bring to nought the school I had planned and the place I had chosen for it. Since, however, in that very place he had many rivals, and some of them men of influence among the great ones of the land, relying on their aid I won to the fulfillment of my wish; the support of many was secured for me by reason of his own unconcealed envy. From this small inception of my school, my fame in the art of dialectics began to spread
abroad, so that little by little the renown, not alone of those who had been my fellow students, but of our very teacher himself, grew dim and was like to die out altogether. Thus it came about that, still more confident in myself, I moved my school as soon as I well might to the castle of Corbeil, which is hard by the city of Paris, for there I knew there would be given more frequent chance for my assaults in our battle of disputation. No long time thereafter I was smitten with a grievous illness, brought upon me by my immoderate zeal for study. This illness forced me to turn homeward to my native province, and thus for some years I was as if cut off from France. And yet, for that very reason, I was sought out all the more eagerly by those whose hearts were troubled by the lore of dialectics. But after a few years had passed, and I was whole again from my sickness, I learned that my teacher, that same William Archdeacon of Paris, had changed his former garb and joined an order of the regular clergy. This he had done, or so men said, in order that he might be deemed more deeply religious, and so might be elevated to a loftier rank in the prelacy, a thing which, in truth, very soon came to pass, for he was made bishop of Châlons. Nevertheless, the garb he had donned by reason of his conversion did nought to keep him away either from the city of Paris or from his wonted study of philosophy; and in the very monastery wherein he had shut himself up for the sake of religion he straightway set to teaching again after the same fashion as before.

To him did I return, for I was eager to learn more of rhetoric from his lips; and in the course of our many arguments on various matters, I compelled him by most potent reasoning first to alter his former opinion on the subject of the universals, and finally to abandon it altogether. Now, the basis of this old concept of his regarding the reality of universal ideas was that the same quality formed the essence alike of the abstract whole and of the individuals which were its parts: in other words, that there could be no essential differences among these individuals, all being alike save for such variety as might grow out of the many accidents of existence. Thereafter, however, he corrected this opinion, no longer maintaining that the same quality was the essence of all things, but that, rather, it manifested itself in them through diverse ways. This problem of universals is ever the most vexed one among logicians, to such a degree, indeed, that even Porphyry, writing in his “Isagoge” regarding universals, dared not attempt a final pronouncement thereon, saying rather: “This is the deepest of all problems of its kind.” Wherefore it followed that when William had first revised and then finally abandoned altogether his views on this one subject, his lecturing sank into such a state of negligent reasoning that it could scarce be called lecturing on the science of dialectics at all; it was as if all his science had been bound up in this one question of the nature of universals. Thus it came about that my teaching won such strength and authority that even those who before had clung most vehemently to my former master, and most bitterly attacked my doctrines, now flocked to my school. The very man who had succeeded to my master’s chair in the Paris school offered me his post, in order that he might
put himself under my tutelage along with all the rest, and this in the very place where of old his master and mine had reigned. And when, in so short a time, my master saw me directing the study of dialectics there, it is not easy to find words to tell with what envy he was consumed or with what pain he was tormented. He could not long, in truth, bear the anguish of what he felt to be his wrongs, and shrewdly he attacked me that he might drive me forth. And because there was nought in my conduct whereby he could come at me openly, he tried to steal away the school by launching the vilest calumnies against him who had yielded his post to me, and by putting in his place a certain rival of mine. So then I returned to Melun, and set up my school there as before; and the more openly his envy pursued me, the greater was the authority it conferred upon me. Even so held the poet: “Jealousy aims at the peaks; the winds storm the loftiest summits.” (Ovid: “Remedy for Love,” I, 369.)

Not long thereafter, when William became aware of the fact that almost all his students were holding grave doubts as to his religion, and were whispering earnestly among themselves about his conversion, deeming that he had by no means abandoned this world, he withdrew himself and his brotherhood, together with his students, to a certain estate far distant from the city. Forthwith I returned from Melun to Paris, hoping for peace from him in the future. But since, as I have said, he had caused my place to be occupied by a rival of mine, I pitched the camp, as it were, of my school outside the city on Mont Ste. Geneviève. Thus I was as one laying siege to him who had taken possession of my post. No sooner had my master heard of this than he brazenly returned post haste to the city, bringing back with him such students as he could, and reinstating his brotherhood in their former monastery, much as if he would free his soldiery, whom he had deserted, from my blockade. In truth, though, if it was his purpose to bring them succour, he did nought but hurt them. Before that time my rival had indeed had a certain number of students, of one sort and another, chiefly by reason of his lectures on Priscian, in which he was considered of great authority. After our master had returned, however, he lost nearly all of these followers, and thus was compelled to give up the direction of the school. Not long thereafter, apparently despairing further of worldly fame, he was converted to the monastic life.

Following the return of our master to the city, the combats in disputation which my scholars waged both with him himself and with his pupils, and the successes which fortune gave to us, and above all to me, in these wars, you have long since learned of through your own experience. The boast of Ajax, though I speak it more temperately, I still am bold enough to make:

... if fain you would learn now
How victory crowned the battle, by him was
I never vanquished.

(Ovid, Metamorphoses, XIII, 89.)
But even were I to be silent, the fact proclaims itself, and its outcome reveals the truth regarding it.
Chapter 42:

The School of Chartres

With this Chapter, please read also the passages in Volume II, Text 16, below.

For the type of school this "School of Chartres" may have been, see Chapter 34 above. I say "may" have been, because there is some scholarly dispute over whether there was really anything like an official "school" at Chartres. In any case, the term will serve as a convenient name for a group of authors who certainly do belong together. For how this group fits in with what was going on in the period generally, see Chapter 36 above. For the relation between certain of the texts below and William of Champeaux's views on universals, see Chapter 40 above.

Bernard of Chartres

Bernard of Chartres (see Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, pp. 619-620 n. 21) held a view like this: There are three real (kinds of) things. They are: God, the Ideas, and matter. They are simple. Composite things seem to be real, but aren't. Nevertheless, the component elements of composite beings truly are, namely, the Ideas and matter. On going more deeply into the question, however, it turns out that the Ideas are not directly mixed with matter. Rather there are in matter certain formae nativae ("native forms", inborn or innate forms), like unto the Ideas. Compare the standard analogy of the form left in the wax by a seal-ring. The ring is like the
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

Idea, the impression is a *forma nativa*. The *formae nativae* are diversified by their contact with matter. (You have two different impressions of the seal-ring because you have two different globs of wax.) This sounds very much like Gilbert of Poitiers: the *formae nativae* are all numerically distinct, and yet all alike insofar as they imitate the same Idea - come from the same seal-ring. Nevertheless, Bernard calls the *Ideas* "universals". (Whether they count as "universals" in the Boethian sense depends on how you interpret the Boethian requirement that universals "constitute the substance" of the things to which they are common.)

Gilbert of Poitiers

See the passages in Volume II, Text 16, below. Note that in Gilbert's terminology, a "subsistence" is what Bernard of Chartres called a "native form", while a "subsistent" is what has a native form or subsistence, namely, the material composite object. The point of paragraph (28) of the translation is that diversity is not the same as difference. Two things that are "different" must share a common genus. (Recall, species = genus + difference.) Diversity, however, does not require this, and so is the more inclusive notion. This terminological convention is found very often in the Middle Ages, although you can't rely on it. Sometimes authors will explain this terminology very nicely, and then go right ahead and say that two Aristotelian *categories*, for instance, are "different".

In order to get the point of paragraph 24 of the translation (from Gilbert's commentary on Boethius' *De trinitate*, I, 5), you have to realize that the etymological basis for the term 'individual' is "undivided" or "indivisible". An individual is that which cannot be further divided. Gilbert says in paragraph 24 that the "subsistences" (Bernard's "native forms"), by which things are, are not individuals but rather "individues". (I'm sorry, but that's the only way I could bring out the etymological connections here.) They are "divisible", after a fashion, insofar as they are similar to, or "con-formed" to (I have broken up the word to emphasize the sense Gilbert gives it: "of like form with") other subsistences. Thus, Socrates' humanity "con-forms" to Plato's. Notice that this is a pretty weak sense of being divisible. Gilbert's "subsistences" are definitely not divisible in the way a Boethian universal would be, or a universal according to William of Champeaux's first theory. Still, Socrates' humanity is an *exact duplicate* of
Plato's humanity, and Gilbert apparently thinks that such "duplicability" is enough divisibility to keep a subsistence from being an "individual".

Note also that Gilbert says not only that "subsistences", by which things are, are "dividuals", but also that the things that have those subsistences, the "subsistents", are also "dividuals" ("... not only the things that are, but also the things by which they are con-formed ... "). In other words, Socrates and Plato are not individuals for Gilbert. They can be divided. In this case, the divisibility is not at all hard to see. Socrates and Plato are integral wholes, made up of parts, and can be divided into those parts. We don't have to think in terms of dismemberment here. It is enough to note that Socrates and Plato consist of matter together with "native forms" or "subsistences".

A true individual for Gilbert would have to be absolutely simple, not internally made up of parts, and not duplicable. Recall the remarks above about which things really are, according to Bernard of Chartres.
Text 12: Selections from Anselm's Correspondence concerning Roscelin

The first three passages are translated from S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera omnia, F. S. Schmitt, ed., vol. 3. The fourth passage is from vol. 2.

A. Letter 128: From John the Monk, to Anselm


To his lord and father Anselm, brother John his servant and son — with respect to the lord a servant, with respect to the father a son.

We surely know, reverend father, we truly know that your keenness [of mind] is of use in untying even those knots of Scripture where many other people are found wanting. Hence, for the common advantage of catholics, let your diligence not disdain to write to me and certain others what the faith and simple prudence, and your prudent simplicity, think about the three [persons] of the deity.

For Roscelin of Compiègne raises the following problem: If the three persons are only one thing and not three things on their own, like three angels or three souls, in such a way that nevertheless they are the same in will and power, therefore the Father and Holy Spirit were incarnated along with the Son. He says that the lord Archbishop Lanfranc had granted this statement and that you grant it in arguing the point with him. But Saint Augustine’s simile of trinity and unity in the case of the sun, which is one and the same thing and contains heat and brightness inseparably within itself, is altogether opposed to the simile of trinity and identity in the case of three angels and three souls.

May your integrity be preserved safe and sound [both] now and in the future by the three-in-one God who is our topic. Amen.

B. Letter 129: Anselm’s Reply


To [his] lord and dear brother John, brother Anselm [sends the wish that you] always advance to better things.
I have delayed so long in replying to the letter Your Amiability sent me, about the [man] who says that the three persons in God are three things, or else the Father and the Holy Spirit were incarnated together with the Son, because I wanted to speak about this matter more fully. But because many engagements have prevented me since I got your letter, I have been unable [to do so]. In the meantime, therefore, I am replying briefly. But I plan to treat this topic at greater length in the future if God deigns to grant me the opportunity.

Now when he calls the three persons “things,” he means [that] to be understood either with respect to three relations — that is, insofar as God is called Father and Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son — or else with respect to the fact that he is called God.

But if [it is] the three relations he says are three “things,” there is no point in [his] saying this. For no one denies that the three persons are three “things” in that sense. Nevertheless, [this must be taken] in such a way that it be carefully understood how these relations are called “things” and what kind of “things,” and whether or not [these] same relations make some [difference] in the substance, as many accidents do.

Even so, it seems he does not understand the three “things” he mentions in this sense, because he adds [the claim] that there is [only] one will and power for [all] three persons. For these three persons do not have [their] will and power insofar as [they are] relations but insofar as each person is God.

But if he says the three persons are three “things” insofar as each person is God, [then] either he means to set up three gods or else he does not understand what he is saying.

For the present, let these things suffice to indicate to Your Amiability what I think about the view mentioned. Stay well always.

[P. S.] As for your request to visit me before you start out for Rome, rest assured that I would wish [for that] with pleasure, as far as [my] love for Your Grace is concerned. But, as far as I can see, it would be of little use to you — and in fact an obstacle for you — because of my many engagements. For I feel quite strongly that unless you stay with the bishop until you start out, he will be of little or no help in what you must do. And I cannot do anything to assist [you] in making [your] trip.

C. Letter 136: To Fulco, Bishop of Beauvais

Schmitt ed., pp. 279–81. Written after Letter 129, but before the Council of Soissons in 1092, in which Roscelin’s views were condemned.
My very dear lord and friend, the reverend Bishop Fulco of Beauvais, brother Anselm, called the abbot of Bec, [sends his] greeting.

I hear, although I cannot believe it without [some] doubt, that Roscelin the cleric is saying that in God the three persons are three things, separated from one another like three angels, but in such a way that [their] will and power is one [for all], or else the Father and the Holy Spirit were incarnated [too]. If [common] usage permitted it, [he goes on,] we could truly say there are three gods. He claims that Archbishop Lanfranc, of venerable memory, held this view, and that I do [now].

Because of this, I was told, a council is to be gathered together soon by reverend Rainaldus, Archbishop of Rheims. So, because I suppose Your Reverence will be in attendance there, I want you to be prepared for what should be replied in my defense, if the occasion should demand [it].

His life, known to many religious and wise men, is enough to acquit Archbishop Lanfranc from this accusation. And his absence and death denies [the opportunity for] any new charge against him. But as for me, I want all men to have [my] true opinion, as follows.

I hold the things we confess in the Creed, when we say, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator,”¹ and “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker,”² and “Whosoever wants to be saved, above all he must hold the catholic faith,”³ along with the [words] that follow [these opening lines]. These three principles of the Christian confession, which I have here set out, I so believe them (I say) with my heart and confess with my mouth, that I am certain anyone who wants to deny any of these things, whether he is a man or an angel — and anyone specifically who asserts as the truth the blasphemy that I maintained above I have heard [to be] said by Roscelin — is anathema.

In support of this, let me say: Let him be anathema as long as he keeps up this stubbornness. For he is not a Christian at all. If he was baptized and raised among Christians, he is not to be listened to in any way. No explanation of his error is to be required from him, or [from us] to him of our [own] truth. Rather, as soon as his treachery comes to be known beyond doubt, either let him anathematize the venom he vomits forth in his utterances, or else let him be anathematized by all catholics if he does not come to his senses.

It is completely senseless and stupid to call back again into the doubt of shaky questions, because of every single [person] who fails to understand, what has been most solidly founded on a firm rock. For our faith is to be defended by reason against the impious, but not against those who acknowledge that they rejoice in the honor of the name ‘Christian’. From the latter it is rightly to be demanded that they unshakably maintain
the commitment they made in [their] baptism; but to the former it is to be shown in a reasonable way how unreasonably they scorn us.

For a Christian ought to progress through faith to understanding, not to approach faith through understanding, or if he cannot understand, to depart from the faith. But when he can reach understanding, he is delighted; when he cannot [do this], he venerates what he cannot grasp.

I insist that this letter of mine be taken by Your Holiness to the aforesaid council. Or, if perhaps you will not be going, I insist that it be sent through one of your literate [associates]. Let it be read in the hearing of the whole convention if the matter of my name should require [it]. But if not, there is no need [for it] to be shown.

Notes

1 Anselm is quoting the Apostle’s Creed. This creed survives in several versions. See Denzinger-Schönmetzer, Enchiridion symbolorum, § 30.
2 The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. See ibid., § 150.
3 The Pseudo-Athanasian “Quicumque.” See ibid., § 75.

D. Passages from Anselm’s Letter on the Incarnation of the Word


To the lord and father of the whole Church wandering on earth, the supreme Pontiff Urban, brother Anselm, a sinner by life, a monk by habit, called by God — whether by his command or by his permission — [to be] bishop of the city of Canterbury, [sends his] due submission, together with humble service and devotions.

I

… When I was still the abbot of the monastery at Bec, the claim was ventured by a certain cleric in France: “If,” he said, “the three persons in God are one thing only, and are not three things, each one separate by itself like three angels or three souls, yet in such a way that they are altogether the same in will and power, therefore the Father and the Holy Spirit were incarnated together with the Son.

When this reached me, I began a certain letter against this error, which I neglected to finish after part of it had been composed. I believed there was no need for it, since the [man] against whom it was written had
repudiated his error in the council gathered by the reverend Archbishop Rainaldus of Rheims, and since there seemed to be no one who did not know that he had been in error. Nevertheless, the part I had completed certain brothers transcribed without my knowledge, and sent it to others to be read. I say this so that, if that part should come into someone’s hands, although there is nothing false there, still it was left incomplete and unfinished. What I began there must be begun [again] more carefully here and finished.

After I was taken and kept in England for the episcopacy, by I know not what arrangement of God, I heard that, persevering in his view, the author of the aforesaid novelty said that he had repudiated what he had said for no other reason except that he was afraid of being killed by the people. Because of this, certain brothers compelled me by their entreaties to untie the question in which he had been so tangled up that he believed he could in no way get himself free from it without entangling himself in [the theory of] the incarnation of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, or else in multiplying gods …

All [people] are to be reminded to approach questions about Sacred Scripture with the utmost caution. Those dialecticians of our time, rather those heretics of dialectic, who think universal substances are nothing but a verbal puff,¹ and who cannot understand color as other than body, or a man’s wisdom [as other] than [his] soul, are to be altogether “puffed” out of [any] argument about spiritual matters. In fact, in their souls, reason, which ought to be the prince and judge of all things in a man, is so covered up in bodily imaginations that it cannot roll itself away from them, and they are unable to discriminate from those [imaginations] the things that ought to be contemplated alone and pure.

For he who does not yet understand how several men are one man in species, how can he comprehend in that most secret and highest nature how several persons, each one of which is individually the whole God, are one God? And [he] whose mind is darkened to judging between his horse and its color, how will he discriminate between one God and the several relations in him? And lastly, he who cannot understand that something is a man if it is not an individual will in no way understand man unless [as] a human person. For every individual man is a person. So how will he understand that man, [but] not a person, is assumed by the Word — that is, that another nature, not another person, is assumed? . . .
He who is said to maintain that the three persons are like three angels or three souls also says, I hear, “The pagans defend their law, [and] the Jews defend their law. Therefore, we Christians too ought to defend our law.” Let us listen to how this Christian defends his faith. “If,” he says, “the three persons are one thing only, and not three things, each one separate by itself like three angels or three souls, yet in such a way that they are altogether the same in will and power, therefore the Father and the Holy Spirit were incarnated together with the Son.”

Look what this man says! How this Christian defends his faith! Surely either he means to acknowledge three gods or else he does not understand what he is saying. But if he acknowledges three gods, he is not a Christian. If he affirms what he does not understand, he ought not to believe it …

… I have been unable to see anything of his writings to whom I am replying in this letter, except for what I mentioned above …

Notes

1 “verbal puff” = *flatum vocis.*
Chapter 36:

Relations of Influence in the Twelfth Century

If you have been keeping up with the reading for this survey, there is a big chunk of it that has to be done all at once here. Look ahead at the next few chapters of this survey, to see what is coming up. Then please read the passages in Texts 8, 11 and 12 in Volume 2, below. Also the material from John of Salisbury and Peter Abelard in the Hyman and Walsh volume. Look at the Abelard material very closely, and consult the list of corrections to the translation given in Chapter 38, below. The text is very dense - by far the hardest thing we have done so far - and we will spend a lot of time on it.

Also, please read Copleston, History of Philosophy, vol. 2, Ch. 14 and Chs. 16-18.

The diagram on the next page shows how the various late-eleventh and twelfth century figures were related to one another. An arrow between two names, ‘$A \rightarrow B$’ means that $A$ taught $B$. Other relations are marked by dotted lines, and are labelled in each case. Incidentally, notice how the philosophers are coming thick and fast now (see the remarks in Chapter 28, above). Even if some of the people on the diagram are only marginally philosophical, remember that before Anselm we had only four figures of any philosophical stature at all for a thousand years. (I’m counting Pseudo-Denis, but not counting the Greek Fathers. You can quibble if you want, but the point stands: the philosophical density is growing.) I should add that the diagram is a very selective one. A lot of people are left out.

Book worthy of note: D. E. Luscombe, The School of Peter Abelard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). This treats Abelard’s influence on those around and after him. The book is primarily theological rather than philosophical, but it is still good for our purposes, to learn who was who.
A Survey of Mediaeval Philomophy

St. Anselm (1033-1109) (controversy with)

A certain John

Roscelin (c. 1050-1120)

Gerbert of Aurillac (10th cent.)

SCHOOL OF CHARTRES founded by Fulbert (died 1028)
Bernard of Chartres (head of school, 1114-c. 1124)
Gilbert of Poitiers (1076–1154, succeeded Bernard of Chartres)
Thierry (Theodoric) of Chartres (Bernard of Chartres' younger brother, succeeded Gilbert)

William of Conches (c. 1080–1154)

Bernard of Tourn (Sylvester)

Clarenbald of Arras (d. after 1170)

John of Salisbury (associated with Chartres, but did not study there. Died after 1170.)

Alberic of Rheims and Ralph (his brother)

Anselm of Laon → William of Champeaux

Peter Abelard (1079-1142)

School of St. Victor
("founded" by W. of Champeaux)

Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141)
Richard of St. Victor (c. 1123-1173)
Godfrey of St. Victor (d. 1194)
Walter of St. Victor (d. after 1180)
Peter Lombard

(?)(Bec) Manegold of Lautenbach

(Loches) St. Thierry (both attacked Abelard)

SCHOOL OF CHARTRES

(c. 1080-1154, succeeded Bernard of Chartres)

Thierry (Theodoric) of Chartres (Bernard of Chartres' younger brother, succeeded Gilbert)
Chapter 54:

Some Main Themes in Aquinas

This material is going to come primarily from Aquinas' *On Being and Essence* (a very difficult book), and from his disputed question *On Spiritual Creatures*, article 1, "Whether a spiritual substance is composed of matter and form?" The latter text was included in the *first* edition of Hyman and Walsh, on pp. 468-479, but was omitted from the second edition in order to make room for other texts. The translation in the first edition was taken from Mary C. Fitzpatrick and John J. Wellmuth, trs., *St. Thomas Aquinas: On Spiritual Creatures (De Spiritualibus Creaturis)*, (*Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation,* no. 5; Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1949), pp. 15-29. If you can find a copy of this text, you may want to read it. It is pretty difficult, but extremely interesting. If you can't find it, no matter. You will be able to follow along anyway. In any case, I will give page references to this text in the Fitzpatrick and Wellmuth version, followed by the page numbers in the *first* edition of Hyman and Walsh.

Read the rest of the Aquinas material in Hyman and Walsh on your own. You are no doubt keeping up with the secondary reading - in particular, Copleston - without my having to tell you. So there is no need for me to talk about Aquinas' life and dates, his works, and so on.

Recall the *binarium famosissimum*, the regular "pairing" of the doctrines of universal hylomorphism and plurality of forms. (See Chapters 43, 47 and 49, above). Avenciaurol is a big source for this doctrine in the later Middle Ages. But of course it fits right in with the realist tradition in the West back at least to Boethius' *De Trinitate* (see Chapter 23 above). The common philosophical basis for both views was the notion that the *structure of our true judgments reflects the structure of reality*. (If you will recall, I also claimed in Chapter 37 above that at least one form of this principle has historically motivated realism with respect to universals. So it is no wonder that we find this fitting into the
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

realist tradition.) These twin doctrines became a common theme in the Augustinian tradition.

Important: Aquinas rejects the binarium famosissimum. He does this in On Being and Essence, Ch. 4, in On Spiritual Creatures, a. 1, and elsewhere. It is a big thing with him. Let us look more closely. Consider the following three principles:

(1) Only God is entirely simple. Creatures are composite. Composition or complexity is the mark of creaturehood. We have seen this theme several times. It is neo-Platonic in origin, but the doctrine is not confined to neo-Platonicism, by any means. On this view, God is the One.

(2) Composition always requires matter and form. This is the basic universal hylomorphic theme (see Chapter 43). Composition is reflected in the distinction between subject and predicate, and that in turn is reflected in the distinction between matter and form, insofar as the predicate determines the subject, makes it more definite.

Before we go any further, let's explore how these first two themes, already solidly part of the Augustinian "complex", entail or are suggestive of certain other themes in that complex (see Chapter 49 above). All these things are connected by deep conceptual links that are not at first obvious.

(a) If the human soul can survive separation from the body, then it cannot be entirely simple in that state - otherwise it would turn into God at death, by (1) above. Hence the soul must be a composite, and so must have its own matter, by (2) above, quite over and above the matter that is added to it when it is united to the body. We have then two kinds of matter: corporeal matter and spiritual matter. (See Chapter 43 on spiritual matter.)

(b) Hence the soul is a complete substance in its own right, a composite of matter and form. Its union with the body, then, is not the Aristotelian union of two partial substances, matter and form, to form a single unified substance. It is rather more the Platonic/Augustinian two-substance unity. The exact nature of that union is problematic.
Some Main Themes in Aquinas

c) Since the soul, even separated from the body, is a fully constituted substance, it must have its own proper activities even then, just as any fully constituted substance has. These are, of course, the processes of knowing. And they are therefore independent of the body. The binarium famosissimum, therefore, has a secret conceptual link to the doctrine of illumination. The link is nothing so strong as an entailment, but it is pretty strong nonetheless.

Now let us add to these first two principles a third one, taken from Aristotelian epistemology:

3) Matter impedes intelligibility. If you go back to Chapter 45 and look at what I said there about Aristotle's theory of intellection, you will see that there are two senses in which matter impedes intelligibility:

(a) First, matter in the object impedes intelligibility, and must be removed before the object can be understood. This happens quite early in the game, at the level of the sensible species, where the matter is already left behind.

(b) Second, matter in the knower impedes intelligibility in the sense that the intellect cannot be "mixed with the body" if it is going to be able to do its job. Recall Aristotle's argument for this, discussed in Chapter 45.

Let me dwell on this a bit. In Aristotle's epistemology, the mind takes on the form of the object, is formally identical with the object, although it is distinct from the object "in being". (The difference is one of substrate. The real object has prime matter as a substrate; the concept of the object has the passive intellect, which is like prime matter, but is not prime matter.) Now the original object is a combination of form (including the essential and perhaps also accidental forms) plus matter. Hence, if the mind has any matter of its own, then when it takes on the form of the object, we would have form plus matter in the mind - that is, we would have the original object there, and this time not just "formally" but "in being" as well. Hence we would have no knowledge of the object in the Aristotelian sense. It is the immateriality of the intellect that keeps us from turning into trees when we know trees. (See On Spiritual Creatures, p. 22; Hyman and Walsh, first edition, pp. 473-474.)
Now look at these three principles and think about them a bit. Put them together and what do you get? Presto! You get the inevitable conclusion: *Only God is a knower.* No way around it. This is of course an unacceptable consequence for everyone, even for the Augustinians who tended to have such an exalted notion of knowledge that it began to look divine itself. Even they wanted to say that we do know things, even if we need outside help to do so, and could never do it on our own. The question then is where we are going to compromise on these three principles.

Both Aquinas and the Augustinians accept (1). (For Aquinas, this is at least in part because he accepts the Avicennian view that composition *always* requires a cause, to put the components together. But God is uncaused.) The Augustinians deny (3). They distinguish *corporeal* matter is not the same as *spiritual* matter. Some Augustinians, therefore, might try to say that it is only corporeal matter that impedes knowledge, not spiritual matter. (It is not clear at once just who among the Augustinians would say this, or who did in fact say this, if anyone. This already grants a lot to Aristotelian psychology. An Augustinian illuminationist who knew what he was about would perhaps not want to grant even this much.)

In any case, Aquinas doesn't think this trick will work. See *On Being and Essence*, Ch. 4, section 2, pp. 52-53. How, after all, does corporeal matter differ from spiritual matter? Well, Aquinas says, because it has a *form* that gives it extension in space and makes it corporeal - in other words, by a form of corporeity. (Remember, talk of the form of corporeity was right at home in the hylomorphist camp.) Spiritual matter, on the other hand, lacks the form of corporeity; it presumably has the correlative form of spiritual matter, or something like that.

Aquinas is not distorting the doctrine here. This has to be the difference between the two, given the underlying motive for the doctrine to begin with (see Chapter 43), and the universal hylomorphists explicitly said so.

But, Aquinas argues, if this is so, then what really makes corporeal matter impede intelligibility is just what distinguishes it from spiritual matter, which does not so impede intelligibility, namely the form of corporeity. But that cannot be, Aquinas says, since form is the principle of intelligibility. Insofar as things have forms, they are *intelligible*, not un-intelligible. (Form, after all, is what is impressed on the passive intellect.)

Hence the hylomorphist cannot get out of the problem by restricting (3) to just corporeal matter. What he should have done all along, of course, is to reject (3) entirely, as being far too Aristotelian.

But Aquinas won't do this. His sympathies are with Aristotle on this point. Instead, he rejects principle (2). In order to have a composite substance, you do not need to have matter and form. That is one kind of composition, to
Some Main Themes in Aquinas

be sure. But there is a much more basic kind of composition: the composition of a thing's essence with its existence. (‘Existence’ translates the Latin ‘esse’, the infinitive serving as the nominative of the gerund - see Chapter 40 above, on how to translate Abelard's "status" talk, which likewise uses infinitival expressions - and meaning "the act of being", what a "being" in the participial sense does.)

The composition of essence and existence is absolutely crucial to understanding Aquinas. I do not mean to suggest that he himself set it up in the way I have just done, as a dodge to avoid the conclusion that only God is a knower. He certainly didn't. But the conceptual linkage is there.

How does all this work? Well, in the so called "separated substances" - angels and human souls (not God, for present purposes) - there is no matter. They are intelligences, just as they were for Aristotle, and so cannot have matter. Aquinas has just argued this, in the business about spiritual matter above. On the other hand, the separated substances are composites. They are not so altogether simple as God is, since only God is simple in that absolute way, by (1). They are real composites of two really distinct principles: their essences and their acts of existing. See On Being and Essence, Ch. 4, sections 2 and 6. (Note: The distinction between essence and existence has to be a real distinction - and not just some mental distinction that doesn't correspond to an ontological division out there. Otherwise, if they are not really distinct, then their composition is not a real composition, but only a matter of speaking. And if the composition is thus not really composite, then the composite cannot be really distinguished from God, and the whole point of the thing breaks down.) Hence, for Aquinas we have three kinds of cases:

(a) Material creatures. They have an essence, and that essence is composed of prime matter and substantial form. They also have an act of existence, an esse. It is perhaps best to think of the esse as a kind of ontological bolt that holds the matter and form together (although that kind of imagery won't work in other cases).

(b) Spiritual creatures. They too have an essence and an act of existence, an esse. But the essence in this case is not composed of prime matter and substantial form. It has only a substantial form. There is no matter involved. That is why we have a spiritual creature and not a material one.

(c) God. God of course is absolutely simple. Not only do we not have a composition of matter and form in him, we do not even
have the composition of essence and *esse*. And yet God surely exists; there is an act of existing involved. Hence, we must conclude that this is *all* that is involved. God is *nothing but* a pure act of existing, a pure *esse*, "*ipsum esse subsistens*" ("subsistent being itself").

(If you want, of course, you can say that God has *no* essence or you can say that he *does* have an essence and that it is identical with his *esse*. In part, this is purely a terminological point - *provided* you don't link up essence with intelligibility to the extent that saying that God has no essence would amount to saying that he is not intelligible, even to himself. Then it is *not* just a terminological point. But in any case, you don't want to say that God has an essence *that is in any way distinct from his esse*. That is the important thing here.)

Now where did all this come from? Well, go back to Chapter 43 above. We have already seen Avicenna distinguish essence and existence. William of Auvergne (see Chapter 47) picked up on this and made it an important part of his own philosophy. For both Avicenna and William, however, the *existence* of a thing (except God, of course) was a kind of *accident* that its essence may or may not take on. Recall the considerations that led to this kind of "accident" talk, in Chapter 43.

Aquinas does something much more radical. Avicenna and William, by calling the existence of a thing an *accident*, betray that they are still thinking in terms of *forms*. The *existence* of a thing is clearly not its matter, and if it is not the essence or part of the essence - that is, an essential form - then it must be an *accidental form*. That is the only thing left.

Aquinas says no. Accidents are ontologically dependent and derivative. But a thing's *existence* is more basic to it than that. No - it is *not a form at all*.

And with that move, Aquinas introduces a whole new dimension to the philosophical picture. Let us look at some of the consequences of this move.

(i) *Form* is what we grasp in concepts. Form is what gets impressed on the passive intellect. Hence, if *esse* is not a form, we can have *no concept* of it. We have no concept at all of a thing's existence.

But that's odd. If we have not concept of it, then what have we been talking about? Let's note carefully what this means. We have no concept of *esse* acquired by *acquaintance*. That is, we have no *simple* concept of existence, got by abstracting it from instances we have observed, after the fashion described in Chapter 45 above. For then it would have to be a form. If we *try* to form such
Some Main Themes in Aquinas

a concept by acquaintance, the best we can do is to form the very general concept of "being", which applies to absolutely everything that exists, and so is the widest and emptiest of all concepts, not metaphysically rich and important. Another way to put this is to say that if we try to form a simple concept of esse, we miss the target and end up with a participial concept rather than the gerundial one we are after.

But to say that we have no simple concept formed by acquaintance is not to say that we cannot construct a complex concept that describes existence. After all, prime matter is not a form either, but we can still talk about it intelligibly, and even conceive it after a fashion, as "that which underlies forms in changeable substances, and makes them changeable", or something like that. So too we can construct a complex concept that describes existence as "that which makes a being a being", or something like that. ("Being" here taken participially.)

But the fact remains, we have no real understanding, in the Aristotelian sense, no intellection. We never really get at a thing's esse by way of concepts. Rather, we grasp a thing's esse in the act of judging. And, indeed, the copula of a subject/predicate judgment, just as it joins the parts of the judgment together, so too it reflects the composition on the part of the thing. But don't think Aquinas has some kind of simple-minded view about the relation between judgments and reality. It is not a simple part-by-part matching as it is for some realists and for holders of the binarium. The relation is a very complicated one for Aquinas. We don't have to pursue it here.

(2) Aquinas' notion of esse has a role in his theory of individuation. This is a very complicated theory in Aquinas. (Everything is a very complicated theory in Aquinas.) Basically, Aquinas uses the notion of individuation for two quite distinct kinds of functions. And accordingly, the "principle of individuation" for him will be two quite distinct kinds of things. They answer two quite distinct questions:

(a) There is what I shall call the "Principle of Individuation" properly so called (this is my terminology now, not Aquinas'). It answers the question "What gives a thing its identity, what makes it the individual it is?" Answer: Its esse. How many individuals do you have? Well, count up the esses. In a given material individual, for instance, matter does not have its own esse, substantial form another, and accidental forms their own. There is one esse binding the whole business together like a bolt. And since there is but one esse, there is but one individual here.
(b) Second, there is what I will call the Principle of Differentiation. (Hector-Neri Castañeda taught me to distinguish between these two.) It answers the question, "What makes individual A distinct from individual B?" Answer: The one has some form the other one doesn't.

But now things get complicated (again). If A and B are not in the same species, so that they differ not only in their accidental forms but also in their substantial forms, and therefore in their essences, then nothing more need be said. The substantial forms differentiate. It is the fact that they are two distinct substantial forms that allows you to have two esses and therefore two individuals.

But if A and B are in the same species, so that they do not differ in their substantial forms, but formally differ only in their accidents, then the case is more difficult. Here we have to appeal to accidental forms, of course, given the general principle that differentiation comes by forms. But still, we don't want to get ourselves into the situation Boethius got himself into in his De trinitate realist view (see Chapter 23 above), where we freeze the individual and tie it to a complete and fixed set of accidents. We want to allow for accidental change (especially if we're Aristotelians). Well, all this is extremely sticky in Aquinas, but in the end he thinks that matter is required here.

Therefore, we get an important "theorem": Wherever there is a plurality of individuals in a given species, they are all material.

Of course, there is an immediate corollary: Angels, since they are immaterial, can come only one to a species. Each angel constitutes a species unto itself, just as the members of certain Philosophy Departments do. The archangels Gabriel and Michael are as unlike one another as a lizard is from an elephant.

This thesis about angels was a characteristically Thomist doctrine, and was condemned in 1277. See Hyman and Walsh, propositions #42-#43 of the Condemnation of 1277. Why it was condemned is not so clear. It is rather novel, but hardly a dangerous view.

Now, if we have the corollary about angels, you have probably anticipated my next point. There is an obvious problem then. What about human souls? You might say that when they are joined to the body there is matter involved, and so there is no problem. But what happens after death, when the body falls away, and we have these immaterial things flitting around up there (or down there)? They are immaterial, and yet they are all in the same species; they are all human souls, specifically human.

There is obviously some connection with matter, since although the soul is separated now from the body, it was once in the body. But it's not there now,
and how can that be reconciled with the principle that *intraspecific differentiation requires matter*? Aquinas' doctrine here is extremely delicate and fine. It is Aquinas at his very best - and when Aquinas is at his very best, he is very, very good indeed. He will take your breath away. It was on questions like this one that Aquinas earned his reputation. Unfortunately, Aquinas is also at his most difficult on questions like this - as you might expect, since he is making very nuanced distinctions. I will discuss all this briefly in Chapter 55 below. I will also have more to say about the role of matter in individuation and differentiation in Chapter 56. But for the present let's push on.

In order to maintain his denial of principle (2) above (remember it?), Aquinas must hold that in every creature, essence and esse are really distinct. This does not mean of course that they are mutually independent. You can't have the essence without having its esse, since if you have the essence at all, it must exist, and then you have the existence too. You can't have what doesn't exist. So what do you suppose Aquinas does mean here? What sort of real distinction are we talking about? How does Aquinas argue for it?

On this see *On Being and Essence*, Ch. 4, sections 6-8. Aquinas begins with an argument that reminds one of Kant's "refutation" of the ontological argument. (This is on p. 55 of the Maurer translation of *On Being and Essence.*) Here it is:

1. No essence can be understood without its "parts" - that is, without whatever enters into its definition - its real definition, in terms of genus and species.

2. But I can understand what a man is, or what a phoenix is (that is, I can understand what it is = *quid est* = its quiddity = its essence) without understanding whether it is, that is, without knowing whether there is any man or phoenix in fact.

3. Therefore, esse is not part of the essence of a man or a phoenix.

(Recall the reasoning discussed in Chapter 43 above, and notice a very similar criterion of real distinction employed in Avicenna's "Suspended Man" passage, in Text 20 of Volume 2, below. See also Chapter 53 above.

Now as it turns out, I think this is not a good argument. But even if it worked, we would need something more. We would need to establish the claim for *all and only* creatures, not just for man and phoenix. And Aquinas has a two-stage argument to establish this biconditional.
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

(a) The first stage comes in section 6 of his text. If there is anything the essence of which is identical with its existence (that is, for which the real distinction fails), then there is only one such thing. In short, this first stage argues that there is at most one case in which the distinction fails to hold. The argument is that if there were two, there would be nothing to differentiate them, so that we would not have two after all, but only one. We would have to get much further into Aquinas than we are going to do here before we would be in a position to evaluate this argument. Let's just go on.

(b) The second stage comes in section 7 of Aquinas' text. This is an argument that there is at least one case in which the distinction between essence and existence fails. Here Aquinas gives us a kind of infinite regress argument.

Actually, if you look closely at section 7 of the text, it turns out that what Aquinas is really establishing is something rather weaker: that there is at least one being the esse of which is contained in its essence or definition. In order to get the two parts of the argument to mesh - (a) and (b) above - we need an additional argument, that if existence is contained in the essence of anything (in whatever sense is involved in part (b) of the argument), then it is identical with that essence - there is nothing more to the essence than that very existence. Aquinas in fact has a rationale for this. But he doesn't give it here, and neither will I. We can't do everything. Let's just grant the point.

What we have here then is a rudimentary argument for the existence of God. Aquinas thinks of God as ipsum esse subsistens, a pure act of existing and nothing else, no distinct essence, no accidents, no matter. Recall Exodus 3:14. (See Chapter 4 above.)

A little while ago I said that Aquinas' argument on p. 55 of the text (the one about man and phoenix) was a bad one. Why? (Note: You don't strictly need that argument if you can otherwise get the second stage of the two-stage argument above.)

Well, if no essence can be understood without its "parts", and if the essence of God is purely and simply to exist, as Aquinas frequently says, then I cannot understand God without understanding that he exists. That is, his existence follows from his very concept. Hence, an ontological argument for the existence of God works. But Aquinas rejects any ontological argument. (See Summa theologiae, I, q. 2, a. 1, Hyman and Walsh, pp. 523-524, objection 2 and reply.) We have to extrapolate a bit from the text, but the basic idea seems to be that we do not really understand the essence of God. That is to say, we
have only a complex concept of God, formed by description. We do not have a simple concept formed by acquaintance, by abstraction. (The modern distinction between "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description" is a very useful tool to keep at hand when reading certain mediaeval texts. Although the terminology is anachronism, the distinction itself is not. There was such a distinction underlying several mediaeval theories, although we should be careful about importing other baggage that might go along with the modern version of the distinction.)

To the extent that we ever can have such an acquaintance with God, we will get it only after death, in the Beatific Vision. Then we will see God face to face, and will be able to get a simple concept of him by abstraction. And if we have a simple concept of God, then we will not be able to think of God without realizing what is entailed by that concept (no essence can be understood without its "parts", remember). In short, for Aquinas an ontological argument will work, but only if you have the right circle of "acquaintances". Unfortunately, we do not - at least not yet. The only ones who do are the angels and the Blessed who enjoy the Beatific Vision. But they of course don't need an ontological argument, or any other argument, to prove the existence of God for them, since they see him face to face. In short, for Aquinas, an ontological argument for the existence of God will work only for those who don't need it.

But what does all this have to do with the argument on p. 55 of On Being and Essence? Well, if in step (1) of that argument ("No essence can be understood without its 'parts'"), the word 'understood' is taken in the broad sense, to include understanding by a mere description as well as understanding by means of a concept gained by acquaintance, then that step (1) is simply false, since it would follow from (1) that an ontological argument for the existence of God would work for us, in this life. And, according to Aquinas, that just isn't so.

On the other hand, if you take step (1) in the narrow sense, that is, reading 'understood' there as applying only to understanding by acquaintance, then step (2) must be read in the same sense (or else you have a fallacy of equivocation). But in that sense, step (2) is false. I cannot in that sense understood anything without being acquainted with it, and therefore knowing good and well that it exists, whether its existence is "part" of its essence or not. Step (2) is true only for 'understood' in the broad sense, taken to include understanding by description. (After all, I hardly know the phoenix by acquaintance.) But if we read 'understood' in the narrow sense in (1) and in the broad sense in (2), the argument is fallacious. And, as far as I can see, that is exactly what happens.

A lot of fuss has been made in the secondary literature about this text, as though it encapsulated Aquinas' central argument for the distinction between
A Survey of Mediaeval Philosophy

essence and existence in creatures. But, if I am right, the argument is just a mistake on Aquinas' part, and shouldn't be given too much stress. Furthermore, Aquinas doesn't need it to establish the real distinction between creaturely essence and creaturely existence, if he can get the other, two-stage argument to work.

Now let's look briefly at one other thing. There might appear to be another big problem. If God is just pure and simple esse, does this mean that the esse that enters into composition with creatures is God? Is my own esse God himself? If so, then since esse is the principle of individuality, it follows that all creatures are God. This is about as strict a formulation of pantheism as you could possibly want. Is Aquinas then a crypto-pantheist?

Of course not. But in order to see why not, we need to clear up some things. Let us perform a mental experiment. Just as we did in Chapter 40, when discussing the problem of universals, let us peel the metaphysical onion. Take Socrates, a combination of prime matter, substantial form, and accidents, all bound together with an esse. Now pull off the accidents, and then the substantial form, and finally drain away all the matter - until you get down to the bare esse, until you have nothing left but the esse alone. Now that bare, pure esse must be God, mustn't it, since we already have an argument that there can be only one thing that is a pure act of existing, and we call it God. But if the esse of Socrates is God, then Socrates himself is identical with God, since esse is the principle of individuality. Now, what are we going to do about this?

Well, Aquinas' basic approach to problems like this is to ask: What makes you think you can actually perform this experiment? For Aquinas, when you pull off Socrates' accidents, his substantial form and his matter - what you end up with is not a bare, pure esse at all. (If you did, it would be God.) Rather what you end up with is nothing at all. In dismantling Socrates this way, you have destroyed his esse too.

The esse of Socrates is capable of being thought of in isolation in this way (by description, of course, since we have no simple concept of existence, by acquaintance). But it cannot actually be in isolation, any more than the prime matter can. The esse of Socrates just is that esse which actualizes Socrates' substantial form - his soul - in such a way that if you take away the form, the esse disappears too. (The esse's relation to the body is more problematic, since we are dealing here with the special case of a human being, for which the substantial form is a soul that can exist apart from the body. These matters are discussed in Chapter 55 below.) In sum, the esse of Socrates is not a subsistent in the technical Boethian sense (Chapter 23), which Aquinas is employing when he calls God "ipsam esse subsistens".
Some Main Themes in Aquinas

God's esse, on the other hand, not only can be thought of in isolation (again, of course, only by description). It can also exist in isolation. In fact, it can exist only in isolation. It is existent - and that is enough to differentiate it from creaturely esses. Recall our formulation above of the so called "Principle of Differentiation". It was not that what allows A and B to be two individuals is that they have different forms, but rather that one of them has a form the other one doesn't have. Hence any esse that actualizes a form will automatically be distinct from God.
Chapter 55:

Aquinas on the Differentiation of Human Souls

This picks up a problem left over from Chapter 54.

For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, the distinction between an essential form (substantial form) and an accidental form of a thing is not the same as the distinction between a form the thing necessarily has (given that it exists) and one it may or may not have (given that it exists). For both Aristotle and Aquinas, there are such things as inseparable or necessary accidents. The basic schema may be illustrated by a pin-cushion. The pins are the accidents, the cushion is the essence. In a spiritual substance, the cushion consists of a substantial form only. In a material substance, it consists of a substantial form together with prime matter. Some of the pins may be permanently attached. (Think of them as bent at the end, like fish-hooks. You can't pull these pins out of the cushion without ripping the whole thing to shreds!) They are no less accidental for all that.

What holds the whole business together is an act of existing, an esse that binds all the parts together and actualizes them. It is the esse that gives the whole apparatus its identity, that makes it the individual it is. (Esse is the Principle of Individuation or Individuality.) What differentiates one individual from another (we might also say what differentiates one esse from another) is the particular combination of things bound together. Not all of them, of course, since then we would have the frozen individuals of Boethius' De triniate (Chapter 23 above). We want to allow for accidental change. Hence we include only those things that are inseparably bound together among the differentiating features of a thing. The substantial form differentiates the individual from all individuals of a different species. Within the same species, if there are several individuals, they are differentiated from one another by certain inseparable accidents. It is Aquinas' view that these differentiating accidents require prime matter. Intraspecific differentiation requires prime matter.
Now the human soul is the substantial form of the body. Aquinas follows Aristotle here. The individual man therefore is differentiated by a unique combination of prime matter, soul (substantial form) and certain differentiating accidents that require matter. When he dies, however, that combination is broken up. Nevertheless, Aquinas argues (and he has an argument - this is not just a matter of faith) that the soul survives death. The esse, which originally bound together all the inseparable parts of the living man, continues to actualize the separated soul after death. Aquinas wants to say it is the same esse that formerly actualized the composite living man - otherwise what survives would be a different individual, since esse is the principle of individuality. There would be no personal immortality.

But how can this be? When the soul is separated from the body, how can it retain the very same intraspecifically differentiated esse it had while in the body, since all the differentiating accidents, which required matter, are gone?

Aquinas' answer: As a matter of terminology, we shall say that a substance is complete if and only if its esse is differentiated from that of other substances by what it inseparably actualizes or binds together. We must now ask: inseparable on pain of what?

Answer: Not necessarily inseparable on pain of destroying the esse, but inseparable on pain of destroying the substance. The esse of a complete substance, then, is differentiated from others by what it inseparably actualizes or binds together on pain of destroying that substance. On the other hand, to destroy a complete substance is not necessarily to destroy its esse. A composite man, for instance, is a complete substance. His esse is differentiated by certain accidents and other features that cannot be separated from him without destroying (killing) him. But when he is destroyed, his esse is not destroyed. It continues to activate his substantial form or soul, and carries the individuality of the former man along with it. The existing separated substantial form or soul is a substance in its own right. It is the same individual, but not the same substance as the original man. It has to be the same individual, since the esse is the same; it cannot be the same substance, since the essence is not the same. The essence of the man included prime matter; that of his separated soul does not.

Now notice: The esse of this separated substance or soul inseparably actualizes or binds together - on pain of destroying the separated substance or soul - only the substantial form and whatever inseparable accidents it has, accidents that do not differentiate, since differentiating accidents require matter. Hence the esse of the separated soul is not differentiated by what it inseparably actualizes or binds together on pain of destroying the soul. That is, on the basis of our earlier definition, the separated soul is not a complete substance. Rather, we shall call it "incomplete".
Aquinas on the Differentiation of Human Souls

The *esse* of a human soul is not differentiated by what it inseparably actualizes or binds together on pain of destroying the soul, but rather on pain of destroying the composite man whose soul it is. If the man is destroyed, his *esse* is not destroyed, and it *does not cease to be differentiated*. It can still be identified as the unique *esse* that actualizes or binds together that which cannot be separated from *this particular man* without destroying him. It's just that it is not doing so now (which is another way of saying that the man is dead). In short, there is a sense in which this *esse* "goes with" this particular man, even after the man has died. And that is all we need.

Human souls are the only incomplete substances. God's *esse* is differentiated from others' by inseparably actualizing nothing other than itself. No other *esse* is like that. An angel's *esse* inseparably actualizes an essence (and some accidents, although non-differentiating ones). No other *esse* actualizes the same essence; there is only one angel to a species. The *esses* of material substances (including man) inseparably actualize prime matter, a substantial form, and inseparable accidents, including differentiating ones. No other *esse* binds together the same ingredients.

This delicate notion of an incomplete substance is what allows Aquinas to maintain simultaneously: (a) a man's soul is his substantial form; (b) it is nevertheless able to survive the death of the composite man; (c) intraspecific differentiation requires matter. Each of these points, of course, has to be argued separately, and Aquinas does have arguments for each of them.
Chapter 56

Aquinas on Designated Matter

Aquinas talks about something called "designated matter" or "signate matter" in On Being and Essence, Ch. 2, section 4. What is it all about? Well, hang on!

Prime matter qua prime matter is said to be "numerically one" in a kind of negative sense: not that it has any one determinate form, but rather it lacks the features that would differentiate and diversify it. But if this is so, how can there be any more than one material substance at a time? One might suggest that one material substance combines its substantial form with only part of the prime matter there is, while another material substance combines its substantial form with another part. But how can that be if prime matter qua prime matter lacks all diversity and doesn't have parts? If prime matter (hereafter PM) qua PM has no parts, won't one substantial form take it all? (Examine your mental pictures that accompany these questions. Are we being misled by our imagery?)

It was this kind of consideration that led Avicenna to suppose that PM had to be diversified or partitioned in some way before any substantial form advanced. The most straightforward way to do this was to divide it spatially - that is, to take PM as extended in three dimensions and thus as diversified internally according to places. Then one substantial form could combine with a certain volume of PM, and another with another volume. This is the doctrine of designated matter that Aquinas accepts in On Being and Essence - "matter considered under determinate dimensions" (Ch. 2, section 4). The "determinate" dimensions here imply a fixed size and shape.

Of course, as just presented, this doctrine suggests that spatial extension, which is an accident in the category of quantity, inheres in PM "before" any substantial form. Whether this "before" is taken in a temporal sense or in some other sense, it suggests the doctrine of the plurality of forms, which Avicenna seems to have accepted at least to this extent. The form corporeity is attached
to matter before any substantial form is. (On the plurality-of-forms doctrine, see
Chapter 43 above.) Aquinas will have none of this; he rejects the doctrine of the
plurality of forms. It makes nonsense, he thinks, of the distinction between
substantial and accidental forms. Let us just take his reasoning for granted here.

So we should not think of quantity's "inhering" in $PM$ in any sense
"before" any substantial form. Rather, we should think of it as happening all at
once - or better, as not "happening" at all, but as just being so. Several
substantial forms together with accidental forms responsible for fixing the
dimensions of the substances (and hence for dividing them off spatially from one
another) are attached to $PM$. The substantial forms locate things in genus and
species, and the accidental forms (in the category of quantity) keep them
spatially apart. Hence accidents of quantity are responsible for allowing there to
be several material substances at once, and also, by the way, for allowing there
to be several substances of the same species. On the other hand, $PM$ is also
required, since quantity (or at least this kind of quantity) is an accident that
requires a material substance in which to inhere.

Hence Aquinas can adapt Avicenna's view in such a way that it does not
require a plurality of quasi-substantial forms piled one on top of another.
Nevertheless, when he wrote his Commentary on Boethius' De trinitate, q, 4, a.
2,² shortly after the On Being and Essence, he rejected this view. The argument
is simple. If material substances were individuated by matter under a fixed
volume and shape, then they could not grow or change shape without losing
their identity and becoming another individual instead. This is the same kind of
problem (but not exactly the same problem) we saw earlier with Boethius'
frozen individuals (Chapter 23 above).

Hence, in his commentary on Boethius, which contains his longest
sustained discussion of individuation, he adopts Averroes' view instead, that
designated matter, which individuates, is $PM$ under undetermined dimensions.
By undetermined dimensions he means not this definite shape and volume, and
not that one, but rather some shape and volume or other - that is, this one or
that one taken disjunctively. (Averroes states this doctrine in his tract On the
Substance of the Celestial Sphere, Ch. 1, translated in Hyman and Walsh, p.
319.) Also, by the way, Aquinas' own discussion of individuation in his
commentary on Boethius occurs exactly in his commentary on the passage in
which Boethius says that individuation is by accidents. (See passage (3) of Text
6 below.)

The problem with this view is patent, and it is hard to see why Aquinas
(or Averroes) ever took it seriously. All material substances are alike in having
some volume and shape or other. Undetermined dimensions are just too vague
and indefinite - too, well, too undetermined - to distinguish things.
Aquinas on Designated Matter

Aquinas appears to have dropped this view in his later works. But curiously, no fully articulated view is ever put in its place. He continue to use the phrase 'designated matter', and to link individuation with quantity (for instance, in Summa theologiae, I, q. 30, a. 3), but it is never very clear exactly what is going on. In fact, there is evidence that, after writing the first part of the Summa theologiae, Aquinas later gave up the connection of quantity with individuation altogether. For instance, in Quodlibet I, q. 10, a. 21 and a. 22, he argues that it is possible, by the power of God, that two material bodies occupy the same place. In his earlier commentary on Boethius' De trinitate, q. 4, a. 3, he had argued that this was not possible because the two would become one.

What did Aquinas finally come to think about individuation? In some passages, we get the suggestion that esse is the principle of individuation. This is crucial when it comes to the unity of the human composite - as we saw in Chapter 55 above. Man is a substance. Yet his soul is also a substance (On Being and Essence, Ch. 4, paragraph 1). Do we then have two substances? No, because there is only one esse that is simultaneously the esse of the man and the esse of his soul. How many substances do you have? Count up the number of esses.

On the other hand, Aquinas never gave up the view that prime matter is in some sense also tied up with individuation. Here we must distinguish two question, as we did in Chapter 54: (1) What makes a substance one substance? The answer to that is esse. (2) What allows you to have several substances - and so several esses? Let us divide that second question: (2a) What allows you to have distinct species? The answer to that is straightforward: essence, and in particular, substantial form. Substantial forms are just distinct from one another all by themselves. (2b) What allows you to have several substances in the same species? The answer to that is "designated matter", whatever that is.

Let us then call esse the principle of individuation, substantial form the principle of interspecific differentiation, and designated matter the principle of intraspecific differentiation. How does the latter work? I suggest that in this connection the last chapter of On Being and Essence is helpful, even though it is an early work. There we find that some accidents "derive" from matter in such a way that they are the ones that differentiate (note the word) individuals within the same species (paragraphs 5-6 - see also Summa theologicae, I, q. 54, a. 3, ad 2). No special status is given to quantity. What seems to happen then is this. Some accidents must stick with an individual as long as he remains that individual. Aquinas suggests that an animal's sex is an accident of this kind. In view of recent surgical triumphs, we might substitute the animal's genetic make-up as an alternative. Accidents of this kind tend to differentiate individuals within the same genus.

But accidents of this kind are not sufficient to render the individual fully determinate. For then we would have the problem about determinate dimensions.
again. Of course, it is always the case that the individual is fully determinate, but that only means that some of the accidents that an individual has at a given time do not contribute to his intraspecific differentiation. Such accidents might be place and position (despite his earlier views), the fleeting thoughts and volitions that come and go without violating my identity, and so on.

Such a view yields an important consequence: There are never as many individuals within a given species as there are members of a maximally consistent set of completely determinate individual descriptions in that species. In other words, there are always individuals you can describe in a given species that don't exist. At least this is so for any species the individuals of which are subject to accidental change - which includes all the species we observe. It is also true for any species the individuals of which have free choice. For otherwise, if they had chosen differently, they would have been entirely different individuals within the same species. Now Aquinas thinks that all separated substances are intelligent, and that free choice inevitably goes along with intellect. Hence the above principle applies to all species whatever, except perhaps to material species the individuals of which are unperceivable - if there are any such species.

Still, granted that some accidents differentiate individuals within the same species, how does this involve matter? After all, it is supposed to be prime matter as under these accidents, designated prime matter, that is the principle of intraspecific differentiation. The question amounts to this: Why couldn't angels, which have no matter, be differentiated within the same species by some of their accidents? Aquinas, of course, thinks they cannot - each angel is a distinct species. This is a long story, but the final answer to it I think is that Aquinas wants to hold that any individual object subject to intraspecific substantial change is also subject to interspecific substantial change - that is, it can change substantially into an individual of a different species. You'll just have to take my word for it.

Notes to Chapter 56

Aquinas on Designated Matter

Duns Scotus: Kinds of Unity and Distinction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thing</th>
<th>Unity</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature (= formality, reality)</td>
<td>Numerical</td>
<td>Real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Real minor (= real less than numerical)</td>
<td>Formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>(No special term for this.)</td>
<td>Rational, of reason.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Versions of Realism and Nominalism

This table goes together with the next one. We can give both a metaphysical and an epistemological formulation of both realism and nominalism, as they developed in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Realism</th>
<th>Nominalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metaphysical</td>
<td>The common nature (taken absolutely, as Aquinas would put it) has a being of its own.</td>
<td>No it doesn’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological</td>
<td>The common nature (taken absolutely, as Aquinas would put it) is the ground of our knowledge, its basis in the world.</td>
<td>No it isn’t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these terms, we can set up the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aquinas (according to Owens)</th>
<th>Scotus (and Aquinas, according to me)³</th>
<th>Ockham (according to everyone)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metaphysical</td>
<td>Nominalist</td>
<td>Realist</td>
<td>Nominalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological</td>
<td>Realist</td>
<td>Realist</td>
<td>Nominalist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ See my “Degrees of Being, Degrees of Goodness” for my arguments against Owens’s interpretation of Aquinas.
More on Kinds of Unity and Distinction

I. For Ockham (and presumably Scotus):

Two individuals A and B are numerically identical if and only if everything that is true to say of A is also true to say of B and vice versa, and they are really distinct otherwise.

(That is, the Indiscernibility of Identicals is the main criterion here. See Adams, *William Ockham*, vol. 1, p. 16.)

II. Additional criteria for Scotus:

1. If A and B are not both persons of the Trinity, then

   A is really distinct from B if and only if it is possible for A to exist without B’s existing, OR ELSE possible for B to exist without A’s existing (or perhaps both).

2. If A and B are both creatures and are not causally related (by efficient causality or otherwise) in such a way that one depends on the other, then

   A is really distinct from B if and only if it is possible for A to exist without B’s existing, AND also possible for B to exist without A’s existing.

III. For both Scotus and Ockham:

1. A and B are distinct by a distinction of reason if and only if the concept of A and the concept of B are two concepts for the same item.

(Scotus says little about this distinction, and even less about the corresponding kind of unity.)

IV. For Scotus

1. A and B are formally distinct if and only if (1) they are either numerically the same thing, or else are metaphysical ingredients of (constituents of, accidents of, etc.) what is numerically the same thing, and (2) neither one is analytically contained in the other.

   (My paraphrase of Adams’s suggested criterion. See her “Ockham on Identity and Distinction,” p. 55; *William Ockham*, vol. 1, pp. 24–25.)

2. If A and B are common natures, then A is formally identical (= one by a real less than numerical unity) with B if and only if (1) they are found together in numerically one individual (this clauses is redundant), and (2) one of them is analytically contained in the other, or (in other texts of Scotus) the two are analytically equivalent.