

TRANSTEMPORAL PROBLEMS IN PHILOSOPHY: THE CASE OF UNIVERSALS

1. The example I have chosen to test the method of CQAs is probably the philosophical problem which is considered as the most characteristic of the Middle Ages, the archproblem par excellence, 'the' problem of universals, which is supposed to have crossed the centuries, identical, intact, and varying only at the level of the answers given to it. (A. de Libera. *L'archéologie philosophique*. Paris: Vrin, 2016, 29; my translation).
2. [...] we noted last week two requirements. On the one hand, confirming the archeological thesis drawn from Collingwood, the requirement to replace the 'Problems', or even the 'archproblems' of traditional historiography, seen as general, enduring, or 'eternal', with *transitory and particular* complexes of questions and answers (CQAs). (A. de Libera. *op. cit.* 50; my translation, with my italics).
3. I shall put aside the investigation of certain profound questions concerning genera and *species*, since such an undertaking requires more detailed examination: (1) whether genera or *species* exist in themselves or reside in mere concepts alone; (2) whether, if they exist, they are corporeal or incorporeal; and (3) whether they exist apart or in sense objects and in dependence on them. (Porphyry. *Isagoge*. Transl. E. W. Warren 1975).
4. Was it really true, I asked myself, that the problems of philosophy were, even in the loosest sense of that word, eternal? Was it really true that different philosophies were different attempts to answer the same questions? I soon discovered that it was not true; it was merely a vulgar error, consequent on a kind of historical myopia which, deceived by superficial resemblances, failed to detect profound differences. (R. G. Collingwood. *An Autobiography*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978, 60-61).
5. Philosophers explain genus as that which is predicated of many things which differ in species with respect to the question 'What is this?', for example 'animal'. [Quoted from Aristotle, *Topics* I, 5, 102a31-32] [...] They say also that species is that which is predicated of many things which differ in number with respect to the question 'What is this?'. (Porphyry. *Isagoge*. Transl. E. W. Warren 1975, slightly amended).
6. I should like to know whether you mean that there are certain Forms of which all other things partake, and *from which they derive their names*; that things are called 'similar', for example, because they partake of similarity; and 'great' because they partake of greatness, and 'just' and 'beautiful' because they partake of justice and beauty? Yes, certainly, said Socrates, that is my meaning. (Plato. *Parmenides* 130e-131a. Transl. B. Jowett 2014, slightly amended).
7. [...] as regards political action I kept constantly waiting for an opportune moment; until, finally, looking at all the States which now exist, I perceived that one and all they are badly governed; for the state of their laws is such as to be almost incurable [...] So in my praise of true philosophy I was compelled to declare that by it alone one is able to discern all forms of justice both political and individual. (Plato. *Letter* 7 326a. Transl. R. G. Bury 1966, slightly amended).

8. Socrates: [...] is it not by justice that the just are just? [...] Hippias: I shall answer that it is by justice. S: Then this - I mean justice - is something? H: Certainly. S: Then, too, by wisdom the wise are wise and by the good all things are good, are they not? H: Of course. S: And justice, wisdom, and so forth are something; for the just, wise, and so forth would not be such by them, if they were not something? H: To be sure, they are something. S: Then are not all beautiful things beautiful by the beautiful? H: Yes, by the beautiful. S: By the beautiful, which is something? H: Yes, for what alternative is there? (Plato. *Greater Hippias* 287c-d. Transl. R. G. Bury 1966).
9. For every one agrees that a universal is something predicable of many, but only a mental concept or a conventional sign is predicated. No substance is ever predicated of anything. Therefore, only a mental concept or a conventional sign is a universal. (William of Ockham. *Summa Logicae* I, 15. Transl. M. J. Loux 1974, slightly amended).
10. As regards the identity and distinction of God from creatures we need to investigate whether there is something univocally common to God and creatures that is essentially predicable of both. But since the question and the many things that have been said on it as well as the things that are going to be said in the questions that follow hang on the knowledge of the univocal and the universal, in order to clarify what has been said and what is going to be said I ask first some questions about the nature of the universal and the univocal. (William of Ockham. *Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, quest. 4. Transl. M. M. Tweedale 1999).
11. A theologically problematic inference: God is a being [*ens*], the creatures are beings, therefore there is something that God and the creatures have in common.