

## William of Ockham (Occam) Notes 1290-1349/50

A revolutionary guy~

- 1) scholastic tradition (how one gains knowledge)
- 2) spiritual tradition (papal authority, case of poverty)
- 3) ecclesio-political tradition (where does power come from? sided with Louis of Bavaria and Rome)

### **Biographical outline**

English, Franciscan, studied at Oxford 1310-18, lectured there, wrote on logic; 1325 he was sent to Avignon to get questioned about what he was teaching + he was at that point asked to investigate on the Papal position on the poverty of Christ. (Franciscan p.o.v.)

Pope John XXII in Avignon; Louis IV of Bavaria—invades and sets up rival in Rome

William looked at the edict and decided that it was wrong and heretical. He flees to court of Rome, writes tracts to support spiritual Franciscan writing on austere poverty. He was excommunicated by Papal ban, and starts hanging out with Louis IV. William of Ockham was never himself actually condemned, but he was really controversial.

### **Challenges the ecclesio-political tradition**

supports the power of the emperor over the pope, particularly in worldly secular affairs

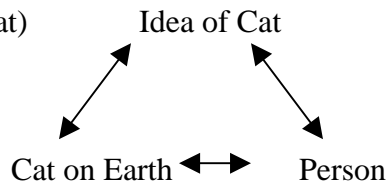
### **Challenges the spiritual tradition**

In the Franciscan argument over poverty, decides that the pope is wrong. See notes above. Ockham argues Christ was actually poor and is a worthy model.

### **Challenges the scholastic tradition:**

Problem of universals—what makes individuals of a group all alike?

EXAMPLE (Illustration of cat)



Various solutions

Platonic: universals (ideas) are all that truly exist

Thomastic (Thomas Aquinas): universals exist in and through examples (and exist even when all gone)

Included are drawings that involve a triangulation

Ockham: neither of these

“Ockham’s razor” says, if you can do it in 2 steps, you don’t need to use any more, or “plurality is not to be posited without necessity.”

He says that the universal is identical with individual:  
Individuals exist, universals are names (nomina) and therefore nominalism: universals are extractions to which we give names as a result of experience on earth

This theory raised problems about the Trinity (defined as one nature in three persons); no necessary mediation between God’s nature and nature of creation. Ockham says, our creation is based on God’s decision, not on nature and therefore, salvation is God’s choice, the means of salvation is God’s choice, and so applies the razor theory. God doesn’t need a secondary cause. Therefore:

If God can save **with** the church, he can save **without** the church.

Nothing forces God to do anything; God is free. However, this raises the anxiety level: how do you know you’re saved? if praying or doing good doesn’t force God to save you. What makes the Church a valid instrument of salvation (the personal piety of the popes? the authority of the Bible?)