

# Universal Features: Doubts, Questions, Residual Problems

*DM VI 7*



# The View in a Sentence

- A universal is an *ens rationis*, properly regarded as an extrinsic denomination grounded in the intrinsic individual formal unities of the mind- and language-independent really real *res* floating around out there, as mediated by non-formally representing intelligible species related to their objects predicatively by some manner of analogy of attribution.



# Residual Issues (*DM VI 7*)

- Some questions/problems dispatched:
  - Are universals real? (*DM VI 7.2-4*)
  - Are universals corporeal? (*DM VI 7.5*)
  - Are universals substances or accidents? (*DM VI 7.6*)
  - Are universals eternal? (*DM VI 7.7*)
  - Are universals caused? (*DM VI 7.8*)



# Are universals real? (*DM* VI 7.2-4)

- Framing the Question:
  - ‘It is first asked whether universals are entities or not. The question can be asked either about the nature which is denominated *universal* or about the intention itself or about the denomination of universality.’ (*DM* VI 7.2)
  - *Quaeritur ergo primo an universalia sint entia, necne. Quod interrogari potest vel de natura, quae universalis denominatur, vel de ipsa intentione seu denominatione universalitatis.*
- Compare: Is Santa Claus a being?
  - Does the thing called Santa Claus exist?
  - Does the concept of Santa Claus exist (does Santa Claus exist *secundum intentionem*:
    - Perhaps: does the object of thought, Santa Claus, exist intentionally?
    - Or, is it rather: does the intention pertaining to Santa Claus exist?



# A Ruling

- The nature denominated *universal*: that nature is a being, but it is, in things, individual.
  - So, e.g., *Peter is human* and *Paula is human*.
    - Not: there is humanity, which exists intrinsically, shared by Peter and Paula.
- The universal, *being human*, is an *ens rationis*.
  - So, in sum, the ruling: the (singular) nature denominated *universal* exists—but is not universal, whereas the denominating universal (so to speak) does not.
  - ‘If, however, the discussion turns on universality itself, or on the intention of universality, the common universality is not said to be a real being but a being of reason, which is true in this sense, namely, that it is not some property, or something intrinsically and really inhering in the nature which is denominated *universal*, according to what we have said.’ (*DM* VI 7.2)
  - *Si autem sit sermo de universalitate ipsa seu de intentione universalitatis, sic communiter dici solet non esse ens reale sed rationis, quod in hoc sensu verum est, scilicet, quod non est proprietas aliqua neque aliquid intrinsece et realiter inhaerens naturae quae denominatur universalis, iuxta ea quae diximus.*



# A (Further) Distinction

- That remains potentially misleading:
  - ‘Yet in another sense there is some need for some distinction and clarification. For we say in two senses that a nature can be denominated *universal*: first by an absolute denomination, as if it were subsisting universally, and secondly by a respective denomination [or a denomination in respect of something].’ (*DM* VI 7.2)
  - *Tamen in alio sensu nonnulla distinctione et declaratione opus est. Dupliciter enim diximus naturam posse denominari universalem; primo, denominatione absoluta ac si universaliter subsisteret; secundo, denominatione respectiva.*
- The upshot:
  - Taken in the first sense, the denominated universal is not even an *ens rationis*.
  - Taken in the second sense, the denominated universal is an *ens rationis*.



# Are universals corporeal? (*DM* VI 7.5)

- ‘. . . [I]t must be said that that some universals can indeed be corporeal, those, indisputably, which belong to things composed of form and matter, as is clear from the concept of man, horse, animal, and body.’ (*DM* VI 7.5)
- ‘. . . *dicendum est posse quidem aliqua universalia esse corporea, ea, nimirum, quae conveniunt rebus ex materia et forma compositis, ut patet de conceptu hominis, equi, animalis, corporis.*
- Question: What precisely is meant in calling a universal ‘corporeal’ beyond merely saying they are extrinsic denominations of entities which are themselves corporeal?
  - N.b. the contrast class includes not only incorporeal universals but also those common to corporeal and incorporeal beings.



# Are universals substances or accidents? (*DM* VI 7.6)

- Answer: neither or both, as you like.
- *Cf.* our earlier distinction between that nature ‘which is denominated *universal*’ and ‘the intention itself or the denomination pertaining to universality.’ (*DM* VI 7.2)
- As to the what is denominated universal: *both*.
- As to the denomination pertaining to universality: *neither*.
  - ‘Although,’ says Suárez, ‘it must be conceived in the manner of an incorporeal accident’ (*quamquam per modum accidentis incorporei concipienda sit*).



# Are universals eternal? (*DM* VI 7.7)

- A simple thought: universals figure in the first principles of sciences; these first principles are necessary and invariant; they are such only if their terms are eternal; hence. . .
  - Recall the conception of science at play here:
    - Any given *scientia* must proceed via *demonstrations*, that is, deductions, or logically valid syllogisms that:
      - the premises are necessary;
      - the premises are better known than their conclusions;
      - and the premises are universal in scope (cf. Aristotle, *APo* 71b16-25, 77b5-73a6; *Met.* 981a5-30, 1006a6-18, 1039b27-1040a7)



# Eternal or Perpetual

- A Platonist understanding: eternal
- A modified Aristotelian understanding: perpetual
  - ‘We, however, assume that these singulars do not always exist and that outside them there do not exist universals: whence we conclude that these cannot be called universal with regard to the real existence which they have beyond their causes. Therefore, these universals are called perpetual, according to the being pertaining to essence or to potential being.’ (*DM VI 7.7*)
  - *Nos autem supponimus haec singularia non semper esse et extra illa non existere universalia: unde concludimus haec non posse dici aeterna secundum realem existentiam quam extra suas causas habent. Dicuntur ergo haec universalia perpetua secundum esse essentiae seu potentiale.*



# Are universals caused? (*DM* VI 7.8)

- Not *really*: let us again distinguish (i) universal natures (*scilicet* individual natures in things denominated universal by us) and (ii) their universality (*scilicet* the extrinsic denominations brought into being by us).
- (i) Easy: no beings, no causes.
- (ii) Complicated:
  - *entia rationis* do not have proper and real causes (*non oportet ut habeat proprias ac reales causas*)
  - Never the less (*tamen*) they initiate real beings, and so have surrogates material and formal causes; the efficient cause is the intellect itself
    - material: this is the material *about which* (*circa quam*), than the material in which or from which (*quam in qua vel ex qua*).
      - Here a universal ‘imitates a material cause in so far as it is like a subject which undergoes the intention of universality and because of this is denominated a universal’ (*quatenus est veluti subiectum quod substernitur intentioni universalitatis et ab ea universale denominatur*)
    - formal: not really necessary to speak of a formal cause here — unless you’re feeling desperate, in which case Suárez happily provides the goods:
      - ‘It is not necessary to seek a formal or final cause here for the ver universality of the universe itself, considered thus in actuality, is like a form which is norther other than either the denomination arising from the act of intellect, or the relation of reason founded and conceived in it.’



# The View in a Sentence

- A universal is an *ens rationis*, properly regarded as an extrinsic denomination grounded in the intrinsic individual formal unities of the mind- and language-independent really real *res* floating around out there, as mediated by non-formally representing intelligible species related to their objects predicatively by some manner of analogy of attribution.



That Question

But is it true?