The Problem of Universals

'Substance, in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse. but in a secondary sense those things are called substances within which, as species, the primary substances are included; also those which, as genera, include the species. For instance, the individual man is included in the species Man, and the genus to which the species belongs is Animal; these, therefore ,— i.e., the species Man and the genus Animal — are termed secondary substances."
[Aristotle, *Categories*, ch. 5 (1b11-19)]

"At present, he says, I shall refuse to say concerning genera and species whether they subsist or whether they are placed in the naked understanding alone or whether subsisting they are corporeal or incorporeal, and whether they are separated from sensibles or placed in sensibles and in accord with them. Questions of this sort are most exalted business and require very great diligence of inquiry."

[Boethius' translation and commentary on Porphyry's *Introduction* (*Isagoge*) to Aristotle's *Categories*]

Universals

Subsist

Do not Subsist

corporally

non-corporally

are concepts

are mere signs

Extreme Nominalism
Universals are mere signs
(*flatus vocis*).

Roscelin (c.1050-1120)

separate from sensible things

inseparate from sensible things

with extramental reality

without extramental reality

Platonic Realism
Non-corporeal Forms serve as paradigms which sensible things approximate in some degree.

Extreme Realism
Individuals differ only accidentally. Socrates and Plato share the same human substance; Socrates, Plato, and Bucephalus all share the same animal substance, etc.

John Scotus Ericena (c.810-c.877)
Remigius (c.841-908)
William of Champeaux (1070-1120)
Odo of Tournai (died 1113)
St. Anselm (1033-1109)

Moderate Realism
Universals are concepts abstracted from individuals, whose meaning is a real shared feature of individuals.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)
Boethius (480-524 CE)
Abelard (1079-1142)
Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)
Duns Scotus (c.1266-1308)

Nominalism
Universals are concepts abstracted from individuals, whose meaning is not a *real* shared feature of individuals.

Wm. of Ockham (c.1285-1349)