Abstract: Ockham’s own formulations of his Razor state that one should only include a given entity in one’s ontology when one has either sensory evidence, demonstrative argument, or theological authority in favor of it. But how does Ockham decide which theological claims to treat as data for theory construction? Here I show how over time (perhaps in no small part due to pressure and attention from ecclesiastical censors) Ockham refined and changed the way he formulated his Razor, particularly the “authority clause” that states that authoritative theological pronouncements constitute a reason for postulating entities in one’s ontology. This refinement proceeded across three stages, culminating in the political writings of the final period of his life, in which Ockham offers reasons (not previously mentioned in scholarly discussions of Ockham’s Razor) against granting ecclesial authority any significant role to play in settling ontological questions.

William of Ockham’s own versions of the principle of parsimony generally include some sort of invocation of theological authority: one should only include a given entity in one’s ontology, he claims, when one has either clear sensory evidence of it, a demonstrative argument for it, or an authoritative theological pronouncement for it.¹ As readers of Ockham are aware, there are aspects of his ontology where that final “authority clause” is crucial. For instance, Ockham acknowledges the existence of entities such as infused charity and the trinitarian relations solely as a result of theological authority. But there are also important cases where Ockham refuses to admit entities

¹ Throughout, I use the following abbreviations for Ockham’s works: Ordinatio in librum primum Sententiarum [Ord.], Reportatio in libros II, III, IV Sententiarum [Rep.], Quaestiones variae [Var. Ques.], Tractatus de quantitate [Quant.], Tractatus de corpore Christi [DCC], Quodlibeta septem [Quod.], and Dialogus [Dial.]. All citations to works other than the Dialogus are to the standard critical editions of Ockham’s works: Opera Theologica [OTh] and Opera Philosophica [OPh]; citations to Dialogus are to the in-progress edition from the British Academy. All translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

¹ This paper was awarded the 2021 Res Philosophica Essay Prize for best unsolicited paper in the special issue on the topic of Theological Dogma and Philosophical Innovation in Medieval Philosophy.
countenanced by most other medieval theologians, such as his rejection of quantitative entities, contrary to the prevailing accounts of the doctrine of the Eucharist in his day. The question for Ockham—as for any philosopher who takes theological pronouncements to be relevant for their ontology—is how does one decide which theological claims to treat as data for one’s theory construction? This matter became increasingly salient to him as his views came under increasing amounts of scrutiny from ecclesiastical authorities, ultimately culminating in his excommunication and exile.

While there have been many discussions and studies of Ockham’s Razor, his ontology, and his overall philosophical methods, much less has been said about his views about the nature and scope of theological authority and how those views serve to inform his broader ontology, let alone how those views seem to have changed over the course of his career. This may be because, as we will see, Ockham’s most detailed discussion of this matter is found in the third part of his *Dialogus*, a work less commonly studied by scholars of his epistemology and metaphysics.) His consideration of the role of theological authority in philosophical matters even leads Ockham to take some first steps toward an account of the epistemology of disagreement, one that provides advice on how one ought to adjust one’s beliefs in the face of experts who disagree.

In what follows, I show how over time (perhaps in no small part due to pressure and attention from ecclesiastical censors) Ockham refined and changed the way he formulated his Razor, particularly the “authority clause” that states that authoritative theological pronouncements constitute a reason for postulating entities in one’s ontology. This refinement proceeded across three stages. First, in his earliest works, particularly his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Ockham adopts a broad trust in ecclesial authority when it comes to matters of ontology, though without specifying who precisely holds such authority. Second, in his later theological and philosophical writings, composed while he was facing charges of unorthodoxy from both his fellow Franciscans and the wider church hierarchy, Ockham reformulates his Razor to a narrower conception of theological authority, restricting the authority clause to only Scripture and to specific theological authority figures that have been institutionally recognized as such. Third, in the political writings of the final period of his life, composed after having been excommunicated and exiled, Ockham offers arguments against granting ecclesial authority any significant role to play in answering questions of ontology.

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2 One recent exception is found in Pelletier 2019, which includes a brief discussion of Ockham’s understanding of “religious sources of testimonial knowledge” amidst a broader survey of his views on testimony generally.
1 Varieties of Parsimony

Many studies of Ockham have devoted sustained attention to his Razor.\(^3\) Although he was of course hardly the first to suggest that ontological theories should be simple, the principle of parsimony has come to bear Ockham’s name due to the frequency with which he asserts that “plurality should not be posited without necessity” and that “it is pointless to do with more what may be done with fewer.” Despite the significant attention paid to Ockham’s Razor, it has not frequently been discussed \textit{why} precisely Ockham thinks parsimony ought to be used as a guide in theory choice.\(^4\)

Note that there are a number of options that Ockham (or anyone else attempting to motivate a principle of parsimony) might take here. For instance, one might think that maximal parsimony is a sufficient condition for the truth of a theory: the one true account of reality just is the simplest theory that accounts for all the data. (Of course, by “all the data” one might mean all the \textit{known} data, all the \textit{knowable} data, or instead all \textit{possible} data whatsoever; this choice will itself result in quite different accounts, of varying levels of plausibility.) More plausibly, one might say that parsimony is a theoretical virtue that makes theories more probable; given two theories that both adequately account for the data, the simpler theory is more likely to be true. This understanding itself splits into two: simplicity could be a \textit{ceteris paribus} virtue (all other things being equal, the simpler theory is more likely to be true) or a \textit{simpliciter} virtue (the simpler theory is more likely to be true even when taking into account all other facts about the theories).

Or parsimony might not be seen as a truth-conducive property whatsoever. It might be seen as a pragmatic virtue of theories: perhaps simpler theories are easier for us to work with, or more readily comprehensible. Or parsimony could be a merely prudential guide for avoiding ontological commitments beyond some maximally safe position: the simplest theory tells us which entities must exist, while less parsimonious theories posit entities whose existence is not strictly entailed by the data, perhaps.\(^5\) Or perhaps parsimony is nothing more than the aesthetic preference that simpler theories are more beautiful or elegant than their competitors.\(^6\)

\(^3\) See, for example, Adams 1989, 156–161; Maurer 1999, 112–129; and Keele 2010, 89–110.
\(^4\) Adams (1989, 156–161) is a notable exception.
\(^5\) This assumes that the simplest theory that adequately explains the data will be a proper subset of all rival theories, which is likely to be an unwarranted assumption, but perhaps makes some sense in the fourteenth-century context of arguments over which Aristotelian categories must be admitted in one’s ontology.
\(^6\) I’m not aware of any work that lays out the options in precisely this way; but see Adams 1989, 157–158, and Hales 1997 for similar lists of ways to understand parsimony. A related but distinct division is given by Keele (2010, 91–93), who distinguishes \textit{metaphysical razors} from \textit{methodological razors}, where the former claim that \textit{reality} is parsimonious, while the latter stipulate only that our \textit{theories} should be parsimonious without taking any stance on how the world itself actually is.
So far as I can tell, Ockham himself seems to have devoted little or no effort to detailing the basis for his Razor.\footnote{Adams offers a similar appraisal, though she is more focused on the question of whether Ockham offers a reason for adopting the principle of parsimony. She concludes that, “it should not be surprising if Ockham failed to provide any extensive justification for [Ockham’s Razor]; contemporary philosophers of science are convinced that simplicity is a legitimate criterion against which to judge the adequacy of theories, but they are hard pressed to explain why or even to say what they mean by simplicity!” (1989, 160).} He does, though, definitively rule out what one might have thought would be a particularly promising line for him to take. Consider, for contrast, Leibniz, who held that God is morally necessitated to always perform the uniquely best action.\footnote{This claim is ubiquitous in Leibniz, but see especially his Discourse on Metaphysics 1–5, as well as Principles of Nature and Grace 10 and Monadology 53–55.} Analogously, one with little familiarity with the texts of Ockham might expect that Ockham believed that God would always choose whatever is simplest—perhaps for some deterministic reason stemming from the simplicity of the divine nature, or maybe because Ockham’s God freely chose to have some aesthetic or moral preference for simplicity.

The suggestion that Ockham’s God always acts in parsimonious ways, however, can easily be disproven by a look at Ockham’s texts. Ockham believes that nothing could put a metaphysical or moral obligation upon God to select the simplest option. Rather, on Ockham’s view it is within God’s power to order the world in any non-contradictory way that God desires, even if some alternative arrangement would be more parsimonious. Further, not only does Ockham affirm that God \textit{can} add unnecessary complexity to reality, Ockham thinks that God has \textit{in fact} done so: “There are a great number of things which God does by means of more when he could have done them with fewer” (\textit{Ord.}, d. 14, q. 2; \textit{OTh} III, 432).\footnote{See also \textit{Ord.} I, d. 17, q. 3 (\textit{OTh} III, 478): “It is frequently the case that God does by means of many things what he could do by means of fewer things, and . . . by the fact that God wills to do so, he does so well and justly.”} (In Section 3, we will see at least one case where Ockham argues that God has in fact done so.)

It is beyond the scope of this article to determine whether Ockham sees parsimony as a sort of alethic virtue (such that more parsimonious theories are more probable than their rivals) or merely some kind of prudential or pragmatic judgment about our theorizing. It may also be that Ockham simply does not have a considered and consistent view of the virtue of parsimony across his works, in much the same way that his applications of parsimony seem to vary from context to context. As others have noted, in many cases he appears to use the Razor to positively deny the existence of some proposed entity (what Elliott Sober has called “a razor of denial”), while at other times he seems to apply the Razor only as a reason to remain agnostic about the existence of some entity (i.e., “a razor of silence”).\footnote{See \textit{Sober} 2015, 12. I suspect that a reasonable case can be made for always ascribing the razor of silence to Ockham, but to do that would require a very different essay, one that
Even if we cannot establish here why Ockham thought parsimony mattered, there is much that can be said about the grounds on which he thought it was legitimate to add entities to one’s ontology.

2 The Evolution of Ockham’s Razor, Part I

Although Ockham often states his principle of parsimony as the mere claim that “plurality should not be posited without necessity,” on several occasions he gives a more complete statement of the principle that specifies what constitutes the “necessary” reasons for positing an entity. Starting already in his earliest surviving work, the Reportatio, Ockham claims that there are exactly three rational bases sufficient for including a putative entity in one’s ontology:

Nothing ought to be posited unless one has experience, demonstrative argument, or authority on behalf of it. (Rep. III, q. 9; OTh VI, 281)

Let’s call these three bases for positing entities “the experience condition,” “the argument condition,” and “the authority condition,” respectively. The first two conditions Ockham claims to find implicit in Aristotle. When commenting upon Aristotle’s argument against there being some primordial element prior to the four elements of air, fire, water, and earth on the grounds that there is no observational evidence for such a thing, Ockham explains that,

[Aristotle] presupposes the principle that multiple things should never be posited when all the appearances can be brought about by fewer things, i.e., that it does not appear that such things should be posited (i) because of an argument from sentences that are self-evident or that are accepted, plausible, and that cannot be disproved in any

11 Ockham’s most common formulation of his principle is simply that “plurality should not be posited without necessity,” which he seems to take as shorthand for the more precise formulation in terms of the argument, experience, and authority conditions. These three bases for positing entities can be found elsewhere in the Reportatio, e.g., in Rep. IV, qq. 3–5 (“Plurality should not be posited without necessity, and no necessity is apparent in the case at hand: not from an evident argument, not from experience, and not from an authority,” OTh VII, 51–52) and in Rep. IV, qq. 10–11 (“Only one thing should be posited in this case, especially because there is no authority, argument, or experience for positing several,” OTh VII, 213).
Following Aristotle (or at least Ockham’s reading of Aristotle), there seems to be strong justification for the argument condition: it is quite straightforward to think that a deductive argument from premises that are known to be true can serve as a reliable basis for crafting one’s ontological theory. With respect to experience, our modern concerns about the possibility of sensory deception and the underdetermination of theory by evidence might make us doubt whether experience is a viable guide for ontology. But Ockham sincerely believes that, under specific conditions, it is possible for an individual cognizer to have immediate awareness of the objects that are causing their sensory or intellectual cognitions (whether those causes are external objects or one’s own thoughts and volitions), such that the cognizer will know that those objects exist. (Somewhat implausibly, Ockham holds that God could miraculously give a cognizer an intuitive cognition of some non-existent object, and on the basis of that miraculous cognition the cognizer would come to know that the object in question does not exist. We can ignore this complication, although it provides interesting possibilities for how God could reliably inform a metaphysician that some purported entity doesn’t exist.) So long as we presume perceptual experience to be generally reliable, the experience condition also seems a sensible basis for doing ontology.

So the experience and argument conditions come with an Aristotelian pedigree as well as having a fairly straightforward justification for their inclusion. But why does Ockham add the authority condition, and what does it even mean to “have authority on behalf of” some putative entity? Theological authority seems like it should be on an altogether different epistemic footing from demonstrative argument and immediate experience; for one thing, authoritative theological pronouncements cannot produce evident knowledge in the way in which demonstrative argument and immediate experience can, since the latter naturally produce belief while the

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12 The passage of Aristotle being commented upon is *Physics* III.5 (204b29–35): “But it is impossible that there should be such a thing [from which the elements come to be] . . . because there is no such perceptible body over and above those called the elements. All things are dissolved into that out of which they come to be, so that it would have to be here in the world alongside of air and fire and earth and water, but no such thing is observed.” (Translation taken from Aristotle 1993, 11.)


14 A further question is why Ockham does not accept any other rational bases for positing entities (e.g., why he rejects such bases as probabilistic arguments or non-authoritative testimony.) Answering this question would require a more complete analysis of the epistemic role of Ockham’s Razor than can be given here.
former does not.\textsuperscript{15} Why should anyone think that theological authority is a reliable basis for doing metaphysics, on par with the argument and experience conditions?

There is one possible answer to this question that I think is largely mistaken: some may speculate that Ockham’s religious commitment is largely an affectation, and that passages where he claims to adopt a view out of deference to authority should not be taken as sincere. Though there are specific times where I think it is fair to question Ockham’s sincerity,\textsuperscript{16} if anything his writings express more religious devotion after his excommunication than before, which is difficult to square with the idea that he is only pretending to defer to authority in order to avoid censure.

I know of no passage where Ockham clearly says why he thinks the authority condition is necessary, but I believe it is easy to reconstruct what his reasoning may have been. As I noted in Section 1, Ockham believes that God’s power is so expansive that God is capable of creating any ordering of reality that is free of logical contradiction; further, he believes that, in general, no two possible created entities are so dependent on each other that God would be unable to create the one without the other.\textsuperscript{17} Now consider the possibility of God creating a world which appears identical to the actual world, but which also contains entities of some unobservable kind $K$. By hypothesis, such a world would be perceptually indistinguishable to us from a world that does not contain entities of kind $K$. It seems that demonstrative argument could never inform us whether or not there were such entities, given that their existence is not necessary to explain any particular feature of reality, nor could empirical evidence tell us so. However, if God himself supernaturally revealed to us that some unnecessary extravagance were included in the world, that would be evidence for a more complex ontology. This is presumably why Ockham includes religious authority as a reason for adding entities into one’s ontology; it’s because it seems that the only way for us to know how unparsimonious the world is would be by receiving an authoritative pronouncement from someone who has much better evidence about the ontological structure of the world. (In Section 3, we will see

\textsuperscript{15} Ockham details the way in which intuitive cognition and demonstrative argument naturally produce evident knowledge in Ord., Prologue, q. 1 (\textit{OTh} I, 1–75). Ockham argues that theological truths cannot be evidently known through our natural cognitive processes in Ord., Prologue, q. 7 (\textit{OTh} I, 183–206).

\textsuperscript{16} For example, it is difficult to take Ockham at his word when he claims that he “is only reporting a view that someone could have, regardless of whether the view is true or false” in Ord. d. 47, q. 1 (\textit{OTh} IV: 684) after he has spent several pages obviously offering support for the view that it is true to say that bad occurrences are caused by God (translation from Hagedorn 2021, 138).

\textsuperscript{17} For a particular explicit statement to this effect, see DCC, ch. 13 (\textit{OTh} X, 115), where Ockham affirms that God can produce and conserve in existence any cause without producing its immediate effects and can also produce any effect without its natural causes, as well as being able to produce any accident without a substance and vice versa. The lone exception that Ockham countenances is that God is not able to create an entity without its essential parts—that is, God cannot create a material substance without its form and matter.
specific examples where Ockham believes God has done something of this sort.)

Although I think this Ockhamist motivation is clear enough, it is unclear what sources are to be taken as sufficiently authoritative for believing that God has created in this extravagant way. The text of the Reportatio offers little insight into the specifics of the authority condition, not bothering to indicate what it is for there to be “authority on behalf of” some entity, or even which writings or declarations count as authorities. The best we find in the Reportatio are appeals to accept some entity or entities because of “the authority of the saints,” “the determination of the Church,” or “what all doctors commonly hold.”

Similarly, there is little explicit discussion of the authority condition to be found in Ockham’s next major work, the Ordinatio, completed sometime not long after the Reportatio. In that work, Ockham presents on multiple occasions a slightly but noticeably revised version of the authority condition. Rather than just speaking of authority in the abstract, as he did in the Reportatio, in the Ordinatio he routinely specifies the relevant theological authority to be the Christian Bible in particular. For example, Nothing ought to be posited without providing an argument, unless the thing is self-evident [per se notum], known from experience, or proved from the authority of the Sacred Scriptures. (Ord., d. 30, q. 1; OTh IV, 290)

This is not a one-off quote; a variety of other passages in the Ordinatio make the same appeal to “the Sacred Scriptures.” Despite the specification of “the Sacred Scriptures,” though, we should not take Ockham at his literal

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18 See, e.g., Rep. III, q. 9 (OTh VI, 308–309) and Rep. IV, q. 8 (OTh VII, 139–140).
19 The oral lectures that formed the basis of the Ordinatio (on Book I of Peter Lombard’s Sentences) were delivered prior to the lectures that form the Reportatio (on Books II-IV), but the Ordinatio is the result of significant revisions and expansions that Ockham later made to those lectures.
20 This revised version of the authority condition does make an appearance in one passage in the final book of the Reportatio: see Rep. IV, q. 1 (OTh VII, 17): “[This] is not known from Sacred Scripture, nor from experience, nor from a reason deduced from things that are known per se.” This is consistent with my developmental story about the authority clause, given that there is evidence that Ockham was already composing the Ordinatio while still finishing the lectures that constitute the Reportatio, e.g., Ockham explicitly refers the reader to his Ordinatio by that name in Rep. IV, q. 16 (OTh VII, 345).
21 Every version of the authority condition I’ve located in the Ordinatio specifies Scripture, though some also mention either the authority of the church or of the saints. See, for example, Ord., d. 2, q. 1 (“A distinction in the Trinity] ought not be posited except where it evidently follows from beliefs handed down in Sacred Scripture or from a determination of the Church, to whose authority every reason ought to be captive,” OTh II, 17) and Ord., d. 26, q. 1 (“Multiple wonders that seem to contradict natural reason should not be posited without the authority of Scripture or the saints,” OTh IV, 157). See also Var. Ques., q. 6, a. 8, which is likely roughly contemporaneous: “No necessity for positing infused habits is apparent, because there is neither a demonstrative argument for them, nor experience, nor the authority of the Sacred Scriptures,” (OTh VIII, 245).
word here and try to impose some sort of doctrine of sola scriptura on
him in this text. For although here and elsewhere he specifically speaks
of positing entities on the authority of the Scriptures, as we will see in
Section 3 his actual practice in the *Ordinatio* is again to affirm entities
such as infused charity and the Trinitarian relations on the basis of “the
authority of the saints” or “the determination of the church.” But beyond
the more verbose statement of the authority condition, in the *Ordinatio*, as
with the *Reportatio*, we find little by way of explanation or elaboration on
the details of the epistemology of theological authority.

In Section 4, I will return to this exploration of the evolution of Ock-
ham’s Razor. But before that, it will be valuable to look in some detail at
the variety of cases from the *Ordinatio* and *Reportatio* where Ockham be-
lieves that positing a distinct type of entity is licensed by only the authority
condition, where God must explicitly reveal facts about the world’s onto-
logical extravagance. This will help us to better understand the function
and limitations of the authority condition.

3 How Theological Authority Drives Ontology in Ockham’s Early
Works

One area where Ockham believes God has acted extravagantly, creating
more entities than is strictly necessary to fulfill God’s purposes, concerns
the theological virtue of charity. The common taxonomy of the virtues
in the Christian Middle Ages comprises the four cardinal virtues (justice,
courage, temperance, and prudence) and the three theological virtues (faith,
hope, and charity). Just as was the case for the cardinal virtues, there was
a great deal of disagreement over the purpose and role of the theological
virtues and what (if any) reasons could be given for their existence. What
was generally agreed upon by Scholastic theologians in the late thirteenth
and early fourteenth centuries is that charity, like the other theological
virtues, is a dispositional state of character; it is an accidental quality, a
habit that exists in the rational soul (or the rational part of the soul) and is
specially infused by God at the moment of Christian baptism for the sake
of bringing about a specifically theological end. Now, one might well ask
whether it is actually intelligible to think of some act-type as habitual for a
given agent when she has never in fact performed that act-type before; but
set aside what it means to have a habit that is divinely created all at once,
not as the result of some continued pattern of behavior.

What precisely the theological end for which infused charity is given,
however, was a matter of significant disagreement. Aquinas, for one, holds
that the purpose of infused charity is to direct our human capacities to a
supernatural end, for, he claims, no human nature can be directed toward
eternal beatitude without the aid of charity to habitually point that nature
at that end. Similarily, Aquinas holds that no human capacity on its own can produce a meritorious act, one that would be deserving of eternal reward; and so, God graciously provides us these supernatural dispositions so that we might perform those acts that are befitting of reward. Overly simplifying somewhat, it is not inaccurate to say that, for Aquinas, the purpose of the theological virtues is to direct us toward God.

Peter Auriol, though, affirms almost exactly the converse: charity isn’t, on Auriol’s view, primarily about how we humans are directed or what acts we are capable of producing; rather, he claims, our possession of charity is what directs God and God’s acts toward us. Auriol bases his theory on the claim that God’s act of love is eternal and immutable. So, for God to not be loving John and Charlotte at t1, and then to love only John at t2, and then to love both John and Charlotte at t3, there must have been some change in John between t1 and t2, and some change in Charlotte between t1 and t3, and whatever that change is, it must consist of acquiring something that God eternally and immutably loves at all times. Thus, Auriol argues, there must be some accidental property that God necessarily loves, and one comes to be newly loved by God only by newly acquiring that particular accident. Thus, charity’s role isn’t ultimately to direct human nature to some new end (though it might do that too); rather, the point of the virtue of charity is that it is, as it were, the lens by which God’s love comes to be focused upon one creature rather than another.

John Duns Scotus holds a view that is broadly similar to Auriol’s, stressing that charity’s role is primarily about our being recipients of divine love, of falling under the scope of God’s acceptance. What Scotus makes more explicit than Auriol is that charity is needed so that we can be objects of God’s love and acceptance even when we are not actually performing meritorious acts (because, say, we are asleep, or perhaps reading an article in a philosophy journal). One place where Scotus does importantly differ from Auriol’s position is this: Scotus appears to take the divine acceptance of this particular quality to be a contingent fact, rather than a necessary one—as he says, “From God’s absolute power, he could very well have accepted (with the special acceptance spoken of before) a beatifiable nature existing in its purely natural state; God could also accept as meritorious an act toward which a nature has an entirely natural inclination” (Scotus, Ordinatio I, d. 17, p. 1, qq. 1–2, n. 160). Notwithstanding this contingency of what it is that God chooses to deem acceptable, nevertheless Scotus still holds that from the fact that God loves and beatifies humans even when

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22 See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 62, aa. 1, 3.
23 See Thomas Aquinas, Disputed Question on Charity, q. un, a. 1.
24 Durand of St. Pourcain holds a similar position, arguing that the habit of charity is necessary for us to be able to perform the meritorious acts that lead to eternal beatitude. See his Scriptum super libros Sententiarum I, d. 17, q. 2, nn. 15, 17.
25 See Peter Auriol, In Sent, d. 17, a. 2.
26 See John Duns Scotus, Ordinatio I, d. 17, p. 1, qq. 1–2, n. 129.
those humans are not presently performing some meritorious act that we can deduce that there must be some habitual quality residing in the soul, which is an eternal object of God’s eternal act of love.

Ockham is deeply critical of nearly all this reasoning about the theological virtues performed by his predecessors. He argues, contra Aquinas and the like, that there is no experiential evidence that we must posit supernaturally infused charity in order to extend our human capacities to supernatural levels; as far as experience goes, the activities accessible to the baptized are indiscernible from the activities accessible to the unbaptized—and this whether we are speaking of our third-personal experience of others or even our own first-personal experiences, where there does not seem any extension of our own powers beyond their natural scope. Rather, naturally acquired habits seem to account for all our experience of ourselves and others:

Nothing ought to be denied when there is sure experience for positing it. But there is sure experience for positing acquired faith, hope, and charity, for a pagan raised among Christians will believe all the articles of faith; similarly, a heretic about one article can truly believe another article. But neither of them has infused faith, as is clear; therefore, they have acquired faith. Similar considerations hold of acquired charity, because an infidel educated among pagans, as a result of the teaching, can love God above all things on an entirely natural basis. They can even praise God, sing, and pray. Therefore, they have a love of God that is not infused, and so it is acquired. Additionally, every act of the will that we experience in ourselves seems to be natural; therefore, the same goes for habits. (Rep. III, q. 9; OTh VI, 281, translation from Hagedorn 2021, 271)

Furthermore, not only is there no experiential evidence for positing divinely infused charity, Ockham argues that charity and the other theological virtues cannot be necessary for any theological purpose related to God’s acceptance, as any such necessitation would be an illegitimate constraint on God’s freedom and God’s omnipotence. Contra Auriol, infused charity cannot be necessary to direct God at us, for no created entity could so necessitate God’s action. Even if someone doesn’t possess infused charity, God is free to love that person if God were to choose to do so; furthermore,

27 Ockham’s longest treatment of charity is found in Ord., d. 17, qq. 1–6. Var Ques. q. 1 seems to contain an earlier version of the Ordinatio discussion, while Quod. VI, qq. 1–2 contains a later and much more condensed discussion. For another account of Ockham’s views on charity, see Hirvonen 2012.

28 “If God can prepare an individual for eternal life and can later bestow eternal life upon that individual without any prior habit of this sort, then God can consider that individual to be cherished and accepted without any habit of this sort. . . . By his absolute power God can bestow eternal life (that is, the beatific vision and beatific enjoyment) regardless of whether
even if someone *does* possess infused charity, God is free to *not* love that person, if God were to choose to do so. 29 Indeed, even if God has given out infused charity, and even if God has previously decreed that divine love will be given to those to who possess infused charity, God is still not necessitated to bring about the salvation and redemption of those who possess that charity. 30 Though Ockham does not mention Scotus’s position, presumably his appraisal of Scotus’s view would be much the same as Auriol’s: no created habit can guarantee God’s acceptance, on pain of restricting God’s freedom.

To sum up, Ockham argues that the infused habit of charity is not necessary to fulfill any of the roles that his predecessors assigned to it: contrary to Aquinas, there is no apparent difference between the actions of the baptized and the unbaptized, such that there must be some habit that the former possess but the latter do not; contrary to Auriol, no created entity can necessitate divine love and acceptance; and contrary to Scotus, no created entity is sufficient for divine acceptance either. Since, as Ockham claims, there is also no experiential evidence for the infused habit of charity, 31 we appear to have a case of a purported entity that would not be posited on the basis of the argument or experience conditions.

However, as a matter of fact, according to Ockham, God has ordered reality such that charity *does* play a certain functional role, even though no such entity was needed to do so. It is possible for God to accept a person, or a person to perform meritorious actions, without any particular habit inhering in that person; but, Ockham holds, God has ordained that as a matter of fact no one will be accepted or will perform meritorious acts without the habit of charity. 32 Ockham’s sole reason for believing in the existence and function of infused charity, he tells us, is because of the authoritative pronouncements of the church: “This should be held because of the authority of the saints, who resoundingly say this” (*Ord.*).

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29 “So, I say that in order for a soul to be in a state of grace and accepted by God, by God’s absolute power no supernatural form is required in the soul. Also, no matter what is posited in the soul, God can by his absolute power not accept that soul” (*Ord.*, d. 17, q. 1; *OTh* III, 454).

30 “By God’s absolute power God might have never become incarnate, even despite whatever absolute entity existed in the holy patriarchs. Therefore, no matter how much God had given that supernatural form to the ancient patriarchs, still it was within God’s power to make his Son incarnate [or not] and, consequently, to redeem humankind and confer eternal life on them [or not]” (*Ord.*, d. 17, q. 1; *OTh* III, 450).

31 See *Rep.* III, q. 9 for Ockham’s argument that “all the operations that we experience by means of supernatural habits can be experienced by means of natural habits” (*OTh* VI, 279, translation from *Hagedorn 2021*, 270).

32 “Given what has been said, the response to the question is clear: some created charity is presupposed by every meritorious act. . . . Nor does anyone, as a matter of fact, ever elicit a meritorious act without charity of this sort formally informing them” (*Ord.*, d. 17, q. 3; *OTh* III, 477–478).
d. 17, q. 3; OTh III, 478). In response to an objection that parsimony considerations suggest we reject charity’s existence, Ockham simply denies that such parsimony considerations are relevant when it comes to God’s activity:

In response to the argument [that it is pointless to do with more what can be done with fewer], I say that God often does with more intermediaries what he could do with fewer intermediaries. (Ord., d. 17, q. 3; OTh III, 479)

Before moving on, I should address one potential worry. Perhaps it could be objected that the postulation of charity does not come at a significant ontological cost for Ockham. After all, infused charity is a kind of habit, of a kind with other entities in the category of Quality that he already admits in his ontology, and so admitting charity adds no additional fundamental kinds into his ontology, as, say, admitting entities in the category of Quantity would involve. Since the admission of infused charity does not involve any new ontological categories, Ockham pays little metaphysical cost price for allowing it.\textsuperscript{33} I cannot adequately respond to this point here, but for now it will have to suffice to note that, first, Ockham considers supernaturally infused charity to be of an entirely different species than every natural habit, and second, that he also makes similar moves with respect to entities that aren’t in categories that he already accepts.

For instance, after arguing that unaided natural reason provides no demonstrative arguments or experiential evidence for the existence of relational entities,\textsuperscript{34} he goes on to accept the existence of several different types of relational entities on the ground of theological authority alone. First, he accepts the existence of the Trinitarian relations that distinguish the three persons of the Trinity on the grounds of authority alone: he holds “there is paternity really and truly in God, on the basis of the sayings of the saints” (Ord., d. 30, q. 4; OTh IV: 366–374). As an example of such a saying he cites the claim made by Augustine that what makes it the case that the Father is the Father is not what makes it the case that the Father is God; this claim, Ockham argues cannot be maintained without positing some kind of entity within the Trinity (either some kind of absolute property or

\textsuperscript{33} In contemporary discussions, Schaffer (2015) and Bennett (2017) have recently argued that metaphysicians should utilize what they call “Ockham’s Laser,” a principle that prohibits only the multiplication of fundamental kinds, as that is the sort of parsimony with which we should really be concerned. For an argument against Schaffer and Bennett’s restriction of parsimony to only fundamental kinds, see Da Vee 2020.

\textsuperscript{34} See Ord., d. 30, q. 3 (OTh IV, 335–364) and Quod. IV, qqs. 8–30 (OTh IX, 611–701). Adams (1989, 250–276) and Henninger (1989, 119ff) provide useful analysis. It is sometimes said that Ockham thinks that natural reason demonstratively proves there are no relations—see, e.g., Kenny (2010, 418)—but this goes beyond what Ockham actually asserts in the Ordinatio, where he claims only to show that “one wishing to lean on reason [alone] . . . would hold that it is easier to deny [the existence of relational entities] than its opposite, for the arguments on the one side are more troublesome than the arguments on the other” (Ord., d. 30, q. 1; OTh IV, 306–307).
some kind of relational entity), and he follows tradition in opting for the Trinitarian relations.\(^{35}\)

There is another case in the *Ordinatio* where theological authority prompts Ockham to admit the existence of a relational entity, this time in the natural world as opposed to in the Godhead. He argues that mere colocation is insufficient to make it the case that a given form inheres in a given chunk of matter. Although he argues that anyone following natural reason alone would conclude that colocation is what explains formal inherence, the Gospel narrative that Christ was able to walk through a wall (without having his soul come to inhere in the matter of the wall) shows that mere colocation is insufficient, and that there must instead be a relational entity of inherence that connects a given substantial form to the matter it inheres in.\(^{36}\) On similar theological grounds, he also argues for a relational entity that binds accidents to their substances and for the unique relation of Incarnational union that connects Christ’s human nature and divine nature.\(^{37}\)

There is one important difference to note between Ockham’s positing of infused charity and his positing of these various relational entities. In the cases of the Trinitarian relations and the relations of inherence and union, it seems that the entities in question have some real metaphysical work to do. For example, the relation of inherence exists because otherwise Christ wouldn’t be able to walk through the wall, without the Trinitarian relations it would be impossible for there to be three non-distinct persons in one maximally simple entity, and so on. But the quality of infused charity is different, as Ockham insists that the virtue is not doing any metaphysical work that God couldn’t do without it. It seems that charity is an entirely unnecessary ontological addition to the world, one that Ockham believes exists only because the theological authority figures say that it exists. (I will return to this point in the conclusion.)

But one noteworthy issue in the *Reportatio* where Ockham does not posit a given kind of entity on the basis of theological authority comes with the case of quantitative entities. Despite the general acceptance among late-medieval theologians that the doctrine of the Eucharist entails the existence of infused charity, Ockham insists that there must be some real relational entity whose presence or absence serves to explain how matter and form can be collocated without the latter inhering in the former.

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35 Augustine’s claim that “the Father is not the Father by that by which the Father is God” is found in *De trinitate* VII, c. 6, n. 11. Ockham proposes the “absolute property” theory of the Trinity in *Ord.*, d. 26, q. 1 before setting it aside as not in line with “the authorities of the saints.” (*OTh* IV, 152–153).

36 That Christ walked through a solid wall is the standard medieval explanation of how he entered the locked room in John 20:19.

37 See *Ord.*, d. 30, q. 4 (*OTh* IV, 369–370, 373–374). Ockham repeats in *Var. Ques.*, q. 6, a. 2 (*OTh* VIII, 212–213, 217–218) that “according to the faith” there must be some real relational entity whose presence or absence serves to explain how matter and form can be collocated without the latter inhering in the former.
of quantities, Ockham argues that the thesis that there are distinctly quantitative entities (in addition to substances and qualities) is otiose at best, if not logically contradictory. Importantly for our present purposes, when in the Reportatio he reviews the arguments in favor of the existence of quantities he makes no reference to statements or arguments of any author other than Aquinas and Duns Scotus; unlike the discussions of charity, the Trinity, or the Incarnation, when speaking about the Eucharist here Ockham presents no citations to theological authorities such as Augustine or Peter Lombard. When he argues for his thesis that there are no such things as quantities, he simply claims that he “asserts nothing that is out of harmony with what is commonly said [about the Eucharist]” (Rep. IV, q. 6; OTh VII, 71).

Despite his protestations, Ockham’s views on quantity engendered a great deal of controversy. As we will see below, it is in the context of this issue that Ockham was at last forced to develop and make precise his views on the nature of authority.

4 The Evolution of Ockham’s Razor, Part II: Refining the Authority Condition

As we’ve seen, in the Reportatio and the Ordinatio Ockham includes the authority condition in his statements of the Razor and uses it to affirm the existence of infused virtues, Trinitarian relations, and the relation of inherence, but provides little detail on how or when it is appropriate to apply it, let alone why the authority condition does not license the positing of quantitative entities. So, beyond the brief versions of the authority condition that we have seen—that what matters is “the authority of the Sacred Scriptures,” “the determination of the church,” or “the common opinion of all doctors,” what authority or authorities are actually relevant for Ockham, and how do those authorities factor into metaphysical theorizing?

The minimal attention paid to these questions in the Reportatio and the Ordinatio may give reason to think these questions were not seen as critically important to the early Ockham. But around 1323–1324, when Ockham found himself under suspicion of teaching heresy and his works investigated by a papal commission, then Ockham for the first time devotes sustained attention to these questions of theological authority. In the Tractatus de quantitate and Tractatus de corpore Christi, both likely composed about six years after the Reportatio and roughly contemporaneous with

38 With the controversial thinker Peter John Olivi (d. 1298) being a notable exception; Olivi was censured by the Franciscan order in 1283, in part over his views on quantity and the Eucharist. See Levy 2012, 462–464.
his being summoned to Avignon to (among other things) defend the orthodoxy of his metaphysics of the Eucharist, Ockham gives his first sustained explanation of which authorities he sees as relevant for ontology.39

The standard view of the metaphysics of transubstantiation, as defended by Albert the Great, Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and many others, is that in the Eucharist the substance of the bread and the wine are replaced with the substance of Christ, that the accidents of the bread and the wine remain, and that the qualitative accidents (color, flavor, and so on) remain as inhering in the quantitative accidents.40 But in these two short treatises, Ockham argues that there are no entities that exist in the category of Quantity and that no quantitative accidents need to be posited to explain how the qualities of the bread and wine remain after their substance is removed.

After giving a lengthy philosophical defense of the view that there are no distinct quantitative entities, but that both substances and qualities are (in general) essentially quantified—much the same case he had made previously in the Reportatio—Ockham then turns to give an impassioned theological defense of the orthodoxy of this position, arguing that his ontological views about quantitative entities are consistent with the accepted theology of the Eucharist. He first argues that there is nothing explicit in the Sentences of Peter Lombard, the Decretum of Gratian, or “the sayings of the saints” that entail the existence of entities in the category of Quantity (Quant., q. 3; OTh X, 61). And here we finally see—at least implicitly in his practice—what it is that Ockham takes to be a teaching that is authoritative for matters of ontology: the authorities that must be respected when doing ontology are especially those statements of the church fathers that are compiled in Lombard’s Sentences, along with the various conciliar and papal decrees compiled in the Decretum.

Further, Ockham continues, the insistence in both Lombard and Gratian that “accidents of color, taste, weight, and so forth exist without a subject in the sacrament” is also in tension with the views of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century theologians who posit a quantitative accident to be a subject of these qualitative accidents, a point which he takes to favor his view as being closer to these authoritative teachings than are the views of his contemporaries. Furthermore, he says, there is nothing heretical in expositing the sayings of the saints differently than do other theologians, and there is no epistemic requirement to accept the teachings of “doctors who disagree with each other and who are not endorsed [approbantur] by the Church” (Quant., q. 3; OTh X, 62). Rather, as he goes on to explain, Ockham believes that the only theological teachings that carry authoritative

39 For a fuller discussion of the context and content of the Tractatus de quantitate and the Tractatus de corpore Christi, see Levy 2012.
40 For a brief summary of what I’ve called the standard view, see Pasnau 2011, 186n10. A fuller account is in Adams 2010, 186–190.
weight are the Bible and the writings of “authenticated” doctors of the Church:

When it is objected that this view is contrary to the view commonly held by doctors, then I respond that . . . if by “doctors” one means the modern doctors who mutually contradict each other and who disprove each other both publicly and secretly in their writings, then I concede, but there is nothing unsuitable about denying them. For nothing that they say should be accepted unless it can be proved by evident reason, the authority of Sacred Scripture, the determination of the Church, or by doctors who have been authenticated by the Church. (Quant., q. 3; OTh X, 69–70)41

Why is it that Ockham thinks that Scripture, official Church determinations, and “authenticated doctors” are the only authorities that matter when doing ontology? He makes this clear by finally adding additional specificity to the authority condition. When he presents his Razor in the *de corpore Christi*, he makes explicit that only *infallible* authorities are to be relied on in ontology:

No plurality should be posited except on the basis of argument, on the basis of experience, or on the basis of an authority that cannot be mistaken, cannot err, and cannot be overruled. (DCC, c. 29; OTh X, 157–158)

Ockham does not at this time consider the possibility that authorities such as Lombard, Gratian, or Augustine might themselves be subject to the mutual contradiction or potential for being overruled that he finds objectionable about Aquinas, Scotus, and his other contemporaries, though he does note that Augustine changed his mind at times, and so it is only those texts of Augustine that have in some way been authenticated by the broader church that should be taken as authoritative (DCC, c. 37; OTh X, 210–213).

But what is to be done about present theological disagreement, cases where the authoritative tradition is silent or at least underdetermines the ontological issues at hand? In *de corpore Christi*, Ockham suggests that there is exactly one person who has the role of determining which writings are to be considered infallible authorities for future generations, and that is the pope:

It is clear that when there is a controversy between theologians concerning some article and whether it is harmonious or dissonant with the Christian faith, one must return to

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41 Ockham does not make explicit here how it is that a given text or a given theologian is authenticated by the church, though in *Tractatus de corpore Christi* he implies that this is the task of the pope; see below.
the supreme pontiff. . . . One should return to the Roman pontiff when a question is aired about something that is not express in the canonical scriptures nor determined by the Roman church. . . . Although it was licit [to deny the writings of the saints before they were authenticated], after the sayings of the holy fathers were approved by the Apostolic See, everyone ought to hold them with firm faith. (DCC, c. 37; OTh X, 209–210)

5 Authority and Disagreement in Ockham’s Dialogus

The principle that one should appeal to the pope to settle disputes about theological authority was not one Ockham would hold for long. Within a few years of completing de corpore Christi, Ockham came to believe that even popes could (and at times indeed do) mutually contradict each other, undermining the premise that they could be relied upon to offer any sort of ultimate judgment. As he tells it in his Letter to the Friars Minor, Ockham became convinced that Pope John XXII had contradicted previous popes on matters such as the poverty of Christ. This deals a fatal blow to the epistemology of authority presented in de corpore Christi—if the supreme authority can be overruled then it is no longer the supreme authority on matters of doctrine—but it would be well over a decade later before he finally returned to the question of epistemic authority. In his Dialogus, written while exiled in Munich, Ockham gives a new account of what he considers as an authoritative theological pronouncement, one that has been updated in light of his experiences with the ecclesiastical censors and in which he appears to have given up on the possibility of any kind of infallible theological pronouncements.

In Book 3 of Dialogus 3.1, Ockham considers four separate answers to the question of which purported theological authorities one is obligated to believe. As the Dialogus is structured as a dialogue in which a teacher and a student are simply exploring various possible responses to a variety of questions related to theological heresy and church-state relations, Ockham never explicitly says which, if any, of these four views he holds. But from context it is quite apparent that he endorses the fourth view, the only one that he spends multiple chapters explicating and defending from criticism.

The first three views that Ockham surveys are: (1) the claim that only the canonical Bible is authoritative for Christians; (2) the claim that, in addition to the canonical scriptures, papal decrees, the writings of approved doctors of the church, as well as certain extracanonical scriptures are authoritative; and (3) the claim that, in addition to the aforementioned, anything that is generally agreed upon by academic theologians is authoritative as well.  

The editors of the critical edition of the Dialogus attribute the first view to Marsilius of Padua, noting that Ockham’s presentation of it consists of nearly verbatim quotations from
Note that each of the first three views bears at least some similarity to Ockham’s actual practice in his theological writings, as we saw in Section 2. While the first theory is more restrictive than Ockham’s practice ever was, it was the view that is closest to his literal presentation of the authority condition in the Ordinatio as whatever can be “proved from the authority of the Sacred Scriptures.” Conversely, some combination of the second and third theories seems to fit his actual practice when he admits the existence of entities such as the Trinitarian relations and infused charity on the basis of the Decretum or the consensus of other theologians. In the Dialogus, however, he now rejects these earlier accounts of theological authority as naive, instead presenting a position that largely dispenses with the very notion of infallible metaphysical authorities.

The fourth theory holds, first, that different authoritative figures should be awarded different credences and, second, that different kinds of claims should also be treated differently. So, he claims, one ought to accept without question everything propounded by the Biblical writers and the apostles:

[According to the fourth view] one should believe—without any doubt, in all things—the divine scripture contained in the Bible, as well as the writers of that holy scripture, the universal church, and also the apostles. (3.1 Dial., Book 3, ch. 4; William Ockham 2011, 241)43

But with respect to every purported authority beyond the Bible and the entirety of Christendom—whether they be teachings from popes, church councils, doctors of the church, or mere academic theologians—Ockham presents a more complicated criterion, recommending belief in some but not all matters and with varying degrees of certainty, for, he decides, none of these other sources of theological pronouncements are infallible. He begins by drawing a distinction between claims that some historical event has taken place and claims that concern ontology, noting that both kinds of claims are found in these purported authoritative writings.44 With respect to the historical claims propounded by such purported authorities, Ockham

*Defensor pacis* II.19.1–3. The second view Ockham presents as the teaching of Gratian’s *Decretum*. The third view is attributed to no one in particular, although the student in the *Dialogus* claims that “many seem to think this.”

43 Translations of 3.1 *Dial.* are my own, although I have consulted the online translation by John Scott and John Kilcullen, available at http://publications.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/pubs/dialogus/t31d3new.html.

44 Some of the things that are asserted by a general council consist in [historical] facts *in facto*, namely when the general council recounts and asserts things that have taken place *factit sunt*, just as a history in divine scripture recounts an event *rem gestam*. But other [assertions] do not consist in [historical] facts, but rather in the very nature of that thing which is spoken about, as when the council recounts and asserts things that pertain to the nature of God and creatures (whether simple creatures or composite creatures, or even creatures that are recognized to have only
says one should treat these claims as innocent unless proven guilty; such historical claims should be believed unless one has evident knowledge that the council or theologian has gotten it wrong. Even if the author is in fact speaking erroneously, the Christian is obligated to believe the claim in the absence of such countervailing evidence.\footnote{\textit{With respect to those things that have taken place \textit{facta sunt}, for someone to whom it is not obvious [that the council is mistaken], they ought to believe the assertion and testimony of the general council, under the presumption that the general council would not assert something unless they were certain about it, in the case of things that have taken place—just as a judge ought to believe witnesses that he finds (and should find) to be legitimate and truthful and that he cannot refute, even when in fact they are really giving false testimony. (3.1 \textit{Dial.}, Book 3, ch. 6; 246)\par}

But with respect to the ontological claims made by councils and theological authorities, claims specifically about the nature of God or the metaphysics of created things (“whether simple creatures or composite creatures, or even creatures that have only the unity of an aggregate or an ordering”), Ockham argues that there should be no such presumption of truth. Just as in the case of historical facts, if one has evident knowledge that the council is mistaken, one should of course believe the council is wrong.\footnote{\textit{If a general council were to err, whether about those things that consist in \textit{historical} fact or about the other things, one to whom this is obvious ought to not believe it and may rightly contradict and deny the general council on this point” (3.1 \textit{Dial.}, Book 3, ch. 6; 246).\par}

\footnote{Note that, though in this precise passage Ockham speaks only of the authority of general councils, he makes clear a few paragraphs earlier that the distinctions he draws hold for all theological writings beyond Scripture, no matter the author: “If a general council is not to be believed without any exception in all things, how much more so that others are not to be believed without the least exception in all things. Hence it shall suffice for now to consider the case of a general council” (3.1 \textit{Dial.}, Book 3, ch. 5; 244).\par} Even if one does not evidently know the council is wrong with regard to matters of ontology, Ockham holds that one need not even give the council the benefit of the doubt. So long as some “knowledgeable or praiseworthy” author somewhere disputes the council’s claim, then it is legitimate for even the ordinary believer to publicly reject it. Even if there is expert consensus, Ockham holds that nonexperts can still \textit{privately} believe that the council has erred, although he recommends that for reasons of propriety ordinary people should not \textit{publicly} dispute the council’s claims.\footnote{If a general council were to err about things other than what has taken place (e.g., about those things that are asserted about God or creatures in sacred books), then—unless some experts with a praiseworthy view were arguing against it—no Christian to whom this error is not obvious may rightly deny or publicly dispute the general council’s assertion, in order to avoid scandal and to show the honor and reverence that is appropriate to a general council by anyone who does not know that it errs. . . . Nevertheless, [the individual Christian] can believe [\textit{opinari}] the}
Among the chief reasons that Ockham cites for why one is permitted to disbelieve the decrees of councils (as well as the claims of other alleged authorities) on matters of ontology is because many of the members of such councils are simply bad philosophers and poor logicians:

It is obvious and well known that many teachers who are thought to be knowledgeable (no matter that they are part of a general council) do not know in many cases how to discern sophistical arguments from true ones. Since many who are ignorant of the nature of fallacies . . . draw false inferences [paralogisant] in theology and philosophy, as well as in the legal sciences, . . . so less faith should be given to them when they decide some assertion by reasoning from other claims (even indubitable ones) than should be given to them when they assertively present something that has taken place. (3.1 Dial., Book 3, ch. 7; 248–249)

Given that even the councils are full of bad metaphysicians, the student in the *Dialogus* comes to realize (with the teacher expressing agreement) that no individual or gathering can ever be considered to be an infallible theological authority:

If a general council can err, all the more greatly will the Roman pontiff be able to err, as well as any other partial gathering or any doctor or writer who was not a writer of Sacred Scripture. And if it is not the case that a general council should be believed in all things without exception, much more for believing these others in all things without the slightest exception. (3.1 Dial., Book 3, ch. 5; 244)

Although Ockham does not do so, if we take this position to heart and try to formulate the Razor and its authority condition, it seems we would produce the very formulation that we first saw in Section 2 making its appearance in the *Ordinatio*, namely that “Nothing ought to be posited without providing an argument, unless the thing is self-evident [per se notum], known from experience, or proved from the authority of the Sacred Scriptures” (Ord., d. 30, q. 1; OTh IV, 290). Whereas the early Ockham meant this quite broadly—taking the authority of Sacred Scripture to be found in those statements collected in Lombard’s *Sentences* or Gratian’s *Decretum*—the late Ockham of the *Dialogus* would want us to read this version of the Razor literally: only the writers of the Christian Bible are authoritative when doing ontology.

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contrary and concernedly examine the scriptures in search of the truth. (3.1 Dial., Book 3, ch. 6; 246–247)
6 Conclusion

If every theological authority other than scripture alone can err in matters of ontology, where does that leave the authority condition of Ockham’s Razor? After his excommunication and exile, Ockham largely abandoned metaphysics and systematic theology in favor of ecclesiology and political theory, and so apart from these handful of passages on the nature of authority in *Dialogus* there is no text I know of where Ockham applies this newfound understanding of degrees of credence and levels of belief back to his principle of parsimony. It seems that the post-*Dialogus* Ockham must either substantially narrow the authority condition in his Razor and actually subscribe to something like sola scriptura when it comes to ontology (for, in the end, the Christian Bible is the only infallible authority he continues to recognize), or else he must revise the Razor so as to license belief in entities for which we have weaker kinds of evidence, be they potentially fallible authorities or merely probabilistic arguments.

Now that Ockham has come to believe that no ecclesiastical pronouncements of any sort rise to the level of infallible authorities, it seems that much of his ontology may need reworking. Maybe he continues to posit the relation of inherence, for that seemed to him a metaphysical necessity in order to explain how Jesus walked through a wall in the gospel of John (and thus is an ontological posit based upon infallible Scripture if anything is). But it is less obvious that he would retain the Trinitarian relations. In the *Ordinatio* he had tentatively advanced an “absolute property” theory of the Trinity that did not requiring positing relations within God, but quickly rejected that view in favor of the relational theory on the basis of the authority of the saints; but if Scripture is the only infallible authority left for the late Ockham, it is difficult to see why he wouldn’t adopt the absolute property theory instead.\(^48\)

Additionally, his acceptance of infused charity and the other theological virtues also seems to be up for revision, as he could find no functional role that necessitated the existence of these qualities. Absent any straightforward Scriptural support for their existence, the infused virtues seem easily capable of being jettisoned.\(^49\) Lastly, some scholars have argued that even Ockham’s commitment to qualities is theological in nature, being held primarily because of church doctrine that in the Eucharist the qualitative accidents of the bread and the wine continue to exist without any substance as

\(^{48}\) See *Ord.*, d. 26, q. 1 (*OTh* IV, 152–154).

\(^{49}\) Ockham of course cites 1 Corinthians 13:13 (“and now these three remain: faith, hope, and charity”) as the Scriptural source for the theological virtues, but I don’t believe this passage alone would be sufficient to move him to accept the existence of *supernaturally infused* faith, hope, and charity, rather than him interpreting the passage as referring to merely *naturally acquired* faith, hope, and charity, which he posits on experiential grounds. See *Rep.* III, q. 9 (*OTh* VI, 276–313).
If the Razor’s authority condition is rejected, perhaps even Ockham’s commitment to a substance-accident ontology is open to revision or rejection, potentially setting Ockham up to produce an even more revisionary and original ontology. It is unfortunate for the history of philosophy and theology that he never had the opportunity to engage in that project.

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The claim that Ockham accepts entities in the category of Quality only for theological reasons relating to the Eucharist is made by, e.g., Weisheipl (1963) and Spade (1999). Adams (1989, 279–283) disputes this and offers textual grounds for thinking Ockham had other reasons for accepting qualities, and Pasnau (2011, 405–407) supplies additional reasons relating to Ockham’s belief that qualities are needed to explain certain facts about change. Another potential explanation for Ockham’s belief in qualities is that positing them follows directly from his belief that qualities are among the objects of intuitive cognition. On his view, we straightforwardly sense qualities such as colors and flavors, and we have direct mental awareness of qualities such as thoughts and volitions. See, e.g., Ord., Prol., q. 1, where Ockham gives as an example of intuitive cognition the act of seeing an individual quality of whiteness (OTh I, 6–7 and 31–32). So, on this interpretation, qualities would be one of the entities whose existence we can rationally posit on the basis of experience, regardless of the other philosophical work they do in explaining change.

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