PAPERS READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY, 1906-1907.

NICHOLAS DE ULTRICURIA, A MEDIEVAL HUME.

By DR. H. RASHDALL.

Two causes have prevented full justice being done to the philosophical penetration and originality of the Schoolmen. Their acuteness, their subtlety, and their industry have been sufficiently praised. It has even been recognised that beneath a thin veil of orthodoxy—the thinness of which was sometimes appreciated, sometimes not even suspected, by the thinker himself—much bold speculation really went on in the medieval Schools. But it is sometimes forgotten that the acknowledged Doctors of the Church were not the only thinkers who once taught and lectured and disputed in the Rue du Fouarre at Paris or our Oxford School Street: perhaps these were not always the most brilliant or the most original. One cause which has tended to give an exaggerated impression of the orthodoxy and deference to authority prevalent in the medieval Schools is the fact that the heretics, though at one time they often enjoyed considerable vogue, were at length as a rule more or less suppressed, so completely sometimes that nothing remains of their writings but the propositions for which they were condemned and which in most cases, but not always, they eventually retracted. The other is the great advantage which the regular clergy possessed over the seculars in diffusing

their teaching throughout Europe and getting them copied, circulated, preserved, and handed on after their deaths—eventually, after the invention of printing, printed and brought within easy reach of the modern scholar. The secular Master of Arts or Doctor of Theology could not so easily transfer himself and his lectures from Oxford to Paris, and from Paris to Prague or Vienna, while it was a regular part of the Mendicant system to transfer their Lecturers from one convent to another. Every famous Oxford Friar, sooner or later, taught at Paris, and what was known in Paris was soon known to the world. Once accepted and approved by his Order, the Mendicant Doctor was provided with an organised army of disciples, pledged by the spirit of monastic loyalty to diffuse his teaching during his lifetime, and to hand it down to posterity after his death. The great rows of costly folios which represent the Schoolman to the modern historian of Philosophy are for the most part the works of Mendicant Doctors: the works of the secular thinkers, from whom in many cases it is known that these Doctors received their first inspiration, remain unprinted and unexplored in the MS. presses of our University and College Libraries, when their heresies were not conspicuous enough to procure for them the greater distinction of the bonfire.

A most conspicuous instance of the success of well-regulated persecution in condemning thought to oblivion is supplied by the fate of Wycliffe's writings. Wycliffe was, even before the date of his open quarrel with the Church, about the most famous Schoolman of his day: he was famous as a pure Philosopher, a Logician, and a Metaphysician, before he wrote Theology at all; and he was famous as a Theologian before he was famous as a heretic. Yet, in spite of all his fame, his works, with the exception of a few of the most popular, have remained in MS. till the Wycliffe Society began its valuable labours in connexion with the quinquacentenary of his death. Even now that his works occupy a whole shelf in our Libraries, no historian of Philosophy has discovered the existence of such a thinker: even

his name does not appear in Prantl or Erdmann or Ueberweg or Hauréau's History of the Scholastic Philosophy. But the most curious instance of this process of inverted natural selection which has come under my notice is the fate of the writer whom I wish to take this opportunity of introducing—perhaps I may venture to say for the first time—to the notice of modern Philosophers. It might seem hardly credible that a writer of the 14th century should have anticipated the main theses of Berkeley and of Hume, and yet occupy but a line or two in the recognised histories of Philosophy. But such is the fact. This Society exists, no doubt, primarily to promote the study of Philosophy, not of the history of Philosophy;—to say nothing of so antiquarian a department of that history as the Philosophy of the 14th century. Still, the ideas of this neglected Schoolman are so curious and interesting that I hope I am not mistaken in supposing that the members of this Society might like, by way of diversion from the more actual and present-day controversies which usually claim their attention, to hear a little about a forgotten chapter in the history of thought.

In one of the great folios of du Boullai's history of the University of Paris, there is printed a brief document in which one Nicholas de Ultricuria (elsewhere spelt Autricuria) retracts certain propositions which he had maintained in the Schools of Arts at Paris, and for holding which he was deprived of his Mastership of Arts and declared incapable of proceeding to the degree of Doctor of Theology. The document as there printed is only a fragment: the whole of it now appears in the second volume of the magnificent *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, edited by the late Father Denifle and M. Chatelain. The document even now occupies but ten quarto pages. One letter of his to a philosophical opponent is printed in St. Argentrè's *Collectio Judiciorum de novis erroribus*:* two remain in MS. at Paris. This is all that remains of the activity of one who

* *Tom. I, p. 358.*

appears to have felt all the philosophic doubts which, as developed by Berkeley and Hume, all subsequent Philosophy has been seeking either to confirm or to remove. No doubt the ability of a thinker is to be determined not by the theses which he propounds but by the arguments which he uses in defence of them: the arguments used by Nicholas are very inadequately preserved. But what remains makes it clear that if his penetration was not equal to that of Berkeley and Hume, he had fairly entered upon the line of thought which is now associated with their names. Of the man himself scarcely anything is known. He came from Autricourt, in the diocese of Verdun, and may therefore, I suppose, be set down as a German. He performed a disputation for the degree of Doctor of Theology some time before 1342.* In 1340, with five others, one of them being an Englishman—Henricus Anglicus, of the Cistercian Order—he was summoned to the Papal Court at Avignon to answer certain charges of heresy; he is now described as a Licentiate of Theology, *i.e.*, he had all but completed the elaborate course which then conducted to the degree of Doctor in that Faculty. Eight years before, being then a Bachelor of Theology, he was “provided” by the Pope to a Canonry at Metz. This, it may be mentioned, was at the time the usual way of securing a maintenance for University Teachers in the Northern Universities. No endowments expressly designed for University Chairs at present existing, Prebends and College Fellowships (which last at Paris ceased when the D.D. degree was taken), were the only means of subsistence available for such Teachers. His case was referred to a Cardinal,† and the affair apparently lingered on, *more Romano*, for six years. It was not till 1346 that judgment was given to the effect already mentioned. Retraction in a beaten Controversialist at that time involved no disgrace; it

* *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, T. II, No. 912, note.

† *Ib.*, No. 1041 and notes; *cf. Auctarium*, T. I, c. 11.

was looked upon very much in the same light as the act of a modern politician or newspaper editor who retracts a libel which he has found himself unable to justify to the satisfaction of a Judge or Jury, though he may still retain his private opinion that it is true. Nicholas retracted his errors at Avignon in 1346; on St. Catherine's Day, November 25th, 1347, he publicly recanted them in a sermon at the Dominican Church in Paris, and with his own hand burned the theses and the tractate in which they had been defended. His moderation was not unrewarded. In 1348—two years after his condemnation—he is Dean of Metz, and the friends who had shared his errors seem for the most part to have likewise achieved satisfactory ecclesiastical careers.

There is only one more point which has possibly to be added to this jejune record. A certain MS., supposed to be a discourse of Pope Clement VI, bearing the date 1343, declares that Nicholas had fled to the Court of Louis of Bavaria, the anti-papal claimant of the Imperial crown.* Father Denifle appears to doubt the story: yet, if true, it would account for the long delay in pronouncing his condemnation. And the fact would fit in with all that we know of the political and ecclesiastical events of the time. Nicholas was certainly a disciple of William of Occam, who likewise joined the party, and lived at the Court of Louis of Bavaria, and died unreconciled with the Holy See in 1347. The still bolder anti-papalist thinkers Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun and many other more or less suspected Theologians were members of the group which rallied round the enlightened but unfortunate Louis of Bavaria.

However, our interest lies not in the life of Nicholas of Autricourt but in his theses. The first list of errors charged against Nicholas of Autricourt are 32 in number. To this is appended a further list of admissions made by him in the

* See the Note in *Chart. Univ. Paris.*, T. II, p. 720.

presence of Pope Clement VI himself or of the Cardinal to whom the case was committed, together with another schedule sent—no doubt by his enemies—from Paris. I will read, with a few comments, the list of the 32 propositions, and then add a few words as to the light that is thrown on them by the subsequent lists and the one printed letter. I think it will probably be best to translate them, adding the words of the original Latin* :—

(1) "The proposition 'Man is an animal' is not necessary according to the faith."

[*"Dixi et scrip(s)i quod) hec propositio: homo est animal, non est necessaria secundum fidem, non attendens pro tunc connexionem necessariam predictorum terminorum."*]

This proposition Nicholas admits that he had laid down "without attending for the moment to the necessary connexion of the aforesaid terms." This is clearly a piece of Occamistic Empiricism; it asserts that all our knowledge rests upon experience, and that it is not *a priori* unthinkable that there should be men that are not animals.

(2) "From the fact that one thing exists, it cannot by any evidence derived from a first principle be deduced that another thing exists."

[*"Ex eo quod una res est, non potest evidenter evidentia deducta ex primo principio inferri, quod alia res sit."*]

This amounts to Locke's denial of innate ideas, or, in modern language, of any *a priori* or axiomatic truth, and in particular of the axioms upon which the validity of all reasoning depends. In the language of certain modern friends of ours, axioms—even the principle of contradiction—are only postulates. If this interpretation of him be true, I have no doubt our friends the Pragmatists, each of whom is always ready to admit that not he but somebody else invented

* *Chart. Univ. Paris.*, T. II, No. 1124.

Pragmatism, will be ready enough to claim Nicholas de Ultricuria as the founder of their School.

(3) "From the fact that one thing is, it cannot evidently, with an evidence deduced from a first principle, be inferred that another thing is not."

["Ex eo, quod una res est, non potest evidenter inferri quod alia res non sit."]

(4) "From the fact that one thing is not, it cannot be evidently inferred that another thing is not."

["Ex eo, quod una res non est, non potest evidenter evidētia deducta ex primo principio inferri, quod alia res non sit."]

(5) "From the fact that one thing is not, it cannot be evidently inferred that another thing is."

["Ex eo, quod una res non est, non potest evidenter inferri, quod alia res sit."]

These three propositions of course imply the same principle as the preceding ones.

(6) "Evident certainty has no degrees."

["Certitudo evidentie non habet gradus."]

This principle would seem to mean that one self-evident proposition cannot be more or less self-evident than another self-evident proposition. It would be perhaps to attribute to Nicholas too much anticipatory insight to suppose that he is denying the doctrine of degrees of truth and reality in the form given it by Mr. Bradley or Mr. Joachim. It is probable that he was thinking of Aristotle's law that some truths were *γνωριμώτερα φύσει* than others.

(7) "Except the certainty of faith there is no other certainty but the certainty of a first principle or of a proposition which can be resolved into a first principle."

["Excepta certitudine fidei non erat alia certitudo nisi certitudo primi principii vel que in primum principium potest resolvi."]

The exact polemical point of this is obscure; perhaps it means that propositions which rest for their truth upon

induction from experience cannot be certain; and since Nicholas has already asserted that no proposition about existence is really self-evident or a first principle, it will follow that no proposition whatever is intellectually certain, though Faith may supply the deficiencies of Reason.

(8) "Of the existence of material substance distinct from our own soul we have no evident certainty."

[*"De substantia materiali alia ab anima nostra non habemus certitudinem evidentie."*]

Putting aside the Sceptics who doubted everything, this is, so far as I know, the earliest piece of really thorough-going Idealism before the Idealism of Berkeley and Hume—that is to say, if Idealism means or includes a doubt as to the existence of a material world except in and for mind or some kind of spiritual experience. It might no doubt be said that we have here merely the problematical Idealism of Descartes; but it does not appear that Nicholas, like Descartes, discovered any indirect way of proving the independent existence of an external world which, as he contended, was not immediately certain.

(9) "The inference from the proposition 'A is and formerly was not' to the proposition 'something different from A is,' is not evident with an evidence deduced from a first principle."

[*"Hec consequenti(a : a est et prius non) fuit, igitur alia res ab a est, non est evidens evidentia deducta ex primo principio."*]

The point of this thesis is much the same as that of the first five propositions; the only new feature is that the assertion is now apparently limited to things which have a beginning, to events.

(10) "This consequence is not admitted with any evidence deduced from a first principle; 'Fire is brought near to tow and no counteracting cause is present, therefore the tow will be burned.'"

[*"Hec con(sequentia non est evidens evidentia deducta ex primo principio : Ignis est approx(imatus stupe et nullum) est impedimentum : ergo stupa comburetur."*]

Nicholas here proceeds from the denial of necessary connexion in general to an explicit denial of the law of Causality, or rather to what (as I for one should contend) is quite a different thing, a denial of the necessary or self-evident character of the Uniformity of Nature; and consequently of the self-evident certainty of the inductive inferences based upon that assumption. We shall see from the next proposition that he does not here deny the law of Causality itself; what he denies is that a phenomenon must necessarily be followed by another phenomenon which has been observed usually to follow it, or, in Berkeleyan language, that an idea cannot be the cause of another idea.

(11) "We have no evident knowledge that there can be any cause of any event other than God."

["Nescimus evidenter, quod ali(a a Deo possint)esse causa alicujus effectus."]

(12) "We do not know evidently that any cause which is not God exercises efficient causality."

["Nescimus evidenter, quod aliqua causa causet efficienter que non sit Deus."]

Here, no doubt, he goes beyond Berkeley in denying the causality of the human will. From this and other evidence it would appear that Nicholas was influenced by the strongly predestinarian ideas of Thomas Bradwardine; what he meant was "God must be the sole and ultimate cause even of our voluntary acts."

(13) "We have no evident knowledge that there can be or is any efficient natural cause."

["Nescimus evidenter, quod aliqua causa efficien snaturalis sit vel esse possit."]

This is another assertion of the same principle: "We know nothing of real efficient causes in the material world; God is the sole cause of every event."

(14) "We have no necessary knowledge whether any effect is or can be naturally produced."

["Nescimus evidenter, utrum aliquis effectus sit vel esse possit naturaliter productus."]

(15) "Whatever conditions we take to be the cause of any effect, we do not evidently know that, those conditions being posited, it follows that the effect must be posited also."

[*"Quibuscumque acceptis, que possunt esse causa alicujus effectus, nescimus evidenter quod ad positionem eorum sequatur effectus positio."*]

A logical deduction from the preceding; there is no absolute certainty in scientific prediction.

(16) "We do not evidently know that the subject concurs in the production of any effect."

[*"Nescimus evidenter, quod in aliqua productione concurrat subjectum."*]

The human will is (so far as we know) not only not the cause, but not even a concurrent, or, as we might say in modern language, a derived cause of any effect.

(17) "There cannot be any demonstration simply by which through the mere existence of anything the existence of an effect is demonstrated."

[*"Quod nulla potest esse simpliciter demonstratio, qua existentia tantum demonstretur existentia effectus."*]

(18) "It is not evidently known to us that there can be any demonstration from any prior position which is really different from itself."

[*"Non est nobis evidenter notum, quod possit esse aliqua demonstratio a priori differenti realiter."*]

In the last two propositions the denial of the validity of inference seems to be extended not merely to demonstrations which postulate the uniformity of nature, but to all inference whatever. Here Nicholas seems to go beyond Hume, though not perhaps beyond the logical requirements of Hume's position.

(19) "The nobility of one thing above another cannot be evidently shown."

[*"Non potest evidenter ostendi nobilitas unius rei super aliam."*]

Here the scepticism is pushed into the moral region. The way for this development had been prepared by Duns

Scotus, who denied the intrinsic truth or obligation of the second table in the Decalogue but not of the first. God might have commanded man to lie and steal, and that would have made lying and stealing moral; but He could not have commanded them to hate Himself or to take His name in vain. Occam and his followers were more logical, and denied the "perseitas boni" altogether.

(20) "Whatever thing is proved to exist, no one knows evidently that it does not exceed in nobility all other things."

[*"Quacunque re demonstrata nullus scit evidenter, qui(n) excedat nobilitate omnes alias."*]

(21) "Whatever thing is known to exist, no one knows evidently that it is not God, if by God we understand the most noble being."

[*"(Quacun)que re demonstrata nullus scit evidenter, quin ipsa sit D(eus, si per Deum int)elligamus ens nobilissimum."*]

Nicholas is logical enough to recognise, as others who have made Morality depend upon the arbitrary will of God have not always done, that on his premisses he has no right, as far as Reason is concerned, to attribute moral qualities to God. This is one part of his meaning, but the proposition further seems to imply "the existence of God, if by God is meant anything more than the unknowable cause of all phenomena, cannot be demonstrated." Since we cannot assert that one thing is intrinsically nobler than another, for all we know any existing thing may be the noblest being in the world, and so, in the sense defined, God.

(22) "No one evidently knows that one thing is the end (or final cause) of another."

[*"Aliquis nescit evidenter, quod una res sit finis a(lterius)."*]

Here even modern Philosophers of great distinction have shown less penetration than Nicholas. They have not always seen that, if the authority and objectivity of the moral consciousness be denied and God be declared to be super-moral

we have no ground for any Teleology whatever. The idea of value is derived from the moral consciousness, and the distinction between means and end is a distinction of values. The end for which an event happens is not distinguished from the means merely by being posterior to it, but by being good, while the means is not in itself good or is less good. This idea of good is derived from our moral judgments, and from no other source: deny the validity of those judgments, and we can attach no meaning to the distinction between means and ends.

(23) "No one knows evidently that, anything being proved to exist, it may not be right to bestow upon it the highest honour."

[“(Nul)lus scit evidenter qualibet re ostensa, quin sibi debeat impendere maximum honorem.”]

In other words, it is impossible to construct an *a priori* rational argument against any form of idolatry. Any form of idolatry might be plausibly defended on Pantheistic grounds. Here, once more, our Schoolman perhaps compares favourably with some of our modern thinkers, who assert that God is everything, and yet would agree with the official scribe who has appended to this proposition the words “false, heretical, and blasphemous.” And yet, if anything that exists is perfectly good, why not worship one thing as well or as much as anything else? Mr. Bradley has ridiculed Herbert Spencer in a famous note: “Mr. Spencer proposes to take something for God simply and solely because we do not know what the devil it can be”;* but he might, perhaps, find it difficult to give any better reason for the religious reverence with which he himself regards his own Absolute, if once it is admitted that (in his words) “the Reality is our criterion of worse and better, of ugliness and beauty, of true and false, and of real and unreal.”† It is true that the Reality is not its appearances, and that in the appearance there are “degrees of Reality,” but

* *Appearance and Reality*, p. 128.

† *Ib.*, p. 552.

philosophic Brahminism and some other creeds will be prepared to supply a corresponding number of degrees of worship. I may be pardoned this little digression, because I think it really brings out the drift of Nicholas' thought.

(24) "No one knows evidently, but that this proposition can reasonably be conceded: if anything whatever is produced, God is produced."

[*"Aliquis nescit evidenter, quin ista possit retonabiliter conce(di: si aliqua res est producta, Deus est productus." Cf. a later thesis: "Corruptibile includit repugnantiam et contradictionem."*]

It is difficult to give a meaning to this proposition if we take "produce" literally—to imply a beginning in time. Perhaps it means simply, "It cannot be proved, but that, given the existence of anything, the existence of God is proved." We should then have to see in it simply an assertion of the classical argument for a necessary Being: "If anything exists, an absolutely necessary Being exists: now I, at least, exist: therefore an absolutely necessary Being exists." If we take the "is produced" literally, we may suppose it to mean that, if you once admit the real beginning of anything, a being such as God is commonly supposed to be, might have a beginning, and you could not prove the necessity of any eternal, uncreated Being. Nothing that really is can possibly have a beginning. Nicholas is here denying the Aristotelian doctrine of corruption. Or it is just possible (as my friend Mr. Webb suggests), that the argument relied on was the following sophism: "*Aliqua res est producta, Deus est aliqua res, ergo Deus est productus.*" But Nicholas' tone does not suggest that he was indulging in mere logical trifling of this kind.

(25) "It cannot evidently be shown but that anything you like is eternal."

[*"Non potest evidenter ostendi, quin quelibet res sit eterna."*]

Here, again, Nicholas is denying the Aristotelian, or what he takes to be the Aristotelian, doctrine of corruption. Nothing that really exists can begin or cease to be.

(26) "If bread be proved to exist, it cannot evidently be shown that there is anything there which is not an accident."

["*Pane demonstrato non potest evidenter ostendi, quod ibi sit aliqua res, que non sit accidens.*"]

We might see in these words merely a continuation of the former line of thought: a denial of any substance in material things—of either the permanent *εἶδος* or the permanent *ἕλη* in material things. But it is possible that there is a more special and subtle reference to the dogma of Transubstantiation. The orthodox doctrine was, of course, that the substance of the body and blood of Christ took the place of the substance of the bread and wine, which last was destroyed by consecration, the accidents of the bread remaining unchanged. Nicholas objects—"You admit that after consecration there is no substance beneath the accidents of bread: how do you know there was any before: why may there not have been nothing but accidents?" It is significant that this speculation is tenderly dealt with, being only revoked as false, not as blasphemous or even heretical: there is no denial of a miraculous change, but merely the assertion that the body and blood of Christ present in the Eucharist may, after all, be only accidents, like the accidents of bread and wine. At all events, this possible application of Nicholas' thesis to the Sacrament of the altar may be a reason for its condemnation: if you deny Substance, you necessarily deny change of Substance.

(27) "It cannot be said without a self-contradiction, which the propounder of such a proposition may be driven to admit, that everything in the world is produced," *i.e.*, the fact of creation cannot be proved, and even involves self-contradiction.

["*Potest dici sine contradictione, ad quam quis possit duci, quod omnis res de mundo est producta.*"]

Here it is scarcely possible to doubt that a "non" has dropped out before "potest": if we take the words as they stand, they must mean "if you insist that anything has a real beginning, everything may have had such a beginning."

(28) "This consequence is not evident: 'A is produced, therefore there is or was someone who produced A,'"*i.e.*, if creation or a beginning of the world is admitted, that does not prove a Creator.

[*"Hec consequentia non est evidens: a est productum, igitur aliquis producens a est vel fuit."*]

(29) "These consequences are not evident: 'The act of understanding exists: therefore the Understanding ("intellectus") exists. The act of volition exists: therefore the Will exists.'"

[*"Iste consequentie non sunt evidentes: actus intelligendi est: ergo intellectus est. Actus volendi est: igitur voluntas est."*]

Here, once more, I need hardly stop to point out the parallels in Hume—in Hume and all his naturalistic followers, and in some who are not Naturalists.

(30) "The proposition cannot be disproved that all things which appear are true."

[*"Non potest evidenter ostendi, quin omnia, que apparent, sint vera."*]

If we suppose that by "true" he means "that which may truly be said to exist," Nicholas might secure the august support of Mr. Bradley, though both Mr. Bradley and Nicholas might perhaps both of them have found it a little difficult to explain the difference between a Reality which exists only in its appearances and an appearance which exists only in Reality.

(31) "Contradictories mean the same thing."

[*"Contradictoria ad invicem idem significant."*]

In this case I will not even venture to name the real or apparent modern parallel. I will only say that in Nicholas this must be, I suppose, pure scepticism. There is no "higher unity" in the background to justify human Reason of its children in the last resort.

(32) "God and the creature (or created world) are not anything."

[*"Deus et creatura (non sunt ali)quid."*]

Here I don't pretend to catch the exact meaning. As the official censor's description is merely "false and scandalous according to the sound of the words," I suppose they cannot have meant quite what they sound. They cannot have meant a flat denial of God's existence in the popular sense of the words. Possibly the meaning is something like the famous "If God existed, he would not be God." God is *ὑπὲρ οὐσίας*, an idea which Nicholas may very well have got from the pseudo-Dionysius. The doctrine is probably the same which he elsewhere expresses by saying "'God is' and 'God is not' mean the same, though in a different manner or sense." God and the creature both have being, but they have it in different senses (not *univoce* but *equivoce*), so that in the sense in which you assert it of the creature it cannot be asserted of God, and *vice versâ*. There is, then, no one thing which each of them can be said to be.*

On examination before the Cardinal, Nicholas made an admission which throws a further light on the general drift of his opinions. He is accused of saying that "concerning things almost no certainty can be had through natural appearances; yet moderate certainty could in a short time be secured if men would turn their mind to things, and not to the understanding of Aristotle and the commentator," *i.e.*, of course, Averroes. Averroes the Commentator was, it must be remembered, in the mediæval Schools, as much the officially recognised and prescribed authority as Averroes the original thinker, and the Averroism which he produced, were the typical representatives of all heresy and infidelity. The movement which Occam inaugurated, and of which Nicholas represents (we may say) the extremest development, was a great revolt against Aristotle and the systems of Philosophy and Theology which the great Dominican Doctors, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, had built upon the foundation of his teaching with such modifica-

* Deus est, Deus non est, penitus idem significant, licet [alio modo].

tions, of course, as the requirements of medieval orthodoxy demanded. I may remark, in passing, that the germs of the movement were undoubtedly to be found in the teaching of Roger Bacon, like Occam a member of the Franciscan Order and of the University of Oxford. Many of the supplementary charges against Nicholas are simply directed against his rejection of various features of the Aristotelian or Thomist Philosophy; but it is to be observed that these he did not, like the former, admit in all cases to be correctly reported. There is a general charge of maintaining that the arguments of Aristotle could be met by arguments of equal probability; a general accusation of disparaging those who studied Aristotle "to decrepit old age," and "to such an extent that, when a friend of truth like himself came and made his trumpet to sound so to awake sleepers from their sleep, they were much aggrieved, and rushed upon him, as it were, armed for a mortal fray." (This is mildly condemned as "presumptuous.") He is charged with denying that "things" could be generated or corrupted,* and with declaring that the idea of corruption involved a contradiction. All change in natural things was, he held, merely due to local motion, to aggregation or dispersal of atoms—a doctrine which was probably objected to, not so much on account of its materialistic tendency, difficult to reconcile with the sceptical Idealism of other theses, as because it denied that corruption was the putting on and off by matter of the "forms" which really, according to Aristotelian orthodoxy, made things what they were. Another charge against Nicholas is his anticipation of the corpuscular theory of light, and his assertion that light has velocity,†—another trace of the influence

* Res absolute permanentes, de quibus dicitur communiter quod generantur et corrumpuntur, sunt eterne sive sint substantie sive accidentia.

† Lumen nichil aliud est quam quedam corpora (que nata) sunt sequi motum solis, seu etiam alterius corporis luminosi, ita quod fit per motum localem talium corporum advenientium ad presentiam corporis luminosi.

of Roger Bacon. He is also accused of denying the Thomist doctrine of Perception, the idea of "visible and intelligible species." Moreover, he had issued a presumptuous notice that he would lecture on the Politics of Aristotle, and would correct whatever needed correction in his account of the just and the unjust. One of the things in Aristotle apparently which needed such correction was the idea that theft was always wrong. The negative instance which he produced was the case of a well-born youth who finds some one willing to instruct him "in all the speculative Science that can be had about created things" for a consideration of a hundred pounds, which the youth could not obtain without theft. It being always right to do whatever is well pleasing to God, and it being well pleasing to God for a man to acquire his own perfection, theft might be in this case permitted. It was unfortunate for Nicholas that he lived before the great days of Probabilist Casuistry, when perhaps such a doctrine might have passed for orthodox. But, in spite of his attacks on Aristotle, it is pretty clear that Nicholas, like most independent thinkers of the Middle Ages, was himself a good deal influenced by Aristotle or the Averroistic interpretation of him, a much more genuine Aristotle in some ways than the Averroism of the Thomists. Although among his comprehensive doubts is to be found the doubt whether anything material existed from all eternity, he is also accused of asserting in several forms the eternity of the world.* In the assertion that the acts of our soul are eternal† it is impossible not to recognise the characteristic Averroist doctrine of the Unity of the active intellect, which carried with it a denial of personal Immortality which

Et si dicatur quod non potest fieri per motum localem, quia in instanti fit, respondet, quod ymo fit in tempore sicut sonus, licet non percipiamus quod fit subito.

* Isti conclusioni, quod res permanentes sunt eterne, magis est assentiendum quam, etc.

† Actus anime nostre sunt eterni.

was, of course, the genuine Aristotelian doctrine, though all the energies of the orthodox Aristotelians were concentrated upon the refutation of it. The accuser goes on to interpret this as meaning that he held the individual intellect to be always active, that the individual's thought is always actual, never potential, adding that by that position the whole third book of Aristotle's "De Anima" is undermined (*cessat*). What he probably meant to assert was that there is any real difference between the divine and the human intellect. It was admitted that the Divine intellect was always *ἐνέργεια*, *actus purus*, and Nicholas asserted that the same might be said of the human intellect, since there was no intellect in man which was not identical with that one actual Intellect. Nicholas' accusers were, perhaps, not far wrong in saying that this involved the virtual denial of that most difficult of Aristotle's conceptions, the "passive intellect," which is mortal and merely human, as contrasted with the active intellect which is eternal and impersonal, and yet is never by Aristotle himself explicitly identified with the Divine *νοῦς* which dwells outside the spheres. Another thesis imputed to him bears out my interpretation; it runs: "The intellect which is now present to me, will afterwards be present to another subject;" in other words, "Intellect, the higher active intellect is always one and the same, is impersonal, the same in one individual and another." Another rather obscure article seems directed against the Thomist doctrine that the *principium individuationis* is in matter, in rejecting which Nicholas follows the Scotists. The assertion that the Universe is perfect, alike as a whole and in all its parts and therefore there can be no real passing from being to not being seems to be also Averroistic.

Averroism, as has been suggested, carried with it the denial of personal Immortality, but our Philosopher seems to have made an attempt to reconcile the doctrine with a rationalised version of future rewards and punishments. "When the atomic corpuscles (*i.e.*, of the individual's material organism) are

segregated at death, there remains a certain spirit, which is called intellect, and another which is called sense, and these spirits, as in the good men they were in the best possible disposition, will be for infinite time (*infinities*) according as those individual corpuscles shall be congregated, and thus in this the good man will be rewarded, and the bad men punished, because for all eternity, when the congregation of its atoms is repeated, it will always have its own good or bad disposition. Or (he says) it may be otherwise put thus—that these two spirits of good men, when their subject is said to be corrupted, are made present to another subject composed of more perfect atoms. And thus, since such a subject is of greater flexibility and perfection, therefore intelligibles come more frequently than formerly to them.”* This is obscure; the text is perhaps a corrupt version of a not wholly fair or intelligent report of a difficult speculation; but I would suggest that the idea is that, though the individual body perishes, another body arises in which the particular combination of atoms is repeated and thereby a new human spirit (or new manifestation of the one eternal and divine Spirit) comes into existence which is yet in a sense continuous with the former, and which enjoys superior intellectual insight, a nearer approach to the beatific vision, in consequence of the spiritual improvement effected in the life of that former body. There seems to be an attempt to combine the assertion of the denial of personal Immortality in

* (Premiatio) bonorum et punitio malorum pec hoc fit, quia quando corpo(ra athomalia) segregantur, remanet quidam spiritus, qui dicitur in(tellectus, et alius) qui dicitur sensus, et isti spiritus sicut in bono s(e habebant in optima) dispositione, sic se habebunt infinites secundum quod (illa individua in)finities congregabuntur, et sic in hoc bonus premia(bitur, malus autem) punietur, quia infinites quando iterabitur congreg(atio suorum atho)malium habebit semper suam malam dispositionem. Vel (potest), dicit, aliter poni, quia illi duo spiritus bonorum, quando dicitur corrumpi suppositum eorum, fiunt presentes alteri supposito constituto ex athomis perfectioribus. Et tunc, cum tale suppositum sit majoris flexionis et perfectionis, idcirco intelligibilia magis quam prius veniunt ad eos.

the strict metaphysical sense with a virtual assertion of it sufficient for ethical purposes—reminding one very much of what we are told is the really orthodox interpretation of the Buddhistic doctrine known as Karma. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by the thesis that “subjects return in the same number in consequence of the return of the supercelestial bodies to the same position.”* When the heavenly bodies return to the same positions, souls return to the re-collected atoms of their former bodies. The expression seems to point to something like the wild theory that history repeats itself at intervals, which is, after all, only an exaggeration of the genuinely Aristotelian doctrine that the human race (like every other species) is eternal, and that periods of civilisation and of barbarism have gone on succeeding one another from all eternity. Nicholas’ speculation seems to be a crude attempt to account for the different characters of men by a sort of semi-physical attraction which nobler souls exert upon the noble examples or ideals (*exemplaria*): it is an attempt to reconcile a rather materialistic predestinarianism with a real and intrinsic difference between different characters; the soul is necessarily determined to act by its *φαντασία* of the end, but the *φαντασία* of a noble end comes by necessity to the noble soul. Here is the strange passage: “Just as the vile elements go to the centre, and earthly elements to the earth on account of homogeneity, while fire gravitates to fire and so with other like noble bodies; so it appears that to noble souls there come noble examples, to vile ones vile examples, and those which are of the earth speak earthly things. Whence such an advent of noble or vile examples (I read ‘*exemplarium*’ for ‘*exemplaris*’) seems to testify to the perfection or imperfection of the souls, for such examples, as he says, do not come except on

* *Supposita redeunt eodem numero per re(ditum corporum) super-celestium ad eundem situm.*

account of homogeneity." I have translated "unigeneitas" by homogeneity, because in English "unigeneity" would hardly sound intelligible, but it is probable that the Philosopher is trying to reconcile the absolute Unity or Identity of the active intellect in all with the existence of different characters in different men by speaking of an attraction exercised by the animal and mortal soul in the nobler individuals upon the forms eternally present in the universal *νοῦς* or God. "Exemplaria" is not, of course, the usual scholastic Latin for the Platonic Ideas, but I think this must be the meaning here.

I will not weary you with the remaining theses, most of which are a repetition in various forms of those already examined, but will just mention two ethical positions which appear in supplementary list of articles sent from Paris. One is that a man ought to love more than himself a neighbour who is better than himself;* the other that God may command a rational creature to hate Himself, and that the creature, if he obeyed, would earn more merit than if he loved God, since he would do this with greater effort and with more contrariety to his own inclination. Here the Ethics which make all Morality lie in obedience to the arbitrary will of God seems oddly combined with a theory that merit lies in self-sacrifice—pushed, it would seem, to the point of violating one's own higher nature. The doctrine, so understood, may be regarded as a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of Kant, if we substitute the Practical Reason for God, and some of the commandments of Kant's Practical Reason are perhaps scarcely more eccentric than those which Nicholas speculatively regards as possible in God. Perhaps it is not fanciful to see in this an extravagant antagonism to Aristotle's doctrine of the true *φιλαντία*.

How much did Nicholas really believe of all these sceptical

* Quilibet plus tene(tur diligere proxim)um meliorem se quam seipsum.

suggestions? We began by comparing him to Berkeley; we soon found that he had anticipated Hume's extension of Berkeley's doubts from the unthinking to the thinking substance (so far as the individual soul is concerned); and eventually we found that some of his doubts almost carried him beyond the position of the great sceptic. His scepticism reaches its culmination in the article "This is a first principle, and there is no other: 'If something is, something is.'"* It will be observed that all that he generally asserts is that this or that cannot be proved: and some of his problematical suggestions are scarcely consistent with others. Some of them, again, are inferences deduced from the propositions of his opponent, Friar Bernard of Arezzo. It is, however, clear enough that Nicholas' speculation is a development of the Nominalism of Occam; the condemnation of Nicholas was accompanied by a general condemnation of the whole Nominalist school, a school which flourished especially in Oxford, in the Franciscan Order, and among the English and Germans who formed the English nation at Paris,—a school whose political tendencies, as exhibited by Occam and John of Jandun (to whom we must add the Italian Marsilius of Padua) made it particularly obnoxious to the Roman Curia. But the School of Occam was not sceptical in the religious sense of the word. If reason was discredited, it was only to make way for faith. Occam was not even in a theological sense a particularly enlightened or progressive thinker; he was a Franciscan Friar, and a supporter or originator of many theological ideas less enlightened than the Aristotelian orthodoxy of the great Dominican School. With regard, therefore, to the more theologically destructive of Nicholas' theses, there is no reason to suppose that Nicholas meant any more than is meant by those modern champions of Religion who seek—to my own mind suicidally—to disparage Reason in the interests of Faith. He is

* Hoc est primum principium et non aliud : si aliquid est, aliquid est.

nearer to the position of Mr. Balfour than to that of either Hume or Berkeley. In so far as he attacks the Thomist dogmatism—the intermediaries of sensation, the Thomist doctrine of form and matter, generation and corruption—his doubts probably represent deliberate convictions. He shared the Occamist tendency to Empiricism, to Nominalism, to Sensationalism, to Utilitarianism, and thought that there was nothing dangerous to the Faith in these tendencies. But there is no reason to doubt that the Canon and Dean of Metz was a sincere Theist and Christian. At the same time there are indications that in some directions his doubts carried him beyond the position of his Master, and that he was really seeking his way to a position which would have been difficult to reconcile even with the more fundamental requirements of medieval Orthodoxy. His Predestinarianism, a point on which he differed from Occam, was no doubt got from Bradwardine, who was implicitly hit by several of Clement's anathemas—a fact, however, which did not stand in the way of his consecration as Primate of all England two years later by the same Pontiff. But there are traces of an Averroism which goes beyond mere theological Predestinarianism, and which is suggestive of the thinly-veiled Naturalism or Materialism of the Italian Averroists, who flourished especially at Padua. Yet, the obscure speculation about future punishment shows that he had not consciously acquiesced in the Pantheistic *Welt-anschauung* of the avowed Averroists, but was struggling to reconcile a Theistic and Christian view of the Universe with tendencies of thought which would, if freely indulged, have carried him in a very different direction. With regard to the most interesting point of all—his suggestion that matter may have no independent existence, it is difficult to be sure whether it really means “the independent existence of matter cannot be proved, although every sensible man believes in it,” or “the independent existence of Matter is a gratuitous, unreasonable, and indeed unintelligible and self-contradictory

hypothesis." After all, the same doubt attaches to the enquiry about the private *Weltanschauung* of Hume himself. On the whole it is difficult to suppose that the strong tendency to explain everything by changes of position in material particles could co-exist with a thorough-going Idealism. Modern Idealism may accept an atomic explanation of the Universe as a convenient methodological assumption of Physics; but it is doubtful whether a Medieval would have succeeded in being at once an Atomist in Physics and an Idealist in Metaphysics. It is more probable that his state of mind was "You can't prove the existence of Matter, and yet we all believe it; in the same way it is impossible to prove the creation of the world and many other distinctively Christian doctrines, and yet we may accept them on the testimony of the Bible or of the Church or of subjective religious emotion." The probability of this interpretation is increased by the fact that Nicholas' position on this matter was an inference from positions of his opponent.*

Friar Bernard had, it appears, maintained that "though from the fact of vision it cannot be inferred that the object seen exists, because the vision may be brought into being by a supernatural cause, or preserved by it, nevertheless because an object has been placed there by natural causes, the general influence of the first cause (*primi agentis*) expressly concurring, such an inference may be drawn."† Nicholas argues very reasonably that if it is admitted that a supernatural cause might produce an appearance of whiteness without a white object being there, no knowledge of the laws of Nature can tell us for certain that on a particular occasion this was not the case.

* "In lumine naturali non possumus esse certi, cum apparentia nostra de existentia objectorum extra, est vera vel falsa, quia uniformiter, ut dicitis, representat rem esse, sive sit, sive non sit" (*d'Argentrè*, I, p. 359).

* *Ib.*, p. 358. I read "quia" for "quin." Bernard's position reminds us of Descartes, who inferred the existence of Matter from the veracity of God.

Nicholas here champions the certainty of immediate perception which his opponent had denied; he had defended in the Hall of the Sorbonne the proposition that "I am evidently certain concerning the objects of the five senses and about my own acts." In what sense he used the word "objects" must remain doubtful. In any case his scepticisms subsequently went further.

Two passages in the record of Nicholas' examination before the Cardinal throw some light upon the spirit in which their theses were maintained. The whole discussion, he tells us, grew out of an agreement to dispute with the Minorite Friar Bernard of Arezzo, upon the basis of the principle of contradiction as formulated by Aristotle, how much we could be certain of, and he pleads that all he had contended was that these startling assertions of his could not be shown to involve any contradiction; and in another place he is accused of inventing a "vulpine" excuse, and saying that his speculation about the future judgment was put forward as a mere possibility, and that it was, after all, less probable than the received view, "and so, he says" (runs the document) "that we should adhere to the law of Christ, and believe that reward and punishment take place in the way in which it is expressed in the sacred law." In another place, however, Nicholas declares that he wrote his tractate under a sense of duty, under the belief that "further delay was displeasing to God," from which the official scribe draws the inference that he claimed divine inspiration—a claim which is made into a distinct article of condemnation and marked "*presumptuosum in se, suspectum, quoad dicentem periculosum et revocandum.*" As this claim was not particularly calculated to propitiate his judges, we may infer that in Nicholas we have to do not with a mere spinner of ingenious metaphysical cobwebs designed to startle and attract attention, but with a sincere religious thinker who really did anticipate lines of thought which, followed out in different directions, have constituted the principal subject of discussion among modern

Philosophers. If he did not actually anticipate the positions of Berkeley or of Hume or of Spinoza, he saw that such positions were possible, and saw the difficulty of meeting any of them, and that is a considerable achievement for a Parisian Doctor of the 14th century. I trust I shall have convinced my audience that Nicholas of Ultricurìa is at least deserving of the passing notice which he has so far failed to attain at the hands of historians of Philosophy.