

## Nominalism, Realism, Conceptualism

### I. Introduction:

The problem of universals is the problem of the correspondence of our intellectual concepts to things existing outside our intellect. Whereas external objects are determinate, individual, formally exclusive of all multiplicity, our concepts or mental representations offer us the realities independent of all particular determination; they are abstract and universal. The question, therefore, is to discover to what extent the concepts of the mind correspond to the things they represent; how the flower we conceive represents the flower existing in nature ; in a word, whether our ideas are faithful and have an objective reality. Four solutions of the problem have been offered. It is necessary to describe them carefully, as writers do not always use the terms in the same sense.

#### A. Exaggerated Realism

Exaggerated Realism holds that there are universal concepts in the mind and universal things in nature. There is, therefore, a strict parallelism between the being in nature and the being in thought, since the external object is clothed with the same character of universality that we discover in the concept. This is a simple solution, but one that runs counter to the dictates of common sense.

#### B. Nominalism

Exaggerated Realism invents a world of reality corresponding exactly to the attributes of the world of thought. Nominalism, on the contrary, models the concept on the external object, which it holds to be individual and particular. Nominalism consequently denies the existence of abstract and universal concepts, and refuses to admit that the intellect has the power of engendering them. What are called general ideas are only names, mere verbal designations, serving as labels for a collection of things or a

series of particular events. Hence the term Nominalism. Neither Exaggerated Realism nor Nominalism finds any difficulty in establishing a correspondence between the thing in thought and the thing existing in nature, since in different ways, they both postulate perfect harmony between the two. The real difficulty appears when we assign different attributes to the thing in nature and to the thing in thought; if we hold that the one is individual and the other universal. An antinomy then arises between the world of reality and world as represented in the mind, and we are led to inquire how the general notion of flower conceived by the mind is applicable to the particular and determinate flowers of nature.

#### C. Conceptualism

Conceptualism admits the existence within us of abstract and universal concepts (whence its name), but it holds that we do not know whether or not the mental objects have any foundation outside our minds or whether in nature the individual objects possess distributively and each by itself the realities which we conceive as realized in each of them. The concepts have an ideal value; they have no real value, or at least we do not know whether they have a real value.

#### D. Moderate Realism

Moderate Realism, finally, declares that there are universal concepts representing faithfully realities that are not universal.

How can there be harmony between the former and the latter? The latter are particular, but we have the power of representing them to ourselves abstractly. Now the abstract type, when the intellect considers it reflectively and contrasts it with the particular subjects in which it is realized or capable of being realized, is attributable indifferently to any and all of them. This applicability of the abstract type to the individuals is its universality. (Mercier, "Critériologie", Louvain, 1906, p. 343).

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## II. The Principal Historical Forms of Nominalism, Realism, and Conceptualism

**A. In Greek Philosophy:** The conciliation of the one and the many, the changing and the permanent, was a favourite problem with the Greeks; it leads to the problem of universals. The typical affirmation of Exaggerated Realism, the most outspoken ever made, appears in Plato's philosophy; the real must possess the attributes of necessity, universality, unity, and immutability which are found in our intellectual representations. And as the sensible world contains only the contingent, the particular, the unstable, it follows that the real exists outside and above the sensible world. Plato calls it *eídos*, *idea*. The idea is absolutely stable and exists by itself (*óntos ón; autá kath' autá*), isolated from the phenomenal world, distinct from the Divine and human intellect. Following logically the directive principles of his Realism, Plato makes an idea entity correspond to each of our abstract representations. Not only natural species (man, horse) but artificial products (bed), not only substances (man) but properties (white, just), relations (double, triple), and even negations and nothingness have a corresponding idea in the suprasensible world. "What makes one and one two, is a participation of the dyad (*dúas*), and what makes one one is a participation of monad (*mónas*) in unity" (*Phædo*, lxi). The exaggerated Realism of Plato, investing the real being with the attributes of the being in thought, is the principal doctrine of his metaphysics.

Aristotle broke away from these exaggerated views of his master and formulated the main doctrines of Moderate Realism. The real is not, as Plato says, some vague entity of which the sensible world is only the shadow; it dwells in the midst of the sensible world. Individual substance (this man, that horse) alone has reality; it alone can exist. The universal is not a thing in itself; it is immanent in individuals and is multiplied in all the representatives of a class. As to the form of universality of our concepts

(man, just), it is a product of our subjective consideration. The objects of our generic and specific representations can certainly be called substances (*ousíai*), when they designate the fundamental reality (man) with the accidental determinations (just, big); but these are *deúterai ousíai* (second substances), and by that Aristotle means precisely that this attribute of universality which affects the substance as in thought does not belong to the substance (thing in itself); it is the outcome of our subjective elaboration. This theorem of Aristotle, which completes the metaphysics of Heraclitus (denial of permanent) by means of that of Parmenides (denial of change), is the antithesis of Platonism, and may be considered one of the finest pronouncements of Peripateticism. It was through this wise doctrine that the Stagyrte exercised his ascendancy over all later thought.

After Aristotle Greek philosophy formulated a third answer to the problem of universals, Conceptualism. This solution appears in the teaching of the Stoics, which, as is known, ranks with Platonism and Aristoteleanism among the three original systems of the great philosophic age of the Greeks. Sensation is the principle of all knowledge, and thought is only a collective sensation. Zeno compared sensation to an open hand with the fingers separated; experience or multiple sensation to the open hand with the fingers bent; the general concept born of experience to the closed fist. Now, concepts, reduced to general sensations, have as their object, not the corporeal and external thing reached by the senses (*túgchanon*), but the *lektóon* or the reality conceived; whether this has any real value we do not know. The Aristotelean School adopted Aristotelean Realism, but the neo-Platonists subscribed to the Platonic theory of ideas which they transformed into an emanationistic and monistic conception of the universe.

**B. In the Philosophy of the Middle Ages:** For a long time it was thought that the problem of universals monopolized the attention of the philosophers of the Middle Ages, and that the dispute of the Nominalists and Realists absorbed all

their energies. In reality that question, although prominent in the Middle Ages, was far from being the only one dealt with by these philosophers.

(1) From the commencement of the Middle Ages till the end of the 12th century.--It is impossible to classify the philosophers of the beginning of the Middle Ages exactly as Nominalists, Moderate and Exaggerated Realists, or Conceptualists. And the reason is that the problem of the Universals is very complex. It not merely involves the metaphysics of the individual and of the universal, but also raises important questions in ideology--questions about the genesis and validity of knowledge. But the earlier Scholastics, unskilled in such delicate matters, did not perceive these various aspects of the problem. It did not grow up spontaneously in the Middle Ages ; it was bequeathed in a text of porphyry's "Isagoge", a text that seemed simple and innocent, though somewhat obscure, but one which force of circumstances made the necessary starting-point of the earliest medieval speculations about the Universals.

Porphyry divides the problem into three parts:

- Do genera and species exist in nature, or do they consist in mere products of the intellect ?
- If they are things apart from the mind, are they corporeal or incorporeal things?
- Do they exist outside the (individual) things of sense, or are they realized in the latter?

"Mox de generibus et speciebus illud quidem sive subsistant sive in nudis intellectibus posita sint, sive subsistentia corporalia sint an incorporea, et utrum separata a sensibilibus an in sensibilibus posita er circa haec subsistentia, decere recusabo." Historically, the first of those questions was discussed prior to the others: the latter could have arisen only in the event of denying an exclusively subjective character to

universal realities. Now the first question was whether genera and species are objective realities or not: *sive subsistant, sive in nudis intellectibus posita sint?* In other words, the sole point in debate was the absolute reality of the universals : their truth, their relation to the understanding, was not in question. The text from Porphyry, apart from the solution he elsewhere proposed in works unknown to the early Scholastics, is an inadequate statement of the question; for it takes account only of the objective aspect and neglects the psychological standpoint which alone can give the key to the true solution. Moreover, Porphyry, after proposing his triple interrogation in the "Isagoge", refuses to offer an answer (*dicere recusabo*) . Boëthius, in his two commentaries, gives replies that are vague and scarcely consistent. In the second commentary, which is the more important one, he holds that genera and species are both *subsistentia* and *intellecta* (1st question), the similarity of things being the basis (*subjectum*) both of their individuality in nature and their universality in the mind : that genera and species are incorporeal not by nature but by abstraction (2nd question), and that they exist both inside and outside the things of sense (3rd question).

This was not sufficiently clear for beginners, though we can see in it the basis of the Aristotelean solution of the problem. The early Scholastics faced the problem as proposed by Porphyry: limiting the controversy to genera and species , and its solutions to the alternatives suggested by the first question: Do objects of concepts (i.e., genera and species ) exist in nature (*subsistentia*), or are they mere abstractions (*nuda intellecta*) ? Are they, or are they not, things? Those who replied in the affirmative got the name of Reals or Realists; the others that of Nominals or Nominalists. The former or the Realist, more numerous in the early Middle Ages (Fredugisus, Rémy d'Auxerre, and John Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century, Gerbert and Odo of Tournai in the Tenth, and William of Chapeaux in the twelfth) attribute to each species a universal essence (*subsistentia*) , to which all the subordinate individuals are tributary.

The Nominalists, who should be called rather the anti-Realists, assert on the contrary that the individual alone exists, and that the universals are not things realized in the universal state in nature, or subsistentia. And as they adopt the alternative of Porphyry, they conclude that the universals are *nuda intellecta* (that is, purely intellectual representations).

It may be that Roscelin of Compiègne did not go beyond these energetic protest against Realism, and that he is not a Nominalist in the exact sense we have attributed to the word above, for we have to depend on others for an expression of his views, as there is extant no text of his which would justify us in saying that he denied the intellect the power of forming general concepts, distinct in their nature from sensation. Indeed, it is difficult to comprehend how Nominalism could exist at all in the Middle Ages, as it is possible only in a sensist philosophy that denies all natural distinction between sensation and the intellectual concept. Furthermore there is little evidence of Sensism in the Middle Ages, and, as Sensism and Scholasticism, so also Nominalism and Scholasticism are mutually exclusive. The different anti-Realist system anterior to the thirteenth century are in fact only more or less imperfect forms of the Moderate Realism towards which efforts of the first period were tending, phases through which the same idea passed in its organic evolution. These stages are numerous, and several have been studied in recent monograph (e.g. the doctrine of Adélarde of Bath, of Gauthier de Mortagne, Indifferentism, and the theory of the *collectio*). The decisive stage is marked by Abélard, (1079-1142), who points out clearly the role abstraction, and how we represent to ourselves elements common to different things, capable of realization in an indefinite number of individuals of the same species, while the individual alone exists. From that to Moderate Realism there is but a step; it was sufficient to show that a real fundamentum allows us to attribute the general representation to individual

thing. It is impossible to say who was the first in the twelfth century to develop the theory in its entirety. Moderate Realism appears fully in the writing of John of Salisbury.

**C. From the thirteenth Century:** In the thirteenth century all the great Scholastics solved the problem of the universals by the theory of Moderate Realism ( Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus ), and are thus in accord with Averroes and Avicenna, the great Arab commentators of Aristotle, whose works had recently passed into circulation by means of translations. St. Thomas formulates the doctrine of Moderate Realism in precise language, and for that reason alone we can give the name of Thomistic Realism to this doctrine (see below). With William of Occam and the Terminist School appear the strictly conceptualist solution of the problem. The abstract and universal concept is a sign (*signum*), also called a term ( *terminus*; hence the name Terminism given to the system), but it has no real value, for the abstract and the universal do not exist in any way in nature and have no fundamentum outside the mind. The universal concept ( *intentio secunda* ) has as its object internal representations, formed by the understanding, to which nothing external corresponding can be attributed. The role of the universals is to serve as a label, to hold the place ( *supponere* ) in the mind of multitude of things which it can be attributed. Occam's Conceptualism would be frankly subjectivistic, if, together with the abstract concepts which reach the individual thing, as it exists in nature.

#### D. In Modern and Contemporary Philosophy

We find an unequivocal affirmation of Nominalism in Positivism. For Hume, Stuart Mill, Spencer, and Taine there is strictly speaking no universal concept. The notion, to which we lend universality, is only a collection of individual perceptions, a collective sensation, "un nom compris" (Taine), "a term in habitual association with many other particular ideas " (Hume), "un savoir potentiel emmagasiné" (Ribot). The problem of the correspondence of the concept to reality is thus at once solved, or rather it is suppressed and replaced by the psychological question: What is the origin of the illusion that

induces us to attribute a distinct nature to the general concept, though the latter is only an elaborated sensation? Kant distinctly affirms the existence within us of abstract and general notions and the distinction between them and sensations, but these doctrines are joined with a characteristic Phenomenalism which constitutes the most original form of modern Conceptualism. Universal and necessary representations have no contact with external things, since they are produced exclusively by the structural functions (a priori forms) of our mind. Time and space, in which we frame all sensible impressions, cannot be obtained from experience, which is individual and contingent; they are schemata which arise from our mental organization. Consequently, we have no warrant for establishing a real correspondence between the world of reality. Science, which is only an elaboration of the data of sense in accordance with other structural determinations of the mind (the categories), becomes a subjective poem, which has value only for us and not for a world outside us. A modern form of Platonic or Exaggerated Realism is found in the ontologist doctrine defended by certain Catholic philosophers in the middle of the nineteenth century, and which consist in identifying the objects of universal ideas with the Divine ideas or the archetypes on which the world was fashioned. As to Moderate Realism, it remains the doctrine of all those who have returned to Aristoteleanism or adopted the neo-Scholastic philosophy .

### III. The Claims of Moderate Realism

This system reconciles the characteristics of external objects (particularity) with those of our intellectual representations (universality), and explains why science, though made up of abstract notions, is valid for the world of reality. To understand this it suffices to grasp the real meaning of abstraction. When the mind apprehends the essence of a thing (*quod quid est; τὸ τί ἐν εἶναι*), the external object is perceived without the particular notes which

attach to it in nature (*esse in singularibus*), and it is not yet marked with the attribute of generality which reflection will bestow on it (*esse in intellectu*). The abstract reality is apprehended with perfect indifference as regards both the individual state without and the universal state within: *abstrahit ab utroque esse, secundum quam considerationem consideratur natura lapidis vel cujus cumque alterius, quantum ad ea tantum quæ per se competunt illi naturæ* (St. Thomas, "Quodlibeta", Q. i, a. 1). Now, what is thus conceived in the absolute state (absolute *considerando*) is nothing else than the reality incarnate in any give individual : in truth, the reality, represented in my concept of man, is in Socrates or in Plato. There is nothing in the abstract concept that is not applicable to every individual ; if the abstract concept is inadequate, because it does not contain the singular notes of each being, it is none the less faithful, or at least its abstract character does not prevent it from corresponding faithfully to the objects existing in nature. As to the universal form of the concept, a moment's consideration shows that it is subsequent to the abstraction and is the fruit of reflection: "*ratio speciei accidit naturæ humanæ*". Whence it follows that the universality of the concept as such is the work purely of the intellect : "*unde intellectus est qui facit universalitatem in rebus*" (St. Thomas, "De ente et essentia," iv).

Concerning Nominalism, Conceptualism, and Exaggerated Realism, a few general considerations must suffice. Nominalism, which is irreconcilable with a spiritualistic philosophy and for that very reason with scholasticism as well, presupposes the ideological theory that the abstract concept does not differ essentially from sensation, of which it is only a transformation. The Nominalism of Hume, Stuart Mill, Spencer, Huxley, and Taine is of no greater value than their ideology. The confound essentially distinct logical operations--the simple decomposition of sensible or empirical representations with abstraction properly so called and sensible analogy with the process of universalization. The Aristoteleans recognize both of these mental operations, but they distinguish

carefully between them. As to Kant, all the bounds that might connect the concept with the external world are destroyed in his Phenomenalism. Kant is unable to explain why one and the same sensible impression starts or sets in operation now this, now that category ; his a priori forms are unintelligible according to his own principles, since they are beyond experience. Moreover, he confuses real time and space, limited like the things they develop, with ideal or abstract time and space, which alone are general and without limit. For in truth we do not create wholesale the object of our knowledge, but we beget it within us under the causal influence of the object that reveals itself to us. Ontologism, which is akin to Platonic Realism, arbitrarily identifies the ideal types in our intellect, which come to us from the sensible world by means of abstraction, with the ideal types consubstantial with the essence of God. Now, when we form our first abstract ideas we do not yet know God. We are so ignorant of Him that we must employ these first ideas to prove a posteriori His existence. Ontologism has lived its life, and our age so enamoured of observation and experiment will scarcely return to the dreams of Plato.

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**Nominalism.** The term *nominalism* covers philosophical theories purporting to account for "universals" (common nouns such as "human being," "horse," "stone") as mere names, since genuine reality is judged to consist solely of individuals. There have been three major philosophical efforts to account for universals. The first was that of Plato, whose extreme "realism" stipulated a world of eternal, universal Forms or Ideas, imitated and participated in by things in our experience; those things, known by sense, he termed "shadows of images." The Platonizing Augustine made divine Ideas of Plato's Forms; Christian Platonists have largely followed him in this. Plato's theory was opposed by the mature Aristotle, who proposed a "moderate

realism" according to which the individual beings of experience are constituted by forms-in-matter. Those forms can be abstracted from sense data by the human intellect, which "makes all things" and which then "becomes all things" by adapting itself to the form of the "other as other." Finally, we can know the individual as individual by returning to the sense impressions by which the real individual was first grasped and from which impressions the process of understanding began, but now equipped to predicate the abstracted universal of the individual as its subject. Third, and many centuries later, various forms of "nominalism" were contrived in reaction to all realisms, for even the most moderate were thought by the nominalists to be excessive. The many forms of nominalism may be said to share family resemblances.

**Proto-Nominalism:** There is evidence of primitive forms of nominalism dating back to the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, but documentation is meager and stems exclusively from those who opposed it. An obscure early nominalist, Raimbertus of Lille, was opposed by Herman, a future bishop of Cambrai, and also by Anselm of Bec. Raimbertus was said to have taught dialectic "as vocal" (*in voce*), and so to have departed from the realist tradition (*in re*), "of Boethius and of the ancients." In two letters and in a major treatise Anselm complained about another nominalist, Roscelin, having spoken of universals as nothing more than "vocal blasts" (*flatus vocis*). Anselm permitted himself the pun that thinkers who applied this to trinitarian theology "ought to be blasted away" (*exsufflandi*). Peter Abelard, too, bore witness against the same Roscelin. Having studied dialectic under him, Peter moved to another teacher, William of Champeaux, who taught "realistically" (*in re*). Abelard liked the explanations of his new teacher, William, no better than those of Roscelin. He refuted two successive positions of William. First, William held for an essence in common; then, under pressure from his difficult student, William proposed a community of "indifference" that Abelard refuted as well. Abelard's personal position seems to have been akin to William's second explanation: Abelard held that a universal term expresses a "status" rather than an essence or

indifference. Such a term is a “word with meaning” (*sermo*). A universal term does duty for a corresponding concept in the divine Intellect representing the things of nature, but in a human intellect only such things as we can produce—swords, for instance, and houses. It is not unfair to list Abelard's solution among the nominalisms. As for the more extreme form ascribed to Roscelin, John of Salisbury later in the twelfth century reported that his nominalism had died with its author. Still, the terms “nominalists” (*nominales*) and “realists” (*reales*) were coined before the century was out. Both were used by Godfrey of Saint-Victor in his *Fountain of Philosophy*, a seriocomic presentation of academic Paris in the 1170s.

The great masters of the thirteenth century, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas, all held forms of moderate realism on universals. In their personal ways they held with Albert that there is a universal “before the thing” (*ante rem*), in the divine Mind; “in the thing” (*in re*), as its form; and “after the thing” (*post rem*), in the human mind, understanding the class to which an individual thing might belong. Between those moderate realists, whose position would become known as “the ancient way” (*via antiqua*) and the “modern way” (*via moderna*) of the nominalists, stands “the Subtle Doctor,” John Duns Scotus (c.1265–1308).

It was characteristic of the thought of Scotus that he distinguished in things a number of “formalities,” intelligible structures that differ from each other in a way that is “less than real” but “more than logical.” An individual being was thus metaphysically analyzed into a broad class and then into increasingly limited formalities: for example, “animal,” “rational,” “Greek,” “philosopher,” and finally the “thisness” (*haecceitas*) in no sense shared by any other being and expressed in the nonuniversal name “Socrates.” With this formalism went a characteristically Scotistic emphasis on the divine Will as against the traditional emphasis on the divine Intellect.

**Classical Nominalism:** Scholastic tradition, with Scotus as its most immediate transmitter, supplied William of Ockham (c.1285–c.1349) with a number of positions that would come to be identified with him but that were in fact no less characteristic of Scotus. Chief among them was the principle of parsimony according to which “entities are not to be multiplied without necessity”—a commonplace since Aristotle—which, although it had been used frequently by Scotus, is widely called “Ockham's razor.” So too theological tradition, mediated by Scotus, provided Ockham with the distinction between “intuitive” and “abstractive” knowledge. By intuitive knowledge we know through sensation existing individual things, and this type of knowing normally carries existential weight: what is thus known is as a rule real. By abstractive knowledge we know the classes into which our thought and language associate things seen to resemble each other. These classes that engage abstractive knowledge cannot be real; hence, abstractive knowledge carries no existential implication. Ockham, who reacted sharply against the multiple formalities of Scotus, the “Subtle Doctor,” has been called with some justice the “More Than Subtle Doctor.” An instance of this is to be found in what appears to be his last theological work, given final shape while he was at Avignon waiting for a decision on the case against him for heresy: it shows traces of the articles urged against him (Wey, p. 28). In *Quodlibet* 6.6 (Wey, pp. 604–607) Ockham wrote that intuitive knowledge of a star could persist after the annihilation of the star by divine intervention: there was no patent contradiction to shackle divine power. In 5.5 (Wey, pp. 495–500) he had held that God could indeed “cause a ‘creditive’ act” in such circumstances and that such an act would “be abstractive, not intuitive” (Wey, p. 498). Natural reason cannot prove that God is One (1.1; Wey, pp. 1–11), nor that God is First Efficient Cause of all else (2.1; Wey, pp. 107–111); articles of faith cannot be demonstrated (2.3; Wey, pp. 117–123).

During Ockham's lifetime Adam Wodeham (d. 1350) and Robert Holkot (d. 1349) supported the *via moderna*. John of Mirecourt suffered a condemnation of his work in that vein (1347), as did Nicholas of Autrecourt in the same year. As was usual with

Ockham, he used his indubitable logical expertise to set out a theory of abstractive human knowing based on logic. Universals thus fall into a triple division in accord with “supposition theory,” a threefold way in which a universal term can usefully, and with truth, “stand for” (*supponere pro*) a thing or things in a world of real individuals without the baggage of an impossible “universal reality.” Ockham's terminology can be misleading for modern readers. First, “personal supposition” is not restricted to persons, but to any and all individual things which the term at stake can name. “Simple supposition” refers to the paradoxical situation in which a universal concept in a human intellect is, in itself, an individual mental episode. Finally, “material supposition” has nothing to do with matter, but refers to usages in which a term might “stand for” itself: “‘Horse’ is a noun.”

It would be difficult to overemphasize another distinction, older than Scotus (it can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.25.3–4), between the “absolute” and the “ordered” power of God. The first was seen by Ockham to be limited by the law of noncontradiction only; the second he held to be limited by divine decisions that have constituted various “orderings” of created things. Although by his absolute power God might reverse moral prescriptions—that he be hated might, in theory, become a precept and thus a virtuous act—the order he has freely established removes this from the realm of serious possibility. Thus Ockham could be sure of a divine response to the sacraments, to virtuous and to nonvirtuous living by humans, and, with the exception of miracles, to the normal order of the world of experience.

Nor did the *via moderna* end with the deaths of the first generation. John Buridan (who disappeared from the records in 1366) counted himself a discerning Ockhamist. Albert of Saxony (d. 1390) was the first rector of the University of Vienna; with Henry Totting of Oyta (d. 1397) and Henry Hainbuch of

Langenstein (d. 1397) Albert brought the *via moderna* into German-speaking circles. The two Henrys, incidentally, have been shown to represent an effort to meet Jewish resistance to trinitarian theology; because it did not seem possible to avoid paralogisms in using Aristotelian logic, they appealed to a “Platonic logic,” a particularity not otherwise observable in nominalists (Shank). An important point is that causes for Ockham are individuals, observed to precede others; effects are individuals observed to follow others (*Quodlibet* 4.1; Wey, pp. 293–300). Abraham was the “cause” of Isaac and so, indirectly but truly, the “cause” of Jacob, his grandson (3.4; Wey, p. 215). Our empiric observation of such sequences guarantees that effects have causes and vice versa; on this basis, Ockham has been dubbed “a medieval Hume.” In fact, his influence on future philosophers of the first rank is undeniable, especially on British empiricists. John Locke (1632–1704) began book 2, chapter I.2 of his *Essay* with the Ockhamist assertion “All our knowledge [is] about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds”; George Berkeley (1685–1753), no empiricist, in his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, introduction paragraph 12, spoke of “an idea which considered in itself is particular, becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort.” David Hume (1711–1776) opened section IV, part I, of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* with the Ockhamist pronouncement “All the objects of human reason or inquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, relations of ideas, and matters of fact.” Ockham's anticipation of Hume's “customary causality” has been noted.

**Nominalism and the Reformation:** The influence of nominalism upon the Reformation ought not to be ignored, but neither should it be exaggerated. Nominalism was neither a primary cause nor an occasion of the Reformation. The young Luther was taught by at least one nominalist professor, Johann Nathin, who had been a student of Gabriel Biel at Tübingen; and Biel was an explicit admirer of Ockham, as his *Collectio vel epitome* (Collection or Abridgement) of Ockham's theology bears witness. But the University of Erfurt, where Luther met



Nathin, welcomed Scholastics of all persuasions—Scotists, Thomists, and Albertists—to say nothing of humanists. What Luther came to dislike about Scholasticism (which for a moment he seems to have favored [McSorley, p. 218]) was the use of philosophy in theology, particularly that of Aristotle. He could not have been unaware of a range of academic options. Furthermore, at a time when Rome still hoped that he might be persuaded to remain in communion with the pope, two Thomists were sent to interview him: first Sylvester Mazzolini and then Cajetan (one of the classical commentators on Aquinas). Luther's objection to Scholasticism was not precisely its nominalist incarnation but rather what he perceived to be a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian insistence that to “do what is within one's power” was a quasi-automatic “cause” of grace and the scholastics' rationalizing of this by distinguishing between merit “out of justice” (*de condigno*), and merit “out of fairness” (*de congruo*). To the extent that nominalist theologians held such views, Luther was moved to oppose them. It may be noted in this connection that twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologians in dialogue with their Lutheran counterparts have held that Luther was theologically correct in this opposition. One of them has lamented that a year after Luther's death the Council of Trent defined the issue in favor of Augustine, the Second Council of Orange (A.D. 529), prenominalist scholastics, and Martin Luther (McSorley, p. 272).

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