1. Is there a doctrine of the transcendentals in Ockham?

The medieval doctrine of the transcendentals is closely connected with a metaphysical conception of reality, but is there a science of being in William of Ockham (ca. 1285–1347)? In some studies it has been suggested that his “nominalism” meant the beginning of the end of metaphysics. Pierre Alféri, for instance, has argued that this science in fact became a “phantom” for Ockham in two respects. First, metaphysics is a phantom in the corpus of his writings: he wrote commentaries on several Aristotelian works, but not on the *Metaphysics*. Ockham was one of the few prominent medieval authors who did not comment upon this fundamental text. Secondly, it is the practice of his thought in particular that makes the metaphysical project of a universal science of being as being a phantom. The consideration of transcendental “being” is absorbed by the science of logic that explains the predication of the term *ens*, together with the particular sciences that deal with the singular beings to which the term refers.¹

Neither argument is, however, conclusive. The absence of a *Metaphysics* commentary is not evidence for an antimetaphysical tendency. Ockham himself holds out the possibility of such a commentary;² the reason that he did not realize this intention was not necessarily a lack of interest. Moreover, in several places of his work, Ockham observes that the examination of a problem he is discussing is really part of the

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tasks of First Philosophy. He states, for example, that the question as to the ontological status of concepts and second intentions does not pertain ad logicam but ad metaphysicam. When commenting on Porphyry’s famous statement on the equivocity of being, Ockham remarks that it would be false to deny a univocal concept common to the first being and the other beings. “It pertains, however, to a higher artifex [namely the metaphysician] to speak of this”. The fact is Ockham does have a metaphysics and never denies its possibility.

What conception does he have of this science? His ontology has mostly been studied with respect to two issues, the problem of the universals and the doctrine of the categories. Both themes are typical of the “nominalist” tendency in Ockham’s metaphysics. His solution to the problem of the universals reflects his criticism of conceptual realism—there is no universality in things. His analysis of the categories, which are realiter reduced to two “absolute” categories, namely, substance and quality, reflects his program of “ontological reduction”.

In view of this tendency one could wonder whether there is a doctrine of the transcendental in Ockham. The marginal attention paid to this topic in most studies creates the impression that the account of

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