

Chapter 19

James of Viterbo on Universals

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Abstract The chapter starts out with a brief discussion of the similarity alleged to exist by the editors of William Ockham's *Ordinatio* between a series of opinions canvassed by Ockham on the nature of universals and a series of opinions listed by James of Viterbo on the nature of concepts. It then proceeds to expound James's little known theory of concepts and universals, and concludes that, despite interesting parallels between his views and those of the *Veneralibilis Inceptor*, James's theory is still very much committed to the realist assumptions that Ockham thought metaphysics needed to dispense with.

Keywords Universals • Concept • Realism • Nominalism • Nature(s) • Species • Ontology

At the beginning of his answer to the question “whether a univocal universal is anything real existing anywhere subjectively,” in *Ordinatio* d. 2, q. 8, Ockham explains that “there could be different opinions” on this matter and proceeds to outline four which he examines in sequence before ultimately opting for the first. In an explanatory footnote of the critical edition of the *Ordinatio*, the editors state, regarding the opinions in question, that “similar theories are recounted by James of Viterbo,” and they cite in support of this claim a passage from James's *Quodlibet* 1, q. 1.¹ In the following table, I have reproduced both Ockham's four opinions in Paul Vincent Spade's English translation (Spade 1994) and the passage by James of Viterbo quoted by the editors, indicating in parentheses the page reference to Spade

¹Ockham, *Ord.* d. 2, q. 8, OTh II, 267, n. 1. The editors also refer the reader—but this time without citing any particular texts—to d. 19, q. 5 of Durand of Saint-Pourçain's *Sentences* commentary and d. 23, q. un. of Peter Auriol's *Scriptum*. I will not be looking at either text in this article. All references, unless specified otherwise, are to James of Viterbo.

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and the page and line reference to Ypma's critical edition of James's *Quodlibet* 1, q. 1 (James of Viterbo, *Quodl.* 1²).³

Ockham	James of Viterbo
O1	J1
The first theory could be that a universal is a concept of the mind, and that the concept is really the act of intellection itself, so that then a universal would be nothing but a confused intellection of a thing (215).	On this, you should know that a concept, according as it is taken in intellectual [matters], is a certain actuality or perfection of the intellect according to which [the intellect] is called, and is, [in the process of] understanding. And this [is so] whether it is really the same as the act of understanding, as it seems to some [people] (7, 76–79).
O2	J2
A second theory could be that a universal is some species that, since it is really related to every singular, is called a universal. So it is universal in representing, and yet singular in being (216).	[O]r is something formed or constituted through the act of understanding, as is maintained by others. . . . If it is something formed through the act, then it is a certain perfection of the intellect inseparable from the act, in such a way that [there can] neither [be an] act without a concept, nor a concept without an act. In this respect, the concept differs from the intelligible species, which sometimes remains without the act, according to those who posit species (7, 79–80, 83–87).
O3	J3
There could be another theory: The universal is some true thing following on the intellect's act, which thing would be a likeness of the [conceived] thing. It would be universal because it would be equally related to all [things conceived by it] (216–217).	But there are [yet] others who say that the concept is the object itself, as cognized (7, 88–89).
O4	J4
There could be a fourth theory, that nothing is universal from its own nature, but only from institution, in the way a word is universal (217).	–
Ockham's conclusion	James's conclusion
One . . . can hold that a concept, and any universal, is a quality existing subjectively in the mind. It is the sign of an external thing just as much from its nature as a spoken word is the sign of a thing according to the will of the one who institutes it (229).	However, for now it seems to me to be more reasonably said that the concept and the act of understanding refer to the same absolute thing. Let this be assumed for now (7, 89–91).

²For the quodlibets, see James of Viterbo, *Quodl.* 1, 2, 3; and for *Quaestiones de divinis praedicamentis* I–XVII and XXV.

³A partial translation of the passage from James's quodlibet can be found in Spade (1995, 36). The translation in J2 extending from "If it is something formed . . ." to the end of the paragraph, as well as James's conclusion, is my own.

Clearly if there is to be any “similarity” between the two authors it cannot concern all four of Ockham’s positions, for James mentions only three. Furthermore, where O2 identifies universals with intelligible species, J2 describes the concept as something formed by the intellect that is *not* an intelligible species. Also, it is very hard to discern even a remote similarity between J3—the concept is the object itself as cognized—and either O3 or O4. This leaves us with O1 and J1 as the only case of possible overlap between our two authors. O1 identifies universals with acts of intellection; it is a key thesis of Ockham’s mature doctrine of universals according to which “a concept, and any universal, is a quality existing subjectively in the mind” and “is the natural sign of an external thing” (Ockham in Spade 1994, 229). But J1 likewise identifies concepts (of which universals are a species, according to James) with acts of intellection; moreover, it is not a view that James merely mentions only to discard it later on, but one which we see he endorses, albeit in rather tentative terms (see table above, James’s conclusion, 7, ll. 89–91). So there is a parallel here. However, as I hope will emerge from the following discussion, what one may well regard as a bona fide instance of “ontological parsimony” in James of Viterbo (i.e., the identification of concepts, and thus universals, with acts of understanding) goes hand in hand with an overall account of universals that is still very much committed to the sort of metaphysical realism from which Ockham tried so hard to distance himself. I will start by providing a general account of James’s doctrine of universals; I will then focus on the discussion in his *Quaestiones de divinis praedicamentis* q. 25, where his realist leanings come more clearly to the fore.

19.1 James on the Ontology of Concepts and Universals

A universal is a concept for James of Viterbo; it is one of the two main sorts of concept he discusses, the other being transcendentals or analogical concepts. J1 tells us that a concept is “a certain actuality or perfection of the intellect.” Further on in *Quodlibet* 1, q. 1, James defines it as “an accidental form, belonging to the category of quality” (*Quodl.* 1, q. 1, 8, l. 96). Concepts are thus *real things* (*QDP* q. 6, 151, l. 225). But they are also signs (*QDP* q. 15, 217, l. 301) that represent something in extra-mental reality (*QDP* q. 6, 151, ll. 225–226). Let us leave out transcendentals and focus just on universal concepts.

Genera and species (James hardly ever mentions the other three predicables) are real qualities of the soul that represent something outside the soul. What they represent, though, are not extra-mental genera and species, for genera and species exist in act only in the mind; outside the mind, they subsist only in potency.⁴ That is why universals are defined in terms of predication, James explains, for predication is

⁴*QDP* q. 6, 151: “Dicitur autem conceptus rei, non autem res absoluta; quia extra animam non dicitur aliquid genus aut species, nisi materialiter et in potentia. Unde dicit Commentator, in II *Metaphysicae*, quod universale non habet esse, nisi secundum quod est in anima.”

an operation of the soul.⁵ James also tells us that universal concepts are “numerically one” (*QDP* q. 6, 151, ll. 234–235). This is an odd thing to say, *prima facie*, since James appears to be thinking not of concept-tokens (i.e. discrete, accidental qualities of the soul) but of concept-types. What he means by saying that a universal is numerically one is that it is predicable of all the things it is predicable of because it is taken “according to the same definition.” Analogical concepts such as being, by contrast, are not “numerically one” because they are not predicable of those things of which they are predicable (substance and accidents) according to the same reason.

I have said that a universal was a sign for James. But what is it a sign of? James’s answer to this question can be inferred from his answer to a closely related one, namely “what is the object or the foundation of the universal?”; and the answer is: a plurality of things outside the soul. A genus (but the same goes for species) cannot have some unique extra-mental thing as its “object or foundation,” James explains, otherwise it would not be universal.⁶ It must have as its foundation a plurality of things; not however, and this is crucial, a plurality of things insofar as the members of that plurality are distinct, but insofar as they agree (*convenientiam habent*) (*QDP* q. 6, 152, l. 250). A universal, then, is a concept, i.e. a real quality of the soul, enjoying “numerical unity,” and one that signifies a plurality of things outside the soul insofar as they agree. It is this agreement that makes it possible for a single universal concept to be formed and to be predicable of a plurality of singular things (*QDP* q. 6, 152, ll. 249–252). But now, as James explains in his first quodlibet (*Quodl.* 1, q. 1, 6, l. 34), “many and diverse [things] cannot have something in common, unless they agree *in something*” (*nisi in aliquo convenirent*); and as he goes on to write shortly thereafter, agreement in the case of universal and analogical terms is found not only in the name “but also in reality” (*Quodl.* 1, q. 1, 6, l. 40), the nominal agreement being “taken” (*sumptus*) from the real one. Thus the commonality of an analogical term, say *being*, is taken from a real agreement, which James calls an “agreement of attribution,” obtaining between the various things (substances and accidents) of which the term “being” is truly predicated. This agreement is reflected in the way in which the analogical term is predicated, namely principally of one thing (the substance), and secondarily of others (the accidents), which others are attributed to the first “in accordance with some mode of some relation.” The commonality of a univocal term is likewise taken from the agreement possessed by the diverse things of which the term is truly predicated.

⁵*QDP* q. 6, 151: “Inde est quod genus definitur a philosophis per praedicari, quod est actus animae negotiantis circa res.”

⁶James makes this point rather clumsily in *QDP* q. 6 (151, l. 237), by stating that “the thing signified by the universal is not numerically one.” What he means is that a universal does not have just one *significatum*, but many.

But the commonality that characterizes a universal term is different from that of a transcendental; it is the commonality of univocity, in virtue of which a term applies to all the things of which it is predicated according to the very same definition (*ratio*). The sort of agreement from which it is taken must accordingly be different from that from which analogical terms are taken. James defines that agreement as an “essential agreement of similitude and conformity” (*Quodl.* 1, q. 1, 6, ll; 42–43; see also *QDP* q. 8, 236, ll. 247–249).

The key words here are of course “similitude” and “conformity.” In *QDP* q. 6, one of his most detailed discussions devoted to universals, James explains that it is not enough to account for common universal terms to appeal to a real agreement (*convenientia*) in things; what is required is similitude, more precisely *essential* similitude between the things (*QDP* q. 6, 152, l. 275).

Similitude is one of three “species” of agreement distinguished by James, the other two being identity and equality (*QDP* q. 15, 256, ll. 1262–1264). Identity is a rational relation that a thing has with itself (*QDP* q. 15, 258, ll. 1307–1308). Similitude and equality are real relations that concern distinct things, insofar as they are (considered) one (*QDP* q. 13, 163, ll. 1020–1022; *Quodl.* 3, q. 7, 113, ll. 598). It follows that nothing may be similar or equal to itself,⁷ and that two distinct things cannot be identical.

James is uncompromising about the requirement that things must be distinct in order to be similar or equal. In *QDP* q. 15, for instance, he explains that “similitude always requires distinction, not only [the distinction] of those things which are similar, but also of that according to which they are similar.”⁸ In *Quodl.* 3, q. 7, he writes that “similitude and equality are about the oneness [*unitas*] of distinct [things]. Whence similitude is said to be the identical quality [*eadem qualitas*] of different things” (*Quodl.* 3, q. 7, 113, ll. 597–598). The phrase *eadem qualitas* here is apt to suggest that while the particulars are distinct, the real quality in these distinct things is the same, that is, numerically one. Is this what James means here? In fact, he emphatically denies that this is the case: “two [things] similar in respect of whiteness have distinct whitenesses.”⁹ Similitude therefore requires two distinctions: that of the things asserted to be similar, and that of the respect or quality under which they are asserted to be similar.

But while similitude, not merely agreement, is required as a foundation for univocal concepts, not just any similitude will do. The requisite similitude is what James calls similitude of conformity. This is the most perfect of the three sorts of similitude (the other, less perfect ones, being similitude of imitation and similitude of proportion) (*QDP* q. 7, 211, ll. 651–660). As James puts it: “similitudo facit univocationem, scilicet similitudo conformitatis.” Similitude of conformity is, so to

⁷James makes this point explicitly only in regard to similitude (“nihil est sibi ipsi simile,” *QDP* q. 15, 257, l. 1282), but the same point can be extended to equality.

⁸*QDP* q. 15, 257: “Semper enim similitudo requirit distinctionem, non solum eorum quae sunt similia, sed et eius secundum quod dicuntur similia.”

⁹*Quodl.* 3, q. 7, 113: “Duo enim similia secundum albedinem habent distinctas albedines.”

speak, a “univocity-maker” (*QDP* q. 7, 217, ll. 810–811). Because it represents such a strong form of agreement between things, James thinks it is legitimate to describe distinct individuals that display such agreement as being “the same” (*idem*), even though, as we saw above, identity is strictly speaking only a reflexive relation:

[...] identity is twofold: one is strict [identity], as when something is said to be identical to itself; the other is relative [identity], for instance a plurality of individuals of the same species are said to be the same on account of [their] natural conformity.¹⁰

We could very simply summarize the tenor of James’s thoughts on the ontological status of universals as follows. There is something real in particulars that grounds the use of common names, namely the individually distinct natures, or forms, or qualities of individually distinct things. Otherwise put, agreement or similitude is “in things”; however, common natures or qualities, qua common, exist only in the mind.

It is true that James is sometimes given to talk about natures and forms as things shared or had in common. In question 2 of *Quodlibet* 1, for instance, where he is debating whether God can create an infinite number of species of equal rank, James explains that equality in this regard is nothing else than the “perfect similitude of those [things] which communicate in the perfection of some nature” (*Quodl.* 1, q. 2, 31, ll. 530–531), phraseology that is suggestive of real commonalities. Likewise, in *QDP* q. 6 he asserts that a genus may be predicated only of those things which “communicate in a numerically identical form” (*QDP* q. 6, 151, ll. 242–243). However, James no more subscribes to shared essences than he does to numerically identical real qualities. Indeed, as he makes clear in *QDP* q. 6, the only “numerically identical” form things can communicate in is “the form *understood*, which is a concept of the soul.”¹¹ The same response presumably applies *mutatis mutandis* to the passage in *Quodlibet* 2, q. 1. But if the only form individuals communicate in—that is, the only form that we could *à la rigueur* call a shared form—is a form that is understood, then there really is nothing *a parte rei* other than distinct individuals, having numerically distinct natures and qualities, between which relations of agreement (greater or lesser) may obtain.

19.2 James on the “Threefold Distinction”

One of James’s fullest treatments of universals occurs in question 25 of his *Questions on the Divine Categories*, where the issue is whether “whole” (*totum*) or “totality” (*totalitas*) are predicated of God. The reason universals play an important part in this discussion is that Aristotle had distinguished between two types of

¹⁰*Quodl.* 3, q. 7, 113: “Ad hoc autem dicendum est quod duplex est identitas: una quidem simpliciter, ut cum dicitur aliquid idem sibi; alia vero secundum quid, sicut plura individua eiusdem speciei dicuntur idem propter conformitatem in natura.”

¹¹*QDP* q. 6, 151: “Quod non potest intelligi nisi de forma intellecta, quae est conceptus animae.”

whole, integral wholes and universal wholes. James must accordingly examine in what ways each type can be predicated of God. Before doing so however he offers a detailed characterization of each sort of whole and how they differ. He starts his discussion of “universal wholes” by reminding the reader of the Neoplatonists’ threefold distinction between *ante rem*, *in re* and *post rem* universals:

Of that whole [that is said] according to a resemblance [to integral wholes], namely the universal [whole], there is a certain threefold distinction, for it is commonly agreed that there are three sorts of universal: the universal before the thing, the universal in the thing, and the universal after the thing. The universal before the thing is the idea which Plato posited, [the universal] in the thing is what is commonly called the universal, which is said of many things, [the universal] after the thing is the intelligible species.¹²

There is nothing wrong with this threefold distinction, James goes on to write, provided it is understood correctly (*sane intellecta*). James, of course, thinks it is not always understood correctly. Indeed, as we will see shortly, although he finds nothing wrong with identifying the universal “before the thing” with a Platonic idea, he does object to the identification of the universal “in the thing” with the universal properly so-called, as he does to the identification of the universal “after the thing” with an intelligible species. Where then does James think we should turn for a correct understanding of the threefold distinction? His answer, as so often, is: to Simplicius. For Simplicius in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* appeals to the same threefold distinction as above but does so, James contends, in “a more scientific way.” As evidence for this claim, James quotes a lengthy passage from Simplicius’s commentary, which I here reproduce in full in Frans de Haas’ translation (Simplicius 2001, 24):

Perhaps one should take “common item” in three ways, the first transcending the individuals and being the cause of the common item in them in virtue of its single nature, as it is also the cause of the difference <between them> in virtue of its pre-encompassing many species. For example, in virtue of the single nature of animal the first animal, i.e. the Animal-Itself, endows all animals qua animals with the common item they share, and in virtue of its pre-encompassing the different species it establishes the different species of animals. The second common item is the one that the different species are endowed with by their common cause and which resides in them, like the one in each animal. The third is the common feature established in our thoughts by means of abstraction, which is later-born and most of all admits of the notion of the non-differentiated and common feature.

For the common cause transcends its effects and is something different from them in all respects. It is common as a cause, but not as a common nature. The commonality which completes the individuals has difference together with the common item. For there is nothing merely common in mortal and immortal substance, but the common feature is differentiated and the difference is shared in common. Thus only the result of abstraction which we leave behind when we strip away the differences provides us with the notion of the common feature qua common.

¹²*QDP* q. 25, 144–145: “Huius tamen totius secundum similitudinem, scilicet universalis, est quaedam distinctio trimembris, et solet communiter dici quod est triplex universale, scilicet ante rem, in re et post rem. Ante rem ut idea, quam Plato posuit; in re ut illud quod communiter vocamus universale, quod dicitur de pluribus; post rem ut species intelligibilis.”

Before examining James's interpretation of this text, let us first make a few quick general remarks about it.¹³ The three universals are readily recognizable in Simplicius's characterization: the universal *ante rem* is the "common item" qua cause; the universal *in re* is the common element the different species are endowed with; and the universal *post rem* is the one that is established in the mind by abstraction. But Simplicius's characterization of the universal *in re* in the first paragraph is somewhat misleading in view of what he says in the second one. By describing (as he does in the first paragraph) the universal *in re* as the one that "the different species are endowed with by their common cause and which resides in them, like the one in each animal," the reader is led to believe that there exists a self-identical common item in the different species. But this is what Simplicius denies in the next paragraph, where he offers a more complete characterization of the *in re* universal, which he now refers to as "the commonality which completes the individual." Simplicius tells us that this commonality "has difference together with the common item." However, as we discover in the next sentence, what he means by this last phrase is not that commonality and difference coexist side by side; what he means, rather, is that there is no self-identical commonality at all in the species. For Simplicius, the "common item" is not "merely common," it is differentiated; conversely, the difference is not merely different, it is shared in common. It follows that the universal which is "the common feature qua common" does not exist in the thing, but only in the intellect as a result of abstraction. Thus the "more scientific" understanding of the threefold distinction alluded to by James should presumably be understood as follows: the universal *ante rem* is to be understood as the common element insofar as it is a cause; the universal *in re* should be understood as the "commonality which has the common element together with difference"—it is thus not a universal in the thing; and the universal *post rem* we must take to be the universal properly so-called. As we will now see, this is the lesson James gleaned from Simplicius as well.

Here is how James summarizes Simplicius's account of the three universals. I provide the Latin of Ypma's critical edition text (with a few, but significant, corrections) in the left-hand column, with the English translation opposite:

[1] Primum universale est secundum causalitatem, et hoc est idea, nec refert quantum ad hoc, sive ponatur idea ut Plato posuisse dicitur, sive ut catholica veritas ponit	[1] The first universal is [said] according to causality, and that is the idea, and it does not matter whether idea is understood as Plato is said to have understood it, or as catholic truth takes it
[2] Secundum universale est non existens extra animam in singularibus; quod est universale potentia, quia in re est similitudo in diversis, ex qua concipitur universale	[2] The second universal does not exist outside of the soul in singular [things]; it is the universal in potency, for in the thing there is similitudo in diverse [things], from which the universal is conceived

(continued)

¹³For Simplicius on universals see de Libera (1996) and Zachhuber (2005).

[3] Tertium universale est ipsa natura existens in singularibus, ut concepta sine (<i>sive</i> : Ypma) intellectu eorum per quae singularia differunt. Intellectus enim, auferendo ea quibus differunt, concipit uno conceptu illa propter similitudinem eorum	[3] The third universal is the nature itself existing in singulars, as it is conceived, without [an] understanding of those [things] by which singulars differ. For the intellect, by removing those [things] by which they differ, in one concept conceives those [singular things] by reason of their similarity
[4] Unde hoc universale dicitur natura existens in singularibus, non existens in eis, scilicet secundum convenientiam et differentiam, sed ut concepta ab intellectu, cum convenientia sine (<i>sive</i> : Ypma) differentia, vel etiam ipse conceptus intellectus ut repraesentativus naturae ipsius solum in qua conveniunt, sine (<i>sive</i> : Ypma) repraesentatione horum per quae differunt. Et hoc vere et proprie dicitur universale, ut patet per Simplicium (Ypma, 146, 384–399).	[4] Thus this universal is said [to be] the nature existing in singulars, not existing in them, that is, according to agreement and difference, but [existing] as conceived by the intellect with agreement [but] without difference; or also [it is said to be] the intellect's concept itself insofar as it is representative of the nature itself in which [the singulars] agree, without the representation of those [things] by which they differ. And this truly and properly is called the universal, as is made clear by Simplicius

James signals his agreement with Simplicius regarding the nature of the *ante rem* universal. True enough, Simplicius identifies it with the Platonic idea, which is in James's eyes, strictly speaking, incorrect; but Simplicius is at least right to the extent that Platonic ideas are causes, which is what universals *ante rem* are according to James. What about the universal *in re*? Again, James endorses Simplicius's view that the universal exists *in re* only in potency. And what of the third universal? As we have just seen, for Simplicius the common feature *qua* common, that is, the universal *post rem*, results from the process of abstraction by which "we strip away the differences [which] provides us with the notion of the common feature *qua* common." James does not mention abstraction in [3], however he clearly agrees with the idea that only the commonality is found in the intellect—since what is grasped in one concept is the similitude *without* the differences. But then James does something surprising: he *identifies* the *post rem* universal with the nature in the singulars, but the nature in the singulars as conceived. That he is serious about such an identification is confirmed in [4] by his characterization of the universal as "natura existens in singularibus, non existens in eis, scilicet secundum convenientiam et differentiam [. . .]." Why does James now describe universals in this fashion? Part of the explanation must lie in his belief, articulated a few lines further in the text, that it does not suffice for something to be a universal that it be predicated of many; rather, "in order for something to be a universal *it has to be in many*" (*QDP* q. 25, 146, ll. 400–401). James is then faced with the task of showing which of the three universals is "in many."

Clearly the first universal, the universal *ante rem*, cannot, for it is a cause of universals, not a universal itself. But nor can the universal *in re* fit the bill, for it exists there only in potency. This leaves the third universal as the only option. But it is supposed to exist only in the mind. James thus finds himself in the awkward position of having to argue that the *post rem* universal, which is in the mind, is in the thing. The crucial phrase, of course, is “as conceived” [4] or as “considered” [7]. What James is doing is not identifying the universal with the nature-in-the-thing *simpliciter*, but rather identifying the universal with the nature-in-the-thing *as conceived*. Admittedly, this is not an entirely felicitous manner of speaking but James’s awkwardness of speech is in part a reflection of the difficulties inherent in the type of solution he is defending, which involves on the one hand asserting the extra-mental “rootedness” of universals while situating universals qua common only in the mind.

[5] Primum autem est causa pro universali, sed non est in pluribus	[5] The first is a cause for the universal, but it does not exist in the many
[6] Item requiritur sola convenientia, quia communitas omnis ex convenientia sumitur. Ubi ergo est convenientia et differentia, ibi non vere est universale; et hoc est in secundo modo universalis	[6] Again [in order for something to be a universal] only agreement is required, for all commonality is taken from agreement. Hence, where there is agreement and difference, there the universal cannot truly be; and that is [so] in the case of the second sort of universal
[7] Sed in tertio modo concurrunt utrumque, quia illud quod consideratur, in re est et non separatur a re, et (<i>cum: add. Ypma</i>) est ibi sola convenientia sine (<i>sive: Ypma</i>) differentia, et hoc est per acceptionem intellectus. Et ad hoc universale facit anima, non autem ad primum et ad secundum	[7] But in the [case of the] third sort [of universal], both [features] combine. For what is being considered is in the thing and is not separated from it; and here there is only agreement without difference, and that is through [its] reception by the intellect. And that universal, but not the first or the second, is produced by the soul

James’s reading of Simplicius clearly goes beyond what is warranted by the text. Simplicius does not say in the passage quoted above, nor, to my knowledge, anywhere else, that the universal is in the thing. On the other hand, James’s assertion that “for something to be universal it has to be in the many” is clearly not to be taken at face value—since James holds that the universal properly speaking exists only in the mind.

Let us now return to the question of the “correct understanding” of the threefold distinction. We will recall that according to what James viewed as the incorrect understanding, the universal properly so-called was the universal *in re*, while the universal *post rem* was the intelligible species. Taking his cue from Simplicius, James has shown that the universal cannot exist in the thing—because there it is commingled with difference and so exists only in potency—but exists only in the intellect. What about the identification of universals with species? Even if there were such things as intelligible species—and James thinks there are not¹⁴—given

¹⁴See *Quodl.* 3, q. 4, 73, ll. 493–495.

that we know from J2 that James thinks that intelligible species, “according to those who posit them,” are distinct entities from the act of understanding, and from the texts cited in Sect. 1 that James identifies universals *post rem* with the act of understanding, it follows that the thesis that universals are intelligible species must, in James’s view, be incorrect.

Thus, despite the oddity of James’s claim that “for something to be universal it has to be in the many,” the general tenor of his doctrine in the *QDP* q. 25 and elsewhere is that similitudes, commonalities are only “in the mind.”

19.3 Conclusion

I have used a footnote of the critical edition of William Ockham’s *Ordinatio* concerning a supposed “similarity” between a list of theories regarding universals mentioned by Ockham in his *Ordinatio* and a list of possible senses of “concept” mentioned by James of Viterbo in his *Quodlibet* 1 as a pretext to present the outlines of James’s doctrine of universals, an author whose views are seldom if ever discussed in connection with those of the *Venerabilis Inceptor*. For James of Viterbo, as for Ockham, universals do exist, but they exist as qualities of the soul. Qualities of the soul are discrete acts of understanding; and they act as signs of things outside the soul, insofar as they agree. It follows that they cannot be intelligible species, whether we take these, as James apparently thinks proponents of intelligible species do, to be products of the act of understanding, or we take them, as others, e.g. Aquinas did, as antecedent to the act of understanding (in which case they are still distinct from the act of understanding). A crucial corollary of these views is that there are no extra-mental universals or common natures: the natural world, for James, is strictly a world of singulars.

Yet, one should be careful not to overstate the convergence between our two authors, especially if we take into account James’s assertions in *QDP* q. 25. True enough, James does repudiate real universals and real commonalities, and he does believe that *intellectus facit universale* (*Quodl.* 1, q. 5, 71, l. 276). But what major author in the last decade of the thirteenth century would have disagreed with him on these points? Furthermore, though James might have thought that his repeated denial that there are *in re* universals shielded him from the charge that he was a metaphysical realist, Ockham would have surely considered that he was mistaken in this belief. To see this, we need look no further than to James’s contention in *QDP* q. 25 that the universal *is* the nature qua conceived. One would be hard-pressed to find a clearer statement of the very position which Ockham, in the opening sentence of the presentation of his personal views, in *Ordinatio* d. 2, q. 7, declares cannot possibly be true: “No thing outside the soul is universal (. . .) *no matter how it is considered or understood*” (Ockham in Spade 1994, 204. My emphasis). Further, while it is true that James did exhibit “deflationary” tendencies—in addition to his identification of universals with acts of understanding, he also rejected, in common with other contemporaries, intelligible species and the distinction of the agent and possible

intellect—he also postulated the existence of a complex and unwieldy system of so-called *idoneitates*, i.e., seminal reasons, in nature and in the soul, a doctrine that testifies to anything but a deflationary metaphysics (On *idoneitates* see Côté 2009).

In sum, then, while there might be some intriguing parallels in the views held by Ockham and James of Viterbo on the nature of universals, these parallels are neither indicative of a fundamental agreement on universals, nor are they suggestive of any particular affinity in metaphysical outlook or temperament.

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