

Social Origins of Nominalism

BY EDWARD CONZE

IN THE older books on the history of philosophy Descartes marks the turning point from medieval to modern philosophy. Later on German historians began to date modern philosophy from Nicholas of Cusa. Both these estimates are now thirty years out of date. Ever since Duhem published his researches on Leonardo da Vinci and the origins of modern science, it has become each year more and more evident that the real turning point in European thought was the change from scholastic realism to Nominalism. The Nominalist philosophers of the 14th century were the pioneers of modern thought, the characteristic feature of which is the endeavor to control nature by mechanical means.¹

In university circles the question has been hotly debated whether the economic structure of capitalism is responsible for the development of a capitalist mentality, or whether antecedent changes in the religious and philosophical convictions of men led to the growth of the economic structure of capitalism. It has been claimed that it was the re-interpretation of Christian religion at the time of the Reformation which led to the bourgeois mentality that created the capitalist economic system. Recent economic historians have, however, shown that the beginnings of capitalism lie in the 14th century. We are thus faced with the strange coincidence that a new (capitalist) economic system begins to arise simultaneously with a new (Nominalist) philosophical system. We have to ask ourselves whether this is more than a coincidence and whether, perhaps, the Nominalist philosophy expressed the needs of the economic structure that began to shape itself at that time. In the 17th and 18th century, Nominalism was at the basis of the philosophy of precisely those thinkers who most ardently and clearly fought for the realization of a bourgeois conception of society. Could Nominalism from the very start have been an expression

¹ There is an almost complete agreement among recent historians of philosophy on that point. Ernest E. Moody, in *The Logic of William of Ockham*, has, however, challenged the current evaluation of Occam's philosophy. He represents Occam's logic as an attempt to return to pure Aristoteleanism. His arguments are far from convincing, as I hope to show soon in a review of his book for the *Marxist Quarterly*.

of bourgeois mentality? I think that we must come to this conclusion. Naturally I cannot hope to give an adequate proof for my contention in a short article. All I can do is to try to render it plausible, and to refer the reader to the more detailed account I have given elsewhere.²

BOURGEOISIE AND NOMINALIST INTELLECTUALS

A bourgeoisie existed already in the 14th century, in France, England, Northern Italy and some parts of Germany. It is a curious fact that the bourgeoisie at that time was strong precisely in those parts of Europe where Nominalism flourished. To be sure, the agrarian population and its mode of production still predominated. But the economic system was strongly tending toward capitalism and the production of commodities. The instruments of a money economy were emerging: calculation was simplified, bills of exchange and bookkeeping developed, the stability of monetary value established, weight, measure and money regulated uniformly, and new laws passed which encouraged trade.

A certain concentration of capital took place. In England the Lombards concentrated the wool trade in their hands. Trade grew. In vain did the guilds try to conserve the collapsing artisan production. Restrictions on the number of workers allowed in each workshop were either sabotaged or openly abolished (as in Paris in 1307 and in 1351). Rich people, mostly traders, advanced money to artisans, many of whom thus became mere wage-workers. This development was specially marked in the textile industries. In this way a considerable number of workers were placed under one command, the productivity of their labor increased, greater specialization, division of labor and quicker application of technical improvements achieved. The first machines were set up in Boulogne, Augsburg and England. In 1340, in Bristol, a manufacturer was punished "for having caused various machines for weaving and making woollen clothes to be set up, and hired weavers and other workmen for this purpose." The liberation of the serfs created "free" workers everywhere. In Italy the serfs were set free very early, at the instigation of the bourgeois towns, and by about 1500 they are "free" almost everywhere. In Flanders feudal serfdom had been abolished in the 13th century, and in England it had almost disappeared at the end of the 14th century.³ Since it proved more and more difficult for artisans to become masters, the number of skilled workers increased. Feudal retainers flooded the country, a pauperized mass of hirelings, beggars, criminals, prostitutes, creating a labor reserve which legis-

² Edward Conze, *Der Satz vom Widerspruch* (1932), pp. 205-66.

³ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (ed. Kautsky), v. I, p. 648.

lation and hunger soon placed at the disposal of capitalist production.

The growing bourgeoisie was conscious of its tasks and needs. It was a considerable political force. Under Edward III the towns sent 226 deputies to Parliament, compared with 76 from the countryside. In France the bourgeoisie of the towns became the main social force used by the King in his attempts to break the power of the feudal lords.⁴ The bourgeoisie had started to act politically on its own. In 1306, in 1357, in 1382, in 1412, the *corps de métiers* of Paris, the artisans, tradesmen and workmen, revolted against the feudal powers. Etienne Marcel, their greatest leader, put forward demands for reform which retained their significance and power down to the time of the great French Revolution.⁵ The Third Estate increasingly conquered administrative positions, and it played a dominant part in the States General which steadily gained influence during the 14th century, owing to their power to grant taxes. Between 1355 and 1358 the bourgeoisie had secured great influence in the French state. Thereafter the brutal and savage repression of the Jacquerie turned back the wheel of history. The allies which the bourgeoisie had found in the countryside were either massacred or terrorized into submission. It took the French bourgeoisie 400 years and the English bourgeoisie 300 years to conquer political power.

The leading Nominalists were not at all "pure theoreticians." On the contrary, they took an active part in the political struggles of the bourgeoisie. To mention only some few points: Occam fought passionately for Louis of Bavaria who based his power and policy mainly on the town bourgeoisie and whose political aims were those of the bourgeoisie—a secular democratic state. For parliamentary democracy is, according to Engels, the normal form of bourgeois rule. In 1359 Occam wrote an apology for Edward III, that pioneer of capitalist economy in England. Nicholas of Oresme and Buridan influenced the French Court to introduce those monetary reforms which the new money economy required so badly.

Dominated by Nominalists the University of Paris exerted its considerable political influence in the direction of the bourgeois revolution. From 1353 to 1358 it led a violent movement against feudalism. It took part in the bourgeois revolution of Etienne Marcel, and in the rebellion of the butchers which occurred in 1413. It elaborated a plan for the ad-

⁴ Louis the Saint writes in his Testament: "Especially maintain the good cities and commons of thy realm in the same estate and with the same franchises as they enjoyed under thy predecessors. . . . For because of the power and wealth of the great cities, thine own subjects, and especially thy peers and thy barons, and foreigners also, will fear to undertake aught against you."

⁵ Thierry, *Essai sur l'histoire de la formation et des progrès du tiers état*, pp. 53, 58-63; J. M. Hyndman, *The Evolution of Revolution*, ch. 18.

ministrative and legal reform of France which foreshadowed the France of the 19th century. The population backed the University's new constitution by conquering the Bastille; the King even recognized it for a time; but in the end the mass butcheries of the Jacquerie delayed everything for centuries.

If we now take for granted the fact that both the conditions for capitalist development and a powerful and class-conscious bourgeoisie existed already in the 14th century, we may ask what the rising bourgeoisie would expect of its theoreticians. In accordance with its social position it would require (1) arguments against feudalism, and especially against the Church, and (2) a strengthening of that attitude of mind and of those methodological instruments necessary for technical control over nature.

CHURCH AND RELIGION

Feudal aristocracy and the clergy were the two classes that opposed the rise of the bourgeoisie. The nobility was fought with guns and money. The clergy owed their power largely to the hold which their authoritarian philosophy of life exerted over the minds of the people, and especially over the educated classes. This hold could be broken only by the creation of an alternative philosophy of life. Here was a task for the theoreticians of the rising bourgeoisie.

The bourgeois, although often anti-clerical, was not directly anti-religious. He was even pious. What he objected to in the Church was its wealth and its political influence. The bourgeois supported the Emperor and the kings in their attempts to restrict the political influence of the Church. They resented the accumulation of wealth by the Church. Not only was this wealth withheld from capitalist accumulation, much of it was spent in a way which shocked the bourgeois conscience. The budget of Pope John XXII (1316-34), for instance, must have appeared to a merchant or an artisan as the budget of a wicked waster. The Pope spent on war 63.7%, on salaries 12.7%, on alms, church building and missions 7.16%, on clothes 3.35%, on meals 2.5%, etc.⁶ What the bourgeois wanted was a cheap church, *une église a bon marché*. They demanded a simple organization of the Church which would eliminate the unproductive monks, clergymen and the Roman Court, in short all those clerical features which were the most expensive.⁷ Finally, the new class further objected, rather

6 Hermelinck, "Das Mittelalter," in *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (1912), p. 174.

7 Engels, *Bauernkrieg*, pp. 37, 38-28. Later on Helvetius held the same ideas, *Oeuvres*, v. V, pp. 63, 93.—The Basque deputy in the Cortes said on October 2, 1936: "We want a poor Church."

inarticulately at first, to Church interference with the secular knowledge necessary to develop the forces of production.

The attitude of the Nominalists to Church and religion, social questions at that time as to-day, consistently reflected the attitude of the rising bourgeoisie. Occam and his followers, in their criticism of the Church, proposed concrete reforms the economic intent of which was obvious. They demanded a church pruned of over-elaborations, insisted on poverty of the clergy, and called for a return to the simple life of the *ecclesia primitiva* and to the poverty of Christ. They further demanded that the activities of the Church should be restricted to the purely religious and spiritual field. The fraction of the Franciscans to which Occam belonged dreamt of an ideal Church, spiritual, virtuous and poor, in contrast to the Roman Church of the time, carnal, vicious and wealthy.⁸

The Nominalists further taught that the doctrines of Christianity could not be proved by reasoning; and that they were in fact contradictory to the principles of reason. They asserted that the existence of God, rationally speaking, can be established, at best, as probable only. God's essence cannot be understood by our reasoning power. Nothing can be rationally understood except on the basis of some intuition. But of God no intuition is possible. In the absence of empirical data one cannot even be sure about immortality of the soul. It cannot be rationally demonstrated—as St. Thomas attempted to do by studying the essence of man—that man has any aim that lies beyond himself. Nominalism left man without an essence, and in consequence led to interminable doubts about the meaning of life. Many doctrines of the Church were declared by the Nominalists to be in express opposition to reason.⁹ Even the basic principle of logic, the principle of contradiction, is, according to Occam and R. Holkot, violated in the sphere of faith.

The relation of these Nominalist doctrines to the class tasks of the rising bourgeoisie can, I think, be shown in three respects:

1. By insisting on the doctrine that faith cannot be proved rationally, Nominalism prepared for the secularization of knowledge, and for an elimination of theological considerations from our knowledge of the world. As G. Ritter¹⁰ has pointed out, Occam's radical division between faith and rational knowledge contributed considerably to the success of purely secular science in winning its independence from theological sen-

⁸ Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, n. 494, 485.

⁹ Pierre d'Ailly states that faith contains "nonnulla quae apparent manifeste contra rationem et quorum opposita sunt consona rationi." Denzinger, *ibid.*, n. 229.

¹⁰ G. Ritter, "M. v. Inghen und die okkamistische Schule in Deutschland," *Stzb. d. Heidelb. Ak. d. Wiss. Phil-Hist.* (1921), p. 69.

timents and ideas. At the same time, it is characteristic that Nicholas of Oresme worked consciously to break the clergy's monopoly of education. He writes for "tout homme qui est de franc condition et de noble engin," disseminates knowledge also among laymen and makes Aristotle accessible to the lay *conseillers du roi* by his French translation of the *Politics*.

2. By asserting the unreasonableness of the doctrines of faith, the Nominalists revealed how strange the feudal religious traditions appeared to the common sense of the new bourgeois class. The same emotional reaction to feudal religion is shown in the famous Nominalist doctrine that all commands of God are arbitrary. They must simply be accepted, and we need not think that they are really justified.

3. Many writers assume that it was out of mainly religious motives that the Nominalists attempted to increase the gap between knowledge and faith. This may be the case as far as the motives of individual Nominalists are concerned. But these are sociologically unimportant compared with the social results of increasing the gap between knowledge and faith. Weak and not yet quite conscious of themselves, the Nominalists could not openly throw feudal religion overboard. They could only bow it politely out of the room. This explains, I think, those curious Nominalist doctrines which *indirectly* rendered religion superfluous in scientific research. Since the activity of the *causa prima* cannot be understood in detail, rational research will have to deal exclusively with empirical causes, with the *causae secundae*. As regards psychology and ethics, Occam and Pierre d'Ailly taught that one cannot prove rationally the necessity of the supernatural habitus (Faith, Love and Hope) since it is possible to derive all its effects from the natural habitus. The modern Roman Catholic writer H. Denifle¹¹ admits that this doctrine cannot escape the conclusion that the supernatural habitus can be dispensed with in a rational account of the activities of the human soul.

To be sure, many mystics out of religious motives have claimed that God is too high and too sublime to be grasped by our natural reasoning powers. But the mystics coupled this thesis with a contempt for the natural faculties of man. This is, however, emphatically not the case among Nominalists. They deprive the Christian doctrine of any support it was supposed to have in the natural gifts and aptitudes of man, but at the same time they attribute a high value to those natural gifts and aptitudes. The result of necessity is damaging to the cause of religion and it requires only a little time for the Church to experience it. The Nominalist teachings on the relation between knowledge and faith, worked out to their logical

11 H. Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung* (2nd ed. 1906), vol. I, p. 592.

end, contributed in no small measure to the decline of religious convictions, and consequently, of the power of the Church. But in the 14th century, the Church was socially still very powerful: it could be opposed only by those who at the same time kneeled pro forma before its majesty.

KNOWLEDGE AND THE WORLD

Members of different social groups acquire knowledge for different reasons and motives. The studies of medieval scholastics aimed at saving the individual soul and at increasing the power of the clerical hierarchy. The Nominalists deliberately and consciously turn away from many of those questions which agitated the scholastic mind, but which appeared to them as *magis subtiles quam utiles*. Nicholas of Oresme shows a marked contempt for pure speculation, for a "philosophe speculatif qui n'estoit pas expert en vie politique, pratique et active." Everywhere he looks for practical applications. The increase of man's practical control over his environment more and more becomes the goal of knowledge. The cultivation of pure reason is deemed an impossible chimera. For Occam, in accordance with Franciscan tradition, the will is superior to the intellect. Pure reason does not exist. "*Omnis actus intellectus est actus voluntatis.*"

For St. Thomas, for instance, the "essence," the object of pure theoretical speculation, had been the aim of thought. In its search for truth the intellect must leave aside the particular and contingent things.¹² Now, for the Nominalists, the particular, the concrete thing becomes the object of thought. The "essences" of scholasticism become accessible only when we discard our practical attitude towards things. The leisure classes of Greece had studied only those sciences which were connected with beauty and perfection. The Third Estate, earning its living by work, turned to those sciences which deal with the necessities of life, despised by Aristotle and the scholastics, who for all their intellectual power were the ideological representatives of economically parasitical classes. Mechanics, as is well known, appeared degrading to Plato. It corrupted geometry by making it go "like a runaway slave from the study of incorporeal, intelligible things to that of objects which come under the senses and by using, in addition to reasoning, bodies which have been fashioned, slowly and slavishly, by manual labor." St. Thomas shared those sentiments¹³ the denial of which is the very starting point of Nominalism.

¹² St. Thomas, in 6. Eth 1, 2-3.

¹³ "Artes liberales sunt excellentiores quam artes mechanicae. Sed, sicut artes mechanicae sunt practicae; ita artes liberales sunt speculativae . . ." Those arts which are not "liberales," "ordinantur ad opera per corpus exercita, quae sunt quodammodo serviles." St. Thomas, I, II, q. 57, a. 3.

Knowledge, as conceived by the Nominalists, aims at the control of events, and not at a knowledge of essential being. Questions concerning the nature of being *qua* being, discussions about *forma* and *substantia*, become purely verbal and uninteresting. Ontology as a rational discipline begins to lose ground rapidly. Not the things themselves but their signs and symbols become the true objects of science. Jean de Jeandun, fellow combatant of Occam, states quite openly that astronomy has merely the task of giving an account of appearances (*salvare apparentias*). The astronomer is not interested in knowing whether those orbits, epicycles, etc. which are hypothetically postulated for the purposes of calculation have an existence in *esse et secundum rem*. He is interested in the calculation, not in the real cause of events.¹⁴ This theory opened the way to the Copernican revolution which rendered calculation of the movements of the stars easier without claiming to come nearer than Ptolemy to "the reality" of things. For Jean de Jeandun it does not matter whether the hypotheses are true if only they are useful, if only they work. Other hypotheses, which no one has as yet thought of, may perhaps perform the same service; we therefore can never be certain of having rendered truly "reality" itself.

REALITY OF UNIVERSALS AND THE WORLD AS CHAOS

The central thesis of Nominalism, viz., universals are not real, is familiar to everyone. For the Nominalists things lose their *substantia essentialis* which, according to Aristotle and the scholastics, constituted the inner core of their being and the object of true scientific thought. In the Aristotelean tradition the essence of things was invested with quite a number of important functions. By denying reality to the essence of things the Nominalists developed the new conception of scientific method which rendered possible the machine age. They also evolved a picture of the universe which has remained basic for the bourgeois mind.

In this context it is interesting to note that the "principle of parsimony" is for Occam one of the main arguments against the reality of universals.¹⁵ The assumption that nature is organized along the simplest and most economical lines, that *entia non sunt multiplicanda sine necessi-*

14 Duhem, *Leonardo da Vinci*, v. IV, pp. 101-03. Schelling (11th lecture): "Es ist wahr, dass man durch Anwendung der Mathematik die Abstände der Planeten, die Zeit ihrer Umläufe und Wiedererscheinungen mit Genauigkeit vorherbestimmen gelernt hat, aber ueber das Wesen oder An-sich dieser Bewegungen is dadurch nicht der mindeste Aufschluss gegeben worden."

15 Occam: "Dico quod species neutro modo dicta est ponenda in intellectu, quia nunquam ponenda est pluralitas sine necessitate. Sed sicut alias ostendetur, quicquid potest salvari per talem speciem, potest salvari sine ea aequo facilliter. Ergo talis species non est ponenda."

tate, was not made for the first time in 1350. But the emphasis laid on this principle ever since, the fact that in subsequent periods it has been invoked to decide innumerable theoretical questions, and that in no previous age was it regarded so seriously as during the last six centuries, seems to suggest that in some way it made a particular appeal to the bourgeois mind by suggesting a close affinity between the workings of nature and those social and mental processes which characterized early bourgeois activity. It is indifferent to feudal mentality how much one spends or wastes, but the argument for economy finds a ready echo in bourgeois hearts. If the principle of parsimony were denied, not one of the results of modern thought would remain untouched.¹⁶ The principle is patently an arbitrary one. Why should nature be governed by the needs or limitations of the human mind? Its unquestioned acceptance can be explained only by the natural bourgeois desire to project his own aims into his picture of the world. In the cosmos as in society, there is no need for fripperies, extravaganzas, hierarchies of principles, laws or prelates.

The Nominalists teach that things by themselves have no relation to one another. Man has to establish relations between them. Before man operates upon them things are an unrelated and unorganized chaos. Universals are organizing principles which alone bring order into things. But Occam denies any objective existence to universals and to the relations between things. Only our mind establishes these relations.¹⁷ The world of nature is not the locus of relations but our mind and the words of our language. The order of the Thomistic cosmos has become a heap of *inconnexa*.

That the world should appear to be a chaos to the bourgeoisie and its theoreticians is a natural consequence of its social position. The capitalist producer is confronted by a chaos of commodities. He finds himself involved in an unplanned economy in which production is affected by the perturbations of an unregulated market. Nowhere does he find any order which might govern his actions. Where there is some order in society, laws, codes, agreements and contracts it is *he* who has brought it about. The structure of the world always appears to man to be in many ways a reflection of the structure of the society in which he lives. Just as the Church found its hierarchy reflected in and supported by the structure of

¹⁶ The best way of exploding a doctrine is to drag its tacit assumptions into the light of day. It would be a useful task for a Marxist to trace the history of the law of parsimony throughout the history of bourgeois thought, and to show how many of the tenets of modern thought rest on that extraordinary assumption.

¹⁷ Occam: "In re nihil est imaginabile nisi absolutum vel absoluta." "Relatio tantum intentio vel conceptus in anima importans plura absoluta." "Nihil sciture nisi complexum; complexum autem e non est extra animam, nisi forte in voce vel in consimili signo."

nature, so the bourgeois mind enshrined the chaos of bourgeois society in the cosmos of which it was a part.

Since the rise of Nominalism, bourgeois thought has never ceased to feel that the world, ontologically, is a chaos before man brings order into it by his thoughts and by his actions.¹⁸ Feudal scholasticism found order in the world as it is. Post-bourgeois Marxism regards the world not as a chaos but as a "net-work of natural phenomena."¹⁹

CONCLUSION

A more detailed investigation of Nominalism would have to go further, and show that the law of inertia which, although clearly formulated only about 1650, is the very foundation of all mechanical (*i.e.* bourgeois) thought, is the automatic consequence of the Nominalistic denial of the reality of universals. It would have to show how the bourgeoisie in its very attempt to extend the power of an anarchic society over nature, feels more and more like a stranger in the world about it and therefore continually discusses whether it can really understand or get at it. It must show why the bourgeois mind can never lose the feeling of being strange and lost in the world, why it will always be subject to the illusion that there is an unknowable reality behind appearances. One would further have to meet obvious objections by showing, for instance, that the mentality of the so-called "Nominalists" of the 11th century was radically and profoundly different from that of the Nominalists of the 14th century. A survey of the last six centuries would have to show that class-conscious bourgeois thinkers have always taken Nominalism for granted, and that all deviations from Nominalism in modern philosophy are due to non-bourgeois tendencies caused by the necessity of effecting a compromise with the Church and nobility. In that way, it might be possible to prove that the Nominalist philosophy and the bourgeoisie not only arose together, but that they remained indissolubly bound together during the entire course of their respective histories. This article is a small contribution to a study of the bourgeois mind and preparatory to a clarification of the relation between Nominalism and dialectical materialism, or what is the same thing, of the relation between the mechanical and dialectical method.

18 In *Der Satz vom Widerspruch*, n. 241, I have given a long list of pertinent statements from bourgeois philosophers.

19 From Lenin's commentary on Hegel's *Logic*, quoted in Luppold, *Lenin und die Philosophie* (1927), p. 86.

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Marx and Hegel

FROM HEGEL TO MARX. STUDIES IN THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF KARL MARX, by *Sidney Hook*. New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, 335 pages; \$4.

IT WAS thirty-five years ago, in 1901, that Franz Mehring published in three volumes a large collection of the writings of Marx and Engels during their formative years 1841-50. Mehring added a number of brilliant commentaries on the personalities and on the intellectual atmosphere of those vital years. From 1929 onwards, D. Riazanov and the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow published another collection of Marx's early writings which until then had remained unknown. When the first volumes of the great Moscow edition of the collected works of Marx and Engels appeared, they created a sensation among German socialists. Some of them, the orthodox Marxists, were both surprised and gratified to find that Marx had already answered in his youth the philosophical arguments of their opponents. The revisionists, too, did not hesitate to make use of the new material. They seized on the more immature and "pre-Marxist" ideas in Marx's early writings. Some of them "revised" Marx so far backward that the "real Marx" became for them a sort of second Schlegel, inspired by a *romantic* reaction against the inhumanity of capitalism. The later development of Marx, after 1848, appeared to these revisionist extremists as a sheer misunderstanding of Marx's original intentions by Marx himself, and *Das Kapital* stood condemned as a miscarriage. I still vividly remember the solemn discussions which raged in Hamburg in 1932 around these problems, and it sometimes seemed to me that not only the world but also texts can be a looking glass in which everybody sees his own face.

As idealist philosophers cannot fail to return again and again to an interpretation and re-interpretation of the classical trend of thought, so Marxists cannot afford to ignore the wealth of ideas contained in Marx's early writings. Marxist economics cannot be isolated from Marxist philosophy. At every stage of his analysis of fundamentals the Marxist economist meets with postulates which are derived from Marx's moral and social philosophy, and from his dialectical method. It was in the seven years which preceded the *Communist Manifesto* that Marx worked out and justified his philosophical postulates. A Marxist who is unfamiliar with the work Marx did in those years has little chance of fully understanding and of fruitfully developing the teachings of the great thinker.

Sidney Hook has done a great service to Marxism by making the Anglo-Saxon public acquainted with the basis of the Marxist tradition. His book,

roughly, falls into three parts. In the first part he discusses the relations, positive and negative, between Hegel and Marx. The second part, about one half of the book, deals with the "left" Hegelian contemporaries of Marx: D. F. Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Arnold Ruge, Max Stirner and Moses Hess. The third part is devoted to Marx's relation to Ludwig Feuerbach, and it contains an admirable commentary on the famous Theses on Feuerbach.

The exposition of Marx's intellectual development is helpful in a twofold way. (1) Hook carefully describes what ideas were held by certain groups of people in the Germany of 1840-48; his painstaking work makes it easy for readers to familiarize themselves with the ideological background of the period. (2) He makes clear, mainly by implication, that those ideas, apart from their relation to the Germany of 1840-48, have a meaning and significance for Anglo-Saxon socialists today.

Now, merely to praise a good book is a bad way of doing justice to it, and often indicates that one does not take it seriously. The critic might grumble about details in this book, but there are very few, however, to which he can take exception.¹ There are, however, two major points which concern fundamental issues of Marxism. One refers to Hook's treatment of the social basis of German intellectual life in the 1840's. The other consists of some reflections on the unity in Marx's intellectual development.

A. Many readers will regret that, apart from some casual remarks, Hook does not apply historical materialism to the intellectual development he discusses. He seems to justify his omission by arguing that a "knowledge of the social conditions of Germany of the 1840's is not sufficient although it may be necessary." He goes on to say that the different ideologies of the time cannot "be simply correlated with differences in class interests." True, but I would add that there must be some correlation although it may not be a simple one, and that this correlation might have been brought out more clearly.

There is in Hook's book, for instance, almost no reference to the way in which Marx's revolutionary opponents developed after 1848. Hook might argue that this was outside the scope of his work. To be sure, all scientific study must isolate. But can we isolate one period in a man's thinking? Can a Marxist tear out of their social context theories which lose half their significance and meaning in the process? Can he ignore the logic of the social conclusions which men like Strauss and Ruge themselves drew from their early theories? If Strauss and Ruge (and others) were wrong, it was their social position which blinded them to

¹ For instance, on p. 223 Hook says that Feuerbach "had a complete grasp of the psychological processes by which man forgot the human origin of his own creation." I take exception to "complete," since I believe that psychology has been put on a scientific basis only during the past forty years. Again, on p. 247, psychoanalysis is referred to as "a fashionable contemporary psychology." Marxists have nothing to gain from underrating the value of the contributions of modern psychology.

reality. In a brilliant passage in his *Zur Geschichte der Philosophie* (pp. 137-38), Mehring describes the accommodation to objective circumstances which made these men true exponents of the German middle classes. In their theories they were not only speaking *about* things and events but *for* definite social groups. I think that Hook's book would have gained if he had stressed less "the relative *independence* of the particular historical situation" of the "general logic" of arguments, but *in addition* had said more about their relative *interdependence*. As it is, Hook appears to describe himself when he speaks of the "philosophers whose professional concern with the formal relations between ideas has weakened their grasp of the social conditions within which these ideas functioned."

Because of that deficiency Hook also missed the opportunity of evaluating the degree to which the crippled social development of Germany affected the value that the ideas he expounds may have for our own age. Hook is right when he says that "the places through which Marx's thought developed recapitulate the difficulties faced by critical minds today when confronted with the Marxist position." But they recapitulate them in a specifically German form, and there is much in the arguments on both sides which is intelligible only when we take into account the "frog perspective" of the German intellectuals at the time of Metternich. Thus, by more explicitly relating their arguments to the existing German social conditions, Hook might have helped the reader to separate the wheat from the chaff.

B. It is refreshing to note that Hook maintains, against our latter-day barbarians among the Marxists, that Marx "was very sensitive to the logic of his opponents' positions," and that Marx's rejection of a theory "is primarily based upon his contention that it is false, not upon its social origin or import." Therefore Hook carefully expounds throughout his book the arguments which Marx brings forward against his opponents. But each one of these arguments does not stand on its own feet. If we assume that Marx's opponents were on the whole as well-meaning, honest and intelligent as Marx was himself, the fact that Marx's logic convinced neither them nor the majority of their followers seems to indicate that their conception of "logic" was different from that of Marx.

In other words: Some people come nearer the truth than others because their predilections favor contact with reality, where the predilections of others lead them to an estrangement from reality and create a gulf between them and things. There were in the main four predilections of Marx which guided and determined his intellectual development and provided the standards by which he measured the truth of his own and of his contemporaries' ideas. The determinants which give their force to Marx's arguments are his empiricism, his identification with the masses, his dialectical method, and his revolutionary temperament.

1. Marx had great respect for existing realities, a rare virtue among German philosophers and social scientists. Throughout his early writings, on page

after page, we feel the joy he felt at discovering a new field of concrete existence, which was overshadowed by the mysticism of the philosophers (Hegel and even Feuerbach) and which lay outside the horizon of the ignorant coffee-house literati. He turned away from Hegel's conception of the state when his eyes were opened to the day-to-day activities of the Prussian government (as Hook points out). His polemics against the "left" Hegelians are full of ironical remarks about the ignorance these literati displayed with regard to existing economic conditions. Everywhere he triumphantly, as it were, rubs the existing facts under his opponents' noses; he is fond of scoring points, as when he reminds them, in *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, that not London but Liverpool was in reality the centre of British trade with America.

2. Marx further advanced beyond his contemporaries because he tried to come into contact with the masses, because he took sides with them, tried to look at things with their eyes, in the light of their aims and of their commonsense. This attitude contrasts with that of Hegel who took the side of the privileged, with Feuerbach who, after 1848, withdrew into himself, and with the Hegelian literati who took the storms in the Berlin coffee-pots so seriously that they overlooked the real existence of the masses and saw them early as a vague shadow of, or even as an obstacle to, the realizations of the Weltgeist that roamed in their books. This democratic bias is the second factor which gives force to Marx's arguments.

3. Marx believed that the dialectical method revealed reality as it is. It seems to me that Hook's book is at its weakest in the treatment of the dialectical method. I have always believed that one cannot grasp the Marxist dialectic, as scientific method, by pondering over its relations to Hegel or its philosophical implications. It seems to me that the abstract and philosophical side of dialectics should be boiled down to some few laws or rules, and that for the rest we should deal with the method *in its application*. Hook appears to agree, for he says that "the life of a method lies in its application. Only in application can its meaning be truly grasped." He then, however, proceeds for fifteen pages to discuss the dialectical method *in abstraction from* its applications, and I only take him at his word when I maintain that these fifteen pages do not help us to grasp the meaning of dialectics. The meaning of these pages is not very tangible, in a book which is otherwise a model of lucidity. Hook has shown in his article on "Marxism and Values" (in the first issue of the *Marxist Quarterly*) that he can give a dialectical solution of a problem. But in the "dialectical" section of his book (pp. 60-76) he has set himself an impossible and self-contradictory task when he tries to explain the dialectical method outside of or apart from its applications. Further, nothing more is heard of the dialectic after those earlier pages. We hear on p. 273, it is true, that Feuerbach did not understand the dialectic, but we are left in the dark about the way in which it helped Marx to

criticize and overcome the views of his contemporaries.

4. Lastly, and that is a point which Hook makes very clear, Marx's arguments were guided by a desire that something concrete should be done, in the sense of effecting changes in existing social reality. This desire constitutes Marx's revolutionary temperament, which so deeply influenced his ideas that the philistine who wants to keep out of the class struggle will forever be unable to understand them.

These seem to be the four predilections which allowed Marx to advance beyond his contemporaries. They are the red threads in Marx's intellectual development, and they are implicit in Hook's exposition of that development. If he has not brought them out more explicitly it is, I suppose, because he did not want to give us a new, but subjective, interpretation of Marx: he wanted to let Marx speak for himself. His scholarly book should help lift Marxist research and Marxist thought to higher levels.

EDWARD CONZE

The Confusion in Higher Learning

THE HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA, by *Robert Maynard Hutchins*.
New Haven, Yale University Press, 1936; 119 pages; \$2.

THIS book has already met with wide approval and at the same time encountered vigorous opposition. It is not an easy work to dissect, for while it has many valuable insights and practical suggestions, it is fundamentally an expression rather than a clarification of the present confusion in America's higher learning. Frankly I find it impossible at times to be quite sure what Hutchins is arguing. But it merits attention since it is the work of the president of one of America's largest universities, the University of Chicago, and may be presumed to represent his aspirations.

The unity of the book lies largely in his conviction that education itself should have a greater unity. The assumptions on which he operates are a set of homely truths concerning common values, at which, stated in their general form, anyone would probably nod approval. Examples are that education should make people think, that a thoughtful man gets down to (Hutchins would probably prefer up to) principles, that there should be a love of truth for its own sake, that tricks of a trade are secondary matters to be picked up in practice, that education is not a department store where anyone entering may pick and choose anything at all, but a discriminating discipline leading to something intrinsically worthwhile, and so forth. On the other hand, what thinking and principles really con-

Chronicles and Discussion

Bourgeois Origins of Nominalism

IN HIS communication to the *Marxist Quarterly* (April-June 1937), James Feibleman raises, on the whole, seven objections to my treatment of nominalism. Owing to reasons of space I can deal with two of them only at some length. As regards the other five, although they would deserve a fuller treatment, I can merely hint at what would be my answer.

1. First of all we must get our definitions clear. Feibleman defines *nominalism* as the thesis that "universals are fictions of the mind, a proposition which renders particular things ultimate and real, and denies the mental interpretation of these real things."¹

a. Now, if Occam was a nominalist—and I think we can take that for granted in this discussion—Feibleman's definition is not correct, although it can claim the authority of some dictionaries. Occam expressly *denies* that universals are fictions of the mind, because that would destroy the objective validity of universals and the practical value of experimental science.² Universals are not purely imaginary, they have a basis in reality. What is characteristic of modern nominalism is not a clear-cut theory as to the relation of universals to reality but a wavering uncertainty about what corresponds to universals in reality, an uncertainty which has never left the nominalist to this very day, being of the very essence of the theory.

On the one side we hear that the commonness which the universals express is based on an objective *conventia* of things in *reality*.³ It is based on an aptitude, a "gentle force," as Hume called it later on, in the particulars. The universal is even called a *similitudo rei*.⁴ On the other hand, by denying reality to relations, Occam reduces the objective world to a chaos of isolated individuals, for the uniformity of and the similarity between individual things is a relation. Universals are symbols which stand for (*supponunt*) individual things, that is

1 The part after "and" I fail to understand.

2 A good collection of the passages appear in N. Abbagnano, *Guglielmo di Ockham* (1931), p. 91 *et seq.*

3 Ritter, *M. von Inghen und die okhamistische Schule in Deutschland* (1921), pp. 60, 118; Hume, *A Treatise* etc., vol. 1, pp. 1, 5; E. Hochstetter, *Studien* (1927), p. 82 note.

4 Hochstetter, *op. cit.*, pp. 82, 103-108.

Occam's final formula. In this way universals have an objective validity, although the exact nature of their relation to reality remains rather obscure.⁵

b. Nor is the thesis that "only particular things are ultimate and real" in any way characteristic of nominalism only. There is, indeed, one type of "realism" which regards universals as self-subsistent entities that can exist independently of individual substances, and are prior to them (*Universalialia ante rem*). But this Platonic form of realism, which was very widespread in the early Middle Ages, was opposed by a host of Aristotelean realists who claimed that only particular or individual things could exist independently, or separately. Universals only exist together with an individual substance, but they are nevertheless real. Abelard tried to define the kind of reality of these universals by calling them "*status*," something which is neither a thing (*res*) nor nothing (*nihilum*).⁶ (*Universalialia in re*). The Aristotelean realists thus share with the nominalists the conviction that only individual things have a *separate existence* (*subsistentia*), but they ascribe *objective reality* to universals, while the nominalists spoke of *objective validity* only. This distinction may sound a bit subtle. Without it, however, we cannot understand the difference between the so-called "nominalist" doctrines before Occam and nominalism proper, to which we shall turn soon.

c. The *bourgeoisie* is "defined as the trading and mercantile class." While there have been traders in many periods of history the traders developed into a new class, into a bourgeoisie proper, in the fourteenth century, when they turned to *manufacturing*. The trader who turned manufacturer at that time steadily increased the productivity of labor by increasing the number of workers in each unit of production, by developing the division of labor and by introducing technical improvements and even machines. He more and more employed "free" workers. The manufacturer—far more than the trader—is interested in that control over nature which experimental science gradually rendered possible. A trader is a trader. He becomes a bourgeois only in that capitalist system of producing and manufacturing which gradually developed from the fourteenth century onward.

2. If it could be shown that Porphyry, Pyrhoh, Boethius and Roscellinus were nominalists, I would be wrong in asserting that nominalism has always been the doctrine of the bourgeoisie. We would in that case have nominalists who do not represent bourgeois aspirations. The point is vital for my theory. It also serves to illustrate the superiority of the concreteness of the Marxist approach

5 Elsewhere (in *Der Satz vom Widerspruch*, p. 237) I have attempted to show that this insecurity of nominalists about the relation of universals to reality is connected with a general estrangement from reality which is a consequence of the social position and social aspirations of the bourgeoisie.

6 I noticed that some dull-witted writers—mostly Protestant theologians—call this Aristotelean realist with Platonic leanings a "nominalist."

to that unhistorical treatment of philosophical tendencies which prevails in our textbooks. A Marxist would indeed be surprised to find that fundamentally identical doctrines should have arisen in fundamentally different historical circumstances. He therefore keeps his eyes open for differences which escape the friends of unhistorical definitions.

Porphyry, who in his *Eisagoge* "first raised the question of nominalism explicitly," gave evidence of logical acumen but not of a nominalist bias. *Pyrrho* is usually regarded as a skeptic who would not commit himself to any theory as regards universals, and for whom a nominalist doctrine would have been clearly incompatible with his desire for suspension of judgment.⁷ *Boethius*, in his discussion of *Porphyry*, emphatically and unambiguously comes out for Aristotelean realism.⁸ I therefore agree that "it has not yet been determined" whether *Pyrrho* and *Boethius* "were themselves members of the bourgeois class." I would add that it has equally not been determined whether they were at all nominalists.

The real problem lies with *Roscellinus* (1050 to 1120), and with the "nominalism" of the eleventh and twelfth century. I gladly take the opportunity to supplement my former article "by showing that the mentality of the so-called 'Nominalists' of the eleventh century was radically and profoundly different from that of the Nominalists of the fourteenth century."

In connection with *Roscellin*, we have first to bear in mind that he was not a person of great importance. The materialist conception of history is concerned with socially successful and representative ideas and not with the freaks. At any time one can find one writer or another who has said almost anything. Before he decides about the social basis of a doctrine a Marxist will want to know whether it was a typical doctrine in any way representative of anything or of anybody. As a matter of fact, *Roscellin* was an individual with few followers. *John of Salisbury*⁹ reports that his doctrine "almost entirely disappeared with him" and "vanished with its originator." Similarly *Abelard* has little to say of *Roscellin's* (his teachers') doctrines, and passages in his *Dialectica* make it plain that he considered it little worthy of attention.¹⁰ What notoriety *Roscellin* possessed at the time he did not derive from his teachings on universals but from his unorthodox interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity which was attacked by *Anselm of Canterbury*, and condemned by the Council of *Soissons* in 1092.

Now, what about *Roscellin's* "nominalism"? While he was just an individual the prevalent doctrine of the time was a realism of the Platonic type. *Roscellin*,

7 *Pyrrho* and his followers "were constantly engaged in overthrowing the dogmas of all schools, but enunciated none themselves." *Diogenes Laertius* IV, 74.

8 *In Isagogen Porphyrii Commenta* (ed. S. Brand 1906), especially pages 159 to 176. *Boethius* says of universals, of the genera and species, "non est dubium quin vere sint"; "ista vere substantant" (p. 26); "sensibilibus juncta subsistunt in sensibilibus" (p. 176).

9 *Metalogicus* II, 17; *Policraticus* VII, 12.

10 J. G. Sikes, *Peter Abailard* (1932), p. 90.

indeed, was an opponent of that realism. But that in itself does not make him a nominalist.

De Wulf, a first-rate authority, states expressly that "it must be borne in mind that this twelfth century nominalism has a very special sense. It is different from the nominalism of the fourteenth century."¹¹ Roscellin's views are known to us only second-hand, only from the writings of his opponents. According to these very scanty reports Roscellin indulged in the somewhat paradoxical statement that, far from being the real realities in the world, the universals were *flatus vocis*, vocal emissions, composed of letters and syllables. By using the word "*vox*" he referred to the spoken word as to a physical sound, as distinguished from its meaning (*sermo*). This a way of opposing "Platonic" realism by a striking formula. But it is not nominalism. There is no evidence that Roscellin denied the reality of universals. "That is a question with which he does not deal."¹² Occam expressly rejected the opinion that the universal might be a *flatus vocis*.¹³

By reducing a doctrine to a bald statement one too easily tears it out of its context. The philosophical initiative, from Remigius of Auxerre (841-908) to Abelard (*circa* 1140), rested with "Pratonic" realism. According to this doctrine universals, *e.g.* humanity, have an independent existence, and the individual things, *e.g.* individual men, have their existence only as a modification of the universal substance, by participating in it. This doctrine was extremely popular at the time, not only among writers and teachers but also among men of action, for reasons into which I cannot go here.¹⁴ It created a reaction, the representatives of which all agreed that only individual things could exist separately and independently or "substantially," and that universals are not things (*res*). They, however, did not conclude that universals had no reality in connection with individual substances. The opponents of "Platonic" realism therefore all inclined towards some form of Aristotelean realism which cannot be confused with modern nominalism. For the "universale in re" stands even though the "universale *ut res*" is denied.

We have thus replaced Roscellin's thesis into its context. In addition we may

11 *History of Mediaeval Philosophy* (1935), vol. I, p. 197. When discussing Occam the same author states: "We need only compare the doctrines of Occam and of Roscellin to see how utterly misleading it is to label both these philosophers alike as nominalists. The two systems have nothing in common save the denial of extreme realism." (*History*, pp. 425-26). I am almost glad to think that the pious padre from Louvain will never know what sort of people make use of his patient researches.

12 De Wulf, vol. I, p. 149. Similarly Ueberweg-Geyer, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, p. 209.

13 *In sent.* I d. 2 q. 8. He describes the universal as a *terminus* or an *intentio*.

14 One of its motives was the interest in original sin which could easily be rendered plausible that way. For if what really exists is the human race as a specific reality, which is then scattered amongst its many individual representatives, the entire substance was infected by Adam's sin and by participating in that vitiated substance we all suffer from the consequences.

still look at its fruits. It is not only what a man says that matters but also where his doctrine leads him and others to. The radicals of the anti-realist reaction of the twelfth century were led to *skepticism* and *sophistry*, the nominalists of the fourteenth century to *empiricism*, to experiment and observation. The former formulated their doctrines with an eye on "Platonic" realism, Occam with an eye on observed reality.

Occam argued that, if only singulars are real objects and if only in perception we have immediate access to them, experience and observation become the test of true knowledge. In this way he laid the foundation of experimental science. His positive achievement in logic, the interpretation of concepts as symbols, openly contradicts the theory of the *flatus vocis*.

In the eleventh century the Church had reached a degree of corruption unusual even in the history of that body. In consequence new sects and heresies sprang up everywhere, and the doctrines of the Church became the object of destructive argument. Many clerics amused themselves as best they could. Some of them, with more intellectual tastes, spent some of their time in argument for its own sake and basked in the frivolity of their argumentations. They discussed whether a pig led to market is held by a rope or by the one leading it. They turned Roscellin's doctrine to good use by forming syllogisms like this one: "Mouse is a syllable; a syllable does not gnaw cheese; therefore a mouse does not gnaw cheese." This sort of thing was an intellectual by-product of clerical decay which was then, temporarily, brought to an end by the monastic reforms and the crusades. Not only sociologically but also in their spirit these early skeptics and the nominalists are miles apart.

3. When he states that nominalism "gave rise to the middle classes," Feibleman raises the question of the importance of intellectuals. This is a very vast problem, and I can only restate my conviction that the philosophers owe more to the people than the people owe to the philosophers. Making Occam into a sort of father of the bourgeoisie reminds me of a Nazi who argued that Adam Smith was the father of the industrial revolution. It seems to me that intellectuals should not be as conceited as all that. But, naturally, I cannot argue the point *here*.

4. While separating faith from reason, St. Thomas' theology is far more rational—in intention—than Occam's. According to him the articles of faith, like the doctrine of the Trinity, of original sin, of the sacraments, etc., could not be justified by reason but are compatible with reason. According to Occam and the nominalists they are incompatible. According to St. Thomas the articles of revealed faith are above reason but not against reason. Reason can justify them negatively, by showing that the objections of opponents are unfounded. In my argument I stressed not the point that the nominalists *separate* faith and reason—that is what St. Thomas does, too—but that they regard the doctrines of

the Church "to be in express opposition to reason."

5. Far from ignoring the history of science, I quoted Duhem, one of the leading authorities on the subject, in support of what I said about Jean de Jean-dun and astronomy. If Nicholas of Aresme wrote against the black arts, he did not do so because they were practical but because he was against magical, as opposed to rational, practice. He clearly voiced his contempt for pure theoreticians, and I must refer to my quotation in the original article.

Copernicus, as far as I know, was interested in obtaining accurate astronomical tables. Whether we can call this a "practical application of results" is largely a matter of opinion. It is also besides the point. What the Marxist claims is that a careful study of the history of modern science has shown more and more clearly that, whatever may have been the conscious motives of scientists (who like most people easily deceive themselves), their researches were very closely connected with the practical aspirations of the bourgeoisie.

6. As regards the principle of parsimony I must admit a weakness in my argumentation. I showed that it is a product of bourgeois mentality and that it is emphasized by nominalists. Assuming that no bourgeois philosopher can fail to be a nominalist, I believe I have shown indirectly that it is a nominalist principle. I should have given more direct proof. But I feel that Feibleman takes the word "realism" here in a very loose sense. "Realism," as the word is used in modern philosophy, in England and the United States, is often perfectly compatible with nominalism. I may say, incidentally, that in England C. E. M. Joad is not regarded as a philosopher but as a popular writer. Be that as it may, the problem, I think, deserves to be threshed out more thoroughly.

7. I believe, indeed, that Marxists cannot be nominalists. But I do not conclude that they must be realists. The world consists of *concrete* objects which are in themselves neither universals nor particulars. In certain situations we determine the concrete objects as universals *or* as particulars, but in most situations this question of universality or particularity does not arise, being irrelevant to our purpose. In this way, as I see it,¹⁵ Marxism transcends both nominalism and realism.

The dialectic, tracing, as it does, the impulse of movements and changes to material contradictions, seems on the surface to involve a realism of the Aristotelean type. For a material contradiction is the conflict between the *essential* features of a process. But the "essential features of a process," as Marx *e.g.* understood them in his discussion of the contradictions of capitalism, while they are incompatible with nominalist assumptions, should not be confused with Aristotle's "essence." But that is clearly another story.

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¹⁵ I must refer the reader to *Der Satz von Widerspruch*, pp. 243-66, where I have tried to justify this statement.