

Nominalism

The doctrine holding that abstract concepts, general terms, or universals have no independent existence but exist only as names.

Our common classifications are merely the *flatus vocis* or breath of the voice.

...these two versions of nominalism basically collapse into one if one believes that all universals are abstract objects. Most nominalists have held that only physical particulars in space and time are real, and that universals exist only *post res*, that is, subsequent to particular things.

[Plato](#) was perhaps the first ^[4] writer in Western philosophy to clearly distinguish the Nominalist position from a non-Nominalist one, the latter of which he plainly endorsed:

...We customarily hypothesize a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name. ... For example, there are many beds and tables. ... But there are only two forms of such furniture, one of the bed and one of the table. ([Republic](#) 596a-b, trans. Grube)

What about someone who believes in beautiful things, but doesn't believe in the beautiful itself...? Don't you think he is living in a dream rather than a wakened state? ([Republic](#) 476c)

The Platonic universals corresponding to the names "bed" and "beautiful" were the Form of the Bed and the Form of the Beautiful, or the *Bed Itself* and the *Beautiful Itself*. Platonic Forms were the first universals posited as such in philosophy. ^[5]

Our term "universal" is due to the English translation of [Aristotle's](#) technical term *katholou* which he coined specially for the purpose of discussing the problem of universals. ^[6] *Katholou* is a contraction of the phrase *kata holou*, meaning "on the whole". ^[7]

Aristotle famously rejected Plato's Theory of Forms, but he clearly rejected Nominalism as well:

...'Man', and indeed every general predicate, signifies not an individual, but some quality, or quantity or relation, or something of that sort. ([Sophistical Refutations](#) xxii, 178b37, trans. Pickard-Cambridge)

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Heidegger there develops a "fundamental ontology to the modes in which the self "exists," that is, constitutes its own being in the act of existing, and with it originates, s the objective correlates thereof, the several meanings of Being in general. These modes are explicated in a number of fundamental categories which Heidegger prefers to call "existential." Unlike the objective categories of Kant, they articulate primarily structures not of reality but of realization, that is, not cognitive structures of a world of objectives given, but fundamental structures of the active movement of inner time by which a " world" is entertained and the self originated as a continuous event. The "existential" have, therefore, each and all, a

profoundly temporal meaning. They are categories of internal or mental time, the true dimension of existence, and they articulate that dimension in its tenses. This being the case, they must exhibit, and distribute between them, the three horizons of time-past, present, and future (Jonas 1991, pp. 335-336).

....our original statement stands that all the relevant categories of existence, those having to do with the possible authenticity of selfhood, fall in correlate pairs under the heads of either past or future: "facticity", necessity, having become, having been thrown, guilt, are existential modes of the past; "existence," being ahead of one's present, anticipation of death, care, and resolve, are existential modes of the future. No present remains for genuine existence to repose in. Leaping off, as it were, from its past, existence projects itself into its future, faces its ultimate limit, death; returns from this eschatological glimpse of nothingness to its sheer factness, the unalterable datum of its already having become this, there and then; and carries this forward with its death-begotten resolve, into which the past has now been gathered up. I repeat, there is no present to dwelling, only the crisis between past and future, the pointed moment between, balanced on the razor's edge of decision which thrusts ahead (Jonas 1991, pp. 336-337).

Vorhanden (things standing before us), is merely and indifferently "extant", the "there" if bare nature, there to be looked at outside the relevance of the existential situation and of "practical concern." It is being, as it were, stripped and alienated to the mode of mute thinghood. This is the status left to "nature" for the relation of theory - a deficient mode of being - and the relation in which it is so objectified is a deficient mode of existence, its defection from the futurity of care into the spurious present of mere onlooking curiosity.

The existentialist depreciation of the concept of nature obviously reflects its spiritual denudation at the hands of physical science, and it has something in common with the Gnostic contempt for nature (Jonas 1991, p. 337).

Modern science has devolved man into a thing stripped of the positive of existence. The indifference of modern science to the human condition is its contribution to contemporary psychology's nihilism. Modern nihilism is infinitely more radical and more desperate than any nihilism preceding it. That today's science does not care, one way or another, about the case of humans, is the true abyss. That only man cares, in his finitude facing nothing but death, alone with his contingency and the objective meaninglessness of his projecting meanings, is truly an unprecedented situation. The indifference of science to the human condition makes no sense. Life with its awareness of itself, its caring, and its knowing self has been tossed out by natural science.

So radically has anthropomorphism been banned from the concept of nature that even man must cease to be conceived anthropomorphically if he is just an accident of that nature. As the product of the indifferent, his being, too, must be indifferent.There is no point in caring for what has no sanction behind it in any creative intention. But if the deeper insight of Heidegger is right - that, facing our finitude, we find that we care, not only whether we exist but how we exist - then the mere fact of there being such a supreme care, anywhere within the world, must also qualify the totality which harbors that fact and even more so if 'it' alone was the productive cause of that fact, by letting its subject physically arise in its

midst.

The disruption between man and total reality is at the bottom of nihilism. The illogicality of the rupture, that is, of a dualism without metaphysics, makes its fact no less real, nor its seeming alternative any more acceptable: the stare at isolated selfhood, to which it condemns man, may wish to exchange itself for a monistic naturalism which, along with the rupture, would abolish also the idea of man as man (Jonas 1991, pp. 339-340 (Jonas, 1991)).