SOME NOTES ON
THE THEOLOGY OF NOMINALISM
With Attention to its Relation to the Renaissance
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To understand the essence of an historical movement, be it primarily philosophical, theological or cultural, the inquirer should abstain from generalizations and obediently analyze the relevant sources.

To understand its significance, however, he has, consciously or unconsciously, to take the dangerous step of comparing movement with movement in order to find a frame of reference which can bring out, by antithesis or analogy, the typical characteristics.

This latter method has been applied to the study of the Renaissance in two ways. On the one hand, it has been compared with medieval scholasticism mainly in its thirteenth-century Aristotelian form.¹ On the other hand, the Renaissance has been compared with the Reformation, although no one opinion prevails at the moment. The present paper will seek to indicate the relation of the early Renaissance and late medieval Nominalism within the larger context offered by the question “what are the characteristics of Nominalism” and in this way suggest a new appraisal of the motives behind this movement.

Successively, we shall try to define in a first section the Nominalistic attitude; in the second, to survey the different schools within this movement; and, in the third, to outline its basic principles. In the concluding chapter we shall offer some remarks on

the concept of man and his freedom in the early Italian Renaissance and the relation of two movements which were decisive factors in the change of the spiritual climate of Europe at the end of the Middle Ages.

Not only because of our indebtedness to many who dedicated themselves to trends in late medieval thought, but also because of the immature stage in which the research in this field is — and will be for some time — we must be in a continual dialogue with scholars both of the past and of the present.

I. Nominalism

Compared with the exploration of High-Scholasticism, Reformation and Renaissance, the inquiry into the essence and significance of Nominalism is sketchily charted territory.

The term itself reveals that originally it was meant to circumscribe a philosophical movement which accepted a divergence of the logical and the ontological order of things, in some respects parallel to that of early scholasticism represented by Abelard and Roscellin. The Nominalistic theory of knowledge, especially, has led historians of philosophy to believe that here we are dealing with the heart of this late medieval movement. One of the most learned experts in this field, Paul Vignaux, has concluded that the distinction between the *notitia intuitiva* and the *notitia abstractiva* "semble le point de départ de la théorie de la connaissance, peut-être de toute la philosophie de Guillaume d'Ockham."

Except for this theory of knowledge which is common to both, there are marked differences between Nominalism and Occamism. In Occamism one finds this epistemology with the doctrine of the non-physical relation, the doctrine of local or temporal exterior mutation, and an actualistic psychology which results in the rejection of the *habitus*.

As Occamism is the most mature, developed and extreme form of Nominalism, these names are often used interchangeably; but, from the point of view of the history of ideas, it is more correct to distinguish between them.

Two discernible developments have brought the whole question

*P. Vignaux, Nominalisme au XIV* Siecle, Montreal, Paris, 1948, p. 11.
of the characteristics of late medieval Nominalism to the fore again. By publishing Occam’s works the Franciscan Institute made it possible to question the departure of Occam from the high-scholastic tradition, especially the Franciscan school. In an article entitled “Ist Ockhams Relationstheorie Nominalismus?” Gottfried Martin came to the following conclusion: “Die Relationstheorie Ockhams kann nicht als Nominalismus bezeichnet werden, ohne dass gewisse Teile der Relationstheorie des Aquinaten ebenfalls als Nominalismus bezeichnet werden. Ockham steht hier in einem unaufloslichen Zusammenhang mit Aristoteles, Thomas und Duns Scotus.”

This first new approach is inspired by the wish to show Occam’s orthodoxy; for whether one deals with Occam’s political, philosophical or theological ideas, the recurring motif is that Occam is far more in line with tradition than had been thought before. Erich Hochstetter and Philotheus Böhner, O.F.M., proved convincingly that Occam does not mark a sudden break with many aspects of thirteenth-century thought — so convincingly, in fact, that we must take care to avoid the other extreme: the blurring of the deep contrasts between Occamistic and pre-Occamistic thought.

A second development deals with a new understanding of the primary frame of reference and of the message of late medieval Nominalism. Originally, the historians of philosophy had defined the school of Occam according to the aforementioned philosophical and logical characteristics. Theologians and church historians, starting much later to pay due attention to this too-long neglected period, discovered many non-philosophical and non-logical elements which are now beginning to be recognized as co-constituting the inner core of Nominalism.

What we want to do is to go a step further by showing that the theological concept of God is not merely one of many aspects of the inner core of Nominalism, but that its concept of God and Revelation is at the heart of this movement, while logic is its expression in philosophical language — howbeit a very important and revealing expression.

2 G. Martin, op. cit. in Franziskanische Studien 32 (1950), pp. 31-49; p. 49.
4 In his “Nominalism and the Problem of Meaning as illustrated by Pierre
Cardinal Ehrle in his important book on Peter of Candia was the first to see the danger of a one-sided philosophical treatment of Occam and his school.\(^5\)

The present confusion about the meaning of the adjective “Nominalistic” can be reduced to the dilemma of whether to define its value in philosophical terms — an idea too well supported by the sources to be abolished — or to define its value in a more theological way. It appears more and more that certain conceptions common to the group traditionally called “Nominalists” can be found as well with Thomists and Scotists and even seem to be characteristic of the whole climate of thought in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

I should like to suggest that Nominalistic theology is not merely an automatic conclusion drawn out of its philosophy; but, on the contrary, Nominalistic philosophy is the reflection and echo of its theology and, in particular, of its concept of God’s potestia absoluta. In turn, the preponderance of its logic shows itself again and again in the way this basic concept is applied and handled.

Duns Scotus had already emphasized the weakness of the human power of reason if confronted with the mysteries of faith. Bonaventure, Duns and, later, Occam had only too clearly in mind the errors of the pagan philosophers who had tried to give answers without the illumination by faith.

Duns’ solution breaks away from Thomas’ subalternation of man’s theological thinking to revelation and its categories of knowledge, but at the same time it defends the possibility of a real science with God as object, sub propria ratione deitatis. Scotus’ idea of the formal distinction apparently had its origin in the problem of man’s knowledge of God.

\(^5\) d’Ailly on Predestination and Justification,” Harvard Theological Review 52, 1 (January, 1959), pp. 43–60, George Lindbeck qualifies the theological differences within Nominalism first as “secondary” (p. 51) and later even as the “by-product of an intellectual approach. . .” (p. 60). As far as Occam’s stress of the philosophically important notitia intuitiva is concerned, it is quite significant that this concept has the stamp of Augustinian epistemological mysticism.

Though Occam's thought, from the Prologus of the Sentences and on, is directed against the Scotistic *distinctio formalis* it is not Duns' point of departure that he criticizes, but the fact that this point had not been consequently carried through. The omnipotence of God, properly understood, makes deductive theology impossible; the absolute power of God undercuts any rules theologians want to draw up on the basis of God's historical acts. God chose this way of revealing himself; he could have chosen innumerable other ways, equally reasonable, and this conception clearly amounts to a refutation of ontologism. Robert Guelluy puts it very sharply: "Ockham présente lui-même sa doctrine comme une réfutation de l'ontologisme par la théorie aristotélicienne de la connaissance et comme une rectification des vues du Stagirite par le dogme de la liberté divine.""6

It cannot be our task to concentrate on the means with which Occam and his school worked to prove their point, but we can analyze the motives behind this endeavor. We do not look into the structure of his logic, but into that of his theology, for the real character of Nominalism; and, again, it is within the theological structure that the dialectics of God's *potentia absoluta* is the ruling principle.

Before attempting to trace the ramifications of this principle we will first outline the different schools within the Nominalistic movement in order to understand more clearly that we are dealing with a whole complex of cross trends and opinions.

II. Schools

The absence of a common opinion on what marks Nominalism as a separate movement makes it appear bold to try to outline its different "schools," as I shall call its various threads of tradition. Besides, so many fourteenth- and fifteenth-century authors are so slightly known and manuscripts — often anonymous — are so widely scattered that it is premature to attempt to settle this problem once and for all.

On the other hand, by arbitrarily choosing Peter Aureolus, William of Occam, or Gabriel Biel as the representative of Nominalism we have long been led astray as regards the implications of its idea of the omnipotence of God. If we try to see these three men in a greater whole, their individual peculiarities might be neutralized and the common framework extricated more clearly.

We do not mean to be exhaustive in any sense; a mere structure—a working hypothesis, meant to be criticized and enlarged by the ongoing findings and analyses of newly-discovered manuscripts—will suffice.

Rather recently a new means of classification has been advocated by Father Damasus Trapp, O.E.S.A. In a rich and extensive article which will prove to be extremely helpful for research concerned with late medieval thought, he expresses his desire "to contribute a few notes on fourteenth-century Augustinian theology." Although this school constitutes, of course, only one section of Nominalism, it is with Gregory of Rimini, for instance, a vital one.

Father Trapp wants to characterize the thirteenth century as the great century of speculation, and the fourteenth as the great century of criticism, a criticism moving along two lines—the historico-critical and logico-critical. To delineate this latter movement he does not go back to the theological background of Nominalism and its positive message, but to the historical event of the clash between Thomists and Scotists and the climate of criticism which resulted from this. It is too early to pass final judgment on these suggestions; but, even though it might be possible to make a real distinction between the historico- and logico-critical attitudes, this will not lead us to a better grasp of the essence of Nominalism. Perhaps he despairs of finding categories that fit the different trends. The questionableness of this classification is revealed by Father Trapp himself when he says: "Some evince a pronounced lack of historical-mindedness; others insist on it. All to a greater or lesser degree show signs and symptoms of the logico-critical attitude." 7

It is difficult to find traces of a new historical consciousness.

On the contrary, in circles of the most extreme logicism we encounter an a-historical trend which tends to lower authorities to opiniones.

Although William of Occam bears the title Venerabilis Inceptor, it can be shown that Peter Aureolus († 1322) and Durandus de Sancto Portiano († 1334) anticipated some of his ideas. It is Aureolus, especially, who is often quoted by many Nominalists in connection with the famous XVIIth distinction of the First Book of Lombard’s Sentences where he dealt with the relation of created and uncreated love. Aureolus is criticized almost without exception for adhering to the necessity of the grace-habitus; but for the rest he exhibits all the features one might expect within a beginning movement which must always be justifying its own existence. In this case it had to criticize its predecessors on the grounds of a supposed lack of understanding of God’s omnipotence. Therefore, we find in him sharp criticism of the most recent tradition and the denial of any ontological distinction between universal and particular things.

Dr. Anneliese Maier was the first to show the great measure of Peter Aureolus’ dependence on the Dominican rebel Durandus through the Quodlibet of Thomas of Wilton. His works show the traces of the stormy days in which he grew up, days of conflict between Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair. He is less important for the history of Nominalism than Aureolus, not only because he is quoted less often, but because he is not as much of a Nominalistic theologian as has been supposed. But his conflict with the theology (hence, the order) of Thomas, primarily on the point of the divine concursus, ushered in a period of new critical, and often very independent, investigation.

The thought of Aureolus and Durandus indicates that something was simmering in university circles on the Continent. The movement received impetus by the form it assumed on the other side of the Channel; though the ground was prepared for him, William of Occam is, indeed, the “Inceptor” of the late-medieval Nominalistic Movement.

In our search for the essence of Nominalism and its concept of man we must not, however, limit ourselves to Occam, but rather

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*Gregorianum, 29 (1948), pp. 212–223.*
put our questions to the truest representatives of this whole movement. I venture to suggest that we should discern four schools in Nominalism.

The first, the English school, mainly represented by Robert Holcot (†1349) and Adam Woodham (†1358), is best defined as the left-wing school of Nominalism. As clearly as the other schools, and as Occam himself, it shows the centrality of the idea of God's omnipotence — applying it, however, in a most extreme way. Its logic leads to scepticism; its theology to the remarkable combination of determinism and Pelagianism. The moral freedom of man is stressed; but, at the same time, God's government appears to be so immediate that He has to take more than customary responsibility for man's sinful deeds.

An echo of the English school can be heard in Nicolas de Autrecourt and Jean de Mirecourt. Here we find exactly the same combination of scepticism, determinism, and — in a lesser degree — Pelagianism. A direct line between Woodham and Holcot on the one hand and Autrecourt and Mirecourt on the other has been indicated elsewhere. The Church's condemnation of the two Parisians in 1346 and 1347 is responsible for the fact that their influence is negligible.

In the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the second school finds its representatives mainly at the University of Paris. We should like to call this the Parisian syncretistic school. Here the influence of Scotus and Occam is merged in such a way as to make it very difficult to decide what the first loyalty of its representatives is. John of Ripa (c.1355) and Peter of Candia (†1410) can be mentioned in this connection. John Gerson who repeatedly expressed his impatience with this particular tradition should not be assigned to this school.

The innumerable unpublished Questiones and reported Disputationes reveal a sphere of rivalry of sterile cleverness. Gerson's seven points of critique of this Parisian school revolve around the

10 "Il y a donc Nominalisme et Nominalisme; mais il n'y a pas à hésiter sur la position de Gerson; c'est un Nominalisme." A. Combes, Jean Gerson, Commentateur Dionysien, Paris, 1940, p. 611.
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accusation that because of idle curiosity the rapport between faith and theology is endangered. On this school, especially, much research has still to be done; but the evidence that is available seems to bear out Gerson's criticisms.

The third school can best be called the right-wing, and it is represented by Gregory of Rimini († 1358) and Henry of Oyta († 1394). Thomas Bradwardine († 1349) shares most of its characteristics, though for a long time — actually since the fourteenth century itself — he was mistakenly grouped together with Ripa and Mirecourt. This school takes an Augustinian stand, in contrast to the Pelagian trends which we observed in the English left-wing. It tries, as much as do the other schools, to bring out the autonomy of man as regards the natural world, and to prove the compatibility of the freedom of the will with God's sovereignty.

The theology of the fourth school is a typical "Vermittlungs-theologie." John Gerson and Gabriel Biel have both done much to make Nominalistic theology acceptable: Gerson by including mystical warmth in his theological formulations, Biel by neutralizing the extreme positions of the left-wing. The textbooks of Biel especially brought the via moderna to many German universities.

From a survey of the structure of Nominalism as just described, the discernment of the different schools helps us in our search for its essence. Its main line is becoming visible, which enables us to avoid traditional dangers: that of passing judgment on Nominalism on the grounds of extremes, either in epistemological or theological propositions, and that of concentrating one-sidedly on its doctrine of justification. Nominalism is not a doctrinal unity, but a common attitude, on some points at least, of remarkably different strands. One cannot say either that its thought is limited to or exhausted by the doctrine of justification which is only one aspect of the God-man relation. Our announced intention to limit our discussion of Nominalism to the Occam-Biel circle finds its justification partly in the fact that it is in any event the main

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12 Unfortunately, since Feckes' much-quoted book on Biel's doctrine of justification and his position in the Nominalistic movement, Occam and Biel have been too closely identified. I hope to show elsewhere in a more detailed study that it really appears time and again that he only tried hard to be an obedient disciple of Occam.
stream of the tradition, and partly in the fact that it was this school which exerted the most profound influence on the conception of God and man at the end of the Middle Ages.13

III. CHARACTERIZATION

The idea of the potentia absoluta, as contrasted with the potentia ordinata, of God plays, explicitly or implicitly, a vital part in the theology of all the representatives of the Nominalistic movement. What we should like to suggest is that this idea is the common denominator of four such diverse characteristics as: 1) the sovereignty of God; 2) the immediacy of God; 3) the moral autonomy and freedom of man; 4) an attitude of scepticism which leans toward secularization.

The importance of the idea of potentia absoluta has certainly been suggested before, but a wrong understanding of its implications has led many scholars to misinterpret the texts. The problem of potentia absoluta and potentia ordinata of God14 goes back to the very beginning of scholasticism. Hugh of St. Victor († 1141) stated that God's omnipotence is only limited by the rule that He cannot injure Himself, i.e., by the law of non-contradiction.15

The terms themselves date from a later time and are used, among others, by Thomas Aquinas, who summarizes clearly the conclusions reached by the thirteenth century. The potentia absoluta is God's omnipotence considered in isolation. The question "utrum Deus possit facere quae non facit"16 can be answered by saying that God can do this because of His potentia absoluta. The potentia ordinata can be understood as that which God, by virtue of his moving will, is really going to do or has done. It is right to say that whereas the idea of the potentia absoluta had always been a marginal thought, the interests of the Nominalists seem to focus on it. The irrealis which indicates what could have happened if God had willed otherwise becomes more and more a realis. God's

14 Cf. E. Borchert, Der Einfluss des Nominalismus auf die Christologie der Spätscholastik, Münster i W., 1940 BB xxx, I, ff.
15 De Sacramento Christianae Fidei Ia. cap. 22; PL 176. 214.
16 ST I. q 25. a 5.
potentia absoluta becomes the power to reverse the natural order of things as in fact is the case with miracles. God is not obliged to obey moral or natural laws. In God Himself is no potentia ordinata, says Aureolus, as this is a connotative conception which only regards his opera ad extra.\footnote{17}

In the succeeding period this statement is echoed time and again in varying tones, expressing the idea: finiti et infiniti nulla proportio. We cannot reason backwards from God's revelation to His being. This implies criticism of the theological tradition as far as it erred from the knowledge it could have about God from the Holy Scripture and the Sancti. At the same time, it indicated that the established order as a layer between God and man was not the eternal order it was taken for, but, on the contrary, an order as contingent as creation itself.

As we have analyzed it so far, the potentia absoluta-principle seems mainly to have a negative significance, — as it is usually put: the divorce of faith and reason. Many scholars have stopped at this point and, indeed, defined Nominalism as a negative movement. But this is only part of it; one is not allowed to say about the Nominalist as Mandel does: "Gott ist ihm unerkennbar, man kann über ihn nichts aussagen, er wird zu einem X, in dem tausend Möglichkeiten . . . enthalten sind."\footnote{18}

In his quest for certainty the Nominalist makes a clear distinction between the revelation of God Himself and human conclusions, but the revelation in creation and in Christ is not attacked or undermined. The distance between God hidden and God revealed does not make the revelation less trustworthy.

Nor can we agree with Feckes when he suggests that the potentia absoluta can be equated with theory, the potentia ordinata with practice.\footnote{19} It is true that these two powers deal with different spheres, not those of theory and practice, however, but rather with

\footnote{17} "Sic in Deo nulla est potentia ordinata per respectum ad actionem ad extra, cum nullo ordine obligetur aut debeat agere secundum aliquam exigentiam moralem vel naturalem. Unde sic intelligendo, non est in Deo nisi potentia absoluta ab omni ordine et omni debito, nulli subjecta regula nullo modo ad agere aut ad modum agendi aliquem obligata," I Sent. d 44, a 5, Romae 159b, fol. 1060 a/b.


\footnote{19} Op. cit., p. 57; "Es war nicht schwer das was sie nach der potentia absoluta sagten, nun auch für die Wirklichkeit zu behaupten," p. 142.
the sphere of faith and the sphere of experience and reason. The *potentia ordinata* treats theology as the "science" concerned with God's revelation; the *potentia absoluta* includes this sphere but has a wider scope. It works with the presupposition that to reach truth we must consider not only what God actually decides to do (*vult facere = potentia ordinata*), but also what God is able to do (*potest facere = potentia absoluta*).

This latter point of view has both vertical and horizontal aspects. If dealing with the question of what God is able to do, it creates an eschatological openness which reminds one of Joachimism; and, as Occam stands in the tradition of Franciscan spiritualism, this cannot surprise us. As regards the horizontal aspect, it is clear that when reason moves out of the circle of revelation, it enjoys a degree of independence seldom found in medieval thought. It has been said that the consequence of Nominalism is the doctrine of the double truth. Irrespective of the fact that this conception has more merit than is usually thought this can be granted only if it is understood that there is but one truth of which man can be certain, and that is truth as revealed by God.

Metaphysical truth arrived at through deduction, however, can only be tentative. Hence, Occam *cum suis* often suggests several answers of which some may seem more reasonable than others without really deciding the issue. But, ultimately, reason, reaching outside the sphere of faith, can only lay bare innerworldly structures which by axiom are contingent. We may conclude that the *potentia absoluta*-principle delineates not only the sphere of faith but, also, that of reason. These spheres are not absolutely separated, but should, on the contrary, be described as concentric circles — with the important qualification, however, that the inner circle is not formed by an uninterrupted logical arc, but by a set of points which from God's point of view constitute a rational

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20 "Hier liegt der Ausgangspunkt für die Lehre von der doppelten Wahrheit. Der menschlichen Vernunft kann etwas unvermünftig sein, was der göttlichen Vernunft konform ist." Feckes, op. cit. p. 12, n. 57. The demarcation line, however, lies not between faith and reason but between faith — and love and hope: "Quia fides est virtus intellectualis cuius objectum est verum. Ideo virtus intellectualis penitus excludit falsum. Spi autem et charitatis . . . non simpliciter excludit errorem." Biel, III Sent. d 23, q 2 E. The limits of God's *potentia absoluta* lie in the law of non-contradiction, which does not imply contradiction with His *potentia ordinata*. Cf. e.g., IV Sent. d 14, q 1, not. 4.
diagram. Philosophy operates primarily within the inner circle of faith not to undermine its authority, but to prove that God’s action transcends human reason, even meditative reason.

It is difficult to accept, therefore, the traditional explanation of the use of the potentia absoluta-principle as a means of escape for the Nominalist. That is to say, afraid of being accused of heresy, he takes refuge behind the shield of potentia absoluta. The idea that this whole movement acted and confessed out of fear is hardly credible in view of the doctrinal freedom before Trent. Besides, Occam and Biel both take pains to indicate in which sphere they are thinking. All too seldom can this be said about those scholars who analyzed their thought! Nor does thinking from the point of view of the potentia absoluta lead to “logische Spielereien.” It is a most serious task to test how far the realm of revelation contributes to the understanding of the world, taking pains to force neither Scriptural data nor everyday reality.

Although one may well disagree with Erich Hochstetter’s comparison of the potentia absoluta and ordinata with a higher and a lower order, the evidence he produces, to show that the potentia absoluta is not meant to undermine the stability of God’s actual revelation, gives us reason to hope that this misunderstanding is removed once and for all.21 Before we can trace the dialectics of the potentia absoluta-principle as the common denominator expressing itself in the diverse aspects of the localization of God and man in Nominalism, we have to answer one more question.

Granted that this principle is not meant to upset the established order, can Joseph Lortz and Erwin Iserloh22 be right in saying that this is the actual result and consequence of Occamistic theology? This is certainly true for the left-wing and its disciples in


Paris. In addition — with the syncretistic school evidence can be found that a prolonged disputation is more important than the solving of the problem concerned.

Occam's thesis of the irrationality of revelation may not, however, be equated with the undermining of the established order, while Biel clearly conforms to tradition by showing the fittingness of God’s decisions. The Augustinian right-wing, however, succeeds in balancing theological tradition with the belief that God’s will transcends man’s understanding.

The four above-mentioned aspects of Nominalistic theology have been singled out in turn as representing the essence of this movement. Although they may seem to contrast, even to oppose each other, they must receive equal consideration if we are to escape the danger of drawing a mere caricature. We are not able to analyze man’s moral autonomy and the freedom of his will in isolation without losing our sense of proportion.

A. The Sovereignty of God

The potentia absoluta-principle and the adage “finiti et infiniti nulla proportio,” lead us to a brief consideration of the Sovereignty of God. Far more clearly than it has been formulated in studies on Thomas Bradwardine it must be stated that one of the main motives of Occam and his school is the idea of God’s sovereignty. It is true that Bradwardine called the adherents of this school modern Pelagians but, as far as this point is concerned, he fought on common ground. The already mentioned contrast between the different aspects should not lead us astray in over-emphasizing one at the expense of another.

We have still to consider, however, to what extent the strong emphasis on God’s sovereignty results in stating the arbitrariness of His will. On this point 28 we should be as careful as were Occam and Biel. God is indeed “arbitrary” in his opera ad extra as far as he has transgressed and can transgress moral and natural law.

What is *per se* an expression of God’s liberty seems from the human point of view capriciousness. This, we should like to suggest, explains the much discussed proposition that God can allow someone not to love Him in order that this person can dedicate himself totally to his studies. Although this seems to prove Occam’s ethical positivism, we are actually dealing here with an extreme example of this general rule.

Besides, in contrast to Scotus, Occam and Biel are emphatic in stressing God’s simplicity, arguing that God’s intellect and will coincide with His essence in such a way that His decisions cannot be separated from His being.

Concluding this first aspect of Nominalism, we can agree with Vignaux, who described the *potentia absoluta*-principle as a religio-theological motif of the first order: “Celle-ci consistait, en montrant la contingence de tout ordre de la nature et de la grâce, à rappeler la dépendance de toutes choses à l’égard d’un Principe qui agit avec une liberté, une gratuité souveraine.”

### B. IMMEDIACY

It would be rewarding to analyze late-medieval thought under the aspect of recovery of the sense of divine immediacy.

We find it in Rhenish mysticism, Eckhart *et alii* with their sense of the “God within” and their identification of the birth of the soul with the birth of Christ: Jesus visits the soul as the bridegroom visits the bride.

We encounter it in Wiclif’s mixture of Occamistic irrationalism and Platonic realism. The Church based on election rather than succession bypasses the indirect hierarchical way. Hus and the revolutionary Bohemians add the concept of “blood” to the Wycliffian doctrines, and there is a further stress on the removal of barriers between laity and clergy.

Again, we meet the same in Gerson’s conciliarism and sense of the “universal church.” The frequency of masses for the dead
in purgatory, the increased activity in the collection of relics, and the laicization of St. Francis’ ideals in such movements as the Devotio Moderna are all expressions of the same quest for immediacy. And finally, as I hope to show later, we find the same concept in the early Italian Renaissance.

This quest for immediacy takes the shape of hunger for reality in respect to the created world: Nominalistic epistemology attacks the wall between perception and reality which seemed to devaluate reality as a reflection of the universals. Its empiricism opens a new era of secular knowledge as can be observed in the philosophy of nature of John Buridan († 1358) and Nicole Oresme († 1382).

Behind its criticism of the hierarchy of knowledge, however, is the Nominalistic longing to consider God and His relation to the world, not only in terms of the established order, but also in terms of His potentia absoluta. What in another context could be called the eschatological awareness in Nominalism can from the point of view of the God-man relationship be called its quest for immediacy.

In the sphere of the potentia ordinata God works through the hierarchy of the Church, through her sacraments and clergy. To say that in the light of God’s potentia absoluta there is a direct way, bypassing the given order, certainly does not dispense with the great distance between God and the individual. It proves that this way is in no sense ontologically compelling. The fact that St. Paul was converted on his journey to Damascus without the media of word and sacrament proves that even the established order points beyond itself to a possible more direct relationship with God.

This directness of God’s acting, essentially belonging to the vertical aspect of the sphere of the potentia absoluta, when introduced to the given order, causes a short-circuiting. This is the explanation of Holcot’s and Mirecourt’s determinism and monism. It is not in the right-wing — a conception of remarkable tenacity — but in the left-wing of Nominalism that the Almighty God governs His creation so immediately that God is even made responsible for the evil deeds of man.

The doctrine of coefficiency as formulated by Thomas Bradwardine indicates that the idea that no act is performed without God’s creative and redeeming concursus is compatible with the freedom of the human will. This leads us to the third characteristic of Nominalism: the moral autonomy of man and his freedom.
C. The Autonomy of Man

At the outset we must realize that at this point the right-wing finds itself deeply opposed to the main current of Nominalism. Instead of an autonomous anthropology it states a theonomous anthropology which sees in God not the opponent but the creator, preserver, and cause of man’s freedom. For Occam and Biel, however, man’s freedom stems from man’s position in the world.

One can describe the revealed order in two ways. On the one hand, it marks the border of the realm in which God Almighty rules directly. Thus it offers the security of the path of revealed law and order on which the viator journeys toward the eternal Jerusalem. On the other hand, its ontological basis has given way under the criticism of the potestas absoluta-principle. The Word, Sacraments, and clergy of the Church have undergone the metamorphosis from vessels for growing participation in God’s being through justification to mere requirements for graduation to eternal bliss. The supernatural world, instead of accompanying and nourishing the viator, has receded and has become a hemisphere, a dome.

This dome shuts out the world of God’s non-realized possibilities and provides room on the inside for man’s own realm, in which he, as the image of God, thinks and acts. This thinking, though never able to reach unshakeable truth outside this domain, can, nevertheless, transcend the dome; this acting, however good, can never go beyond this boundary line. Here this acting ex puris naturalibus has to be promoted by God Himself from moral goodness to meritorious goodness.

We will briefly describe man’s autonomy within his domain from the point of view of the doctrine of a) predestination, b) habit, and c) Mariology.

a.) The doctrine of predestination seems to threaten this conception of man’s autonomy directly. Staying in the Franciscan-Augustinian tradition, Nominalism had to face the problems resulting from this, especially as Duns Scotus had so strongly defended the praedestinatio ante praevisa merita.27

Two steps brought Nominalism out of this danger area. First it was shown that God’s foreknowledge was, in fact, afterknowledge, by way of the so-called “three-value logic.” This means that three things can be said about a proposition regarding the future: such a proposition is 1) true, 2) not true, or 3) simultaneously true and not true, which issue is only decided when the future becomes present.

This conception, of course, takes the element of willing reason out of God’s foreknowledge as He also has to wait to see what eventually will happen. The second step is that predestination is identified with foreknowledge. Occam proceeds here from the principle “Deus non prius est ultor quam aliquis sit peccator,” which is also applied to the relation between glory and justification.28

The combination of the “three-value logic” and the predestination post praevisa merita grants man a radical freedom which is quite clearly a reaction against what the Nominalists felt to be Thomas’ — and in a lesser degree — Duns’ determinism.

There are innumerable fourteenth- and fifteenth-century treatises dealing with this problem of predestination and future contingents which generally give a fierce defense of the autonomy of man. As we said before, this does not apply to the right-wing, but even with such an Augustinian as Gerson we can find traces of this attitude.29

This voluntaristic anthropology cannot be explained on the grounds of the doctrine of God. On the contrary, the sovereignty of God, as understood by the Nominalist, would lead to an absolute determinism. As Occam says himself, it is the experience of the contingent character of our world which “necessitates” the freedom of man.30

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29 “Causa igitur obdurationis est voluntas avertens et haec initiat; voluntas resistens et haec contineat; culpa promerens — et haec confirmat; Deus gratiam non dans — et haec non liberat; deus iuste punens — et haec ordinat.” De Praedestinatione, Köln, 1483 (Hain 7621) II, 308 b.

30 “. . . . Inquirendum est quomodo et unde contingat contingentia in rebus; pro quo sit ista conclusio: contingentia effectus praesupponit libertatem alicuius causae agentis.” I Sent. d 38, q 1, a 7 (F).
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By way of the *potentia absoluta*-principle this freedom is brought in accordance with the sovereignty of God. The contingent character of our world can be explained by the innumerable possibilities which God could have chosen to actualize His purposes, in addition to the one which he actually did choose. 
b.) The Nominalistic protest against the medieval *habitus*-doctrine is another way in which its appreciation of autonomy is shown. Aureolus bore the brunt of the attack for his defense of the infused *habitus* of grace as required for the ultimate glorification of the *viator*.

Usually this attack is interpreted as a defense of the sovereignty of God, and, indeed, we find Occam and Biel saying: God is no one’s debtor. There is no direct proportion between God’s reward and the status of man; God is in no way obliged to reward man.

We believe that it is the divine acceptation — God’s acceptance of man and his works as worthy of heaven — that expresses this concern, and that it in its turn can make the *habitus* superfluous.

Attention may be called to another motive behind the attack against the *habitus* of grace — that is, that the supernatural information of the will might endanger its freedom. This is brought out by Occam when he says: “Besides, no deed is meritorious unless it be in our power to perform it. . . . *Ergo*, not grace (*habitus*) is the main reason for the meritoriousness of an act, but the free will which causes this deed. *Ergo*, God can accept such an act . . . without this grace (*habitus*).”

It is for this reason that the Nominalists again and again discuss the question “what can man perform” *ex puris naturalibus*, a term which Biel defines as not excluding God’s general rule of the world, but only His supernatural, informing grace. Here not sin but grace appears to be the rival of freedom, and it is on this point that the Nominalist break with medieval tradition takes place. Sin is not a power *per se*, depreciating the powers of the will, but only so in relation to God. Grace, always understood as

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51 “Praeterea nihil est meritorium, nisi quod est in nostra potestate, sed illa caritas non est in nostra potestate, ergo actus non est meritorius principaliter propter illam gratiam sed propter voluntatem libere causantem, ergo posset Deus talem actum elici tum a voluntate acceptare sine tali gratia.” Quod libet VI, q 7. 
52 “Sed per pura naturalia intelligitur animae natura seu substantia cum qualitatis et actionibus consequentibus naturam, exclusis habitibus ac donis supernaturaliter a solo deo infusis.” I Sent. d 28, q 1, a 1, n 2.
the neutralizer of sin, does not liberate and heal the will; but it is only a status required of man by God, making grace a harmless competitor of free will. It would not be difficult to give a long list of quotations to substantiate this. A most revealing one is Occam’s example of the pagan brought up in Christian surroundings, believing all the articles of faith, but being a pagan — believing without the grace-habitus. Man is per se able and free to fulfill the commandments and even — both Occam and Biel go this far — to love God not for our, but for His, sake, ex puris naturalibus, without the help of grace.

This does not mean that Occam and Biel teach that man can earn his own salvation — the acceptation idea is meant to rule this out — but that man has complete autonomy within the dome.

c.) There is a third way in which the autonomy of man is brought out in Nominalism. To the complicated history of Mariology the Nominalists have made a distinct contribution. We cannot analyze this within the framework of this paper; but we do want to draw attention to the Nominalistic emphasis on Mary’s acceptation of her rôle as the Mother of the Son of God, related as this is to its departure from Scotus’ doctrine of predestination.

Although Duns does not speak about Mary’s predestination explicitly, he clearly deals with it, as have many Franciscan theologians since the fourteenth century, within the context of the prae destinatio absoluta Christi.

Because of the fact that this divine act of predestination takes place before the creation of the world, ante praevisa merita, Duns cannot envision Mary’s willingness in any other way than that it is caused by the grace of God and is only instrumental for her task and eternal reward.

As we saw, the Nominalistic approach to predestination is characterized by its emphasis on God’s foreknowledge, on the one hand, and the unpredictability of the future contingents, on the other. It is too easy to say that Occam and Biel made from predestination foreknowledge, and consequently, built their Mariology on Mary’s willingness to execute God’s will precisely. For

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33 III Sent, q 8 B, cf. q 8 D.
Mary, as for Paul, Occam makes an exception to the general rule that there is a *ratio praedestinationis* for God according to His revealed will.\(^{35}\)

Here again, St. Paul and Mary serve Occam to bring forward Scriptural evidence that God is not tied down by His own rules. But this interest in the *ratio praedestinationis* of others comes to the fore in his Mariology by way of stressing Mary’s willingness.

One of the moot points in fourteenth-century theological discussions is the immaculate conception of Mary. This question was usually analyzed in three steps: whether it was possible (*potuit*), fitting (*decuit*), and a historical fact (*de facto fuit*). In an outstanding article Father Aquilinus Emmen, O.F.M., shows that some of the authors, one of them Aureolus, single out this middle term “fittingness” (*decuit*), using, together with Occam and Biel, the argument that God does not bypass those who prepare themselves fittingly.\(^{36}\)

The *popular* Protestant criticism of Roman Catholic Mariology, pointing to the separation of Mariology and Christology and the resulting interest in Mary’s individual qualities, seems only to be justified as far as it regards the Nominalistic interpretation! In the presentation of Mary we meet again with a Nominalistic emphasis on the autonomy of man.\(^{37}\)

Summarizing our analysis of Nominalistic anthropology we may conclude, in the light of its *habitus*-doctrine, its conception of predestination and its Mariology, that it can be defined as autonomous.

\(^{35}\) “Causa autem quare istos [Paul and Mary] praedestinat sine omni ratione et alios propter rationem non est nisi divina voluntas.” I Sent. d 41, col. 5, fol. 7.


\(^{37}\) An unpublished and little noticed Vienna Ms includes a treatise on the cause of predestination and reprobation which, I am convinced, if not a work of Bradwardine, is certainly Bradwardinian. On many points it attacks the Nominalistic autonomous anthropology. In connection with our question of Mary’s fittingness it says: “... si non esset personarum acceptio apud Deum tunc si alla filia de domo Iacob consimilis fuisset in merito cum Domina mea ipsa similiter Filium Dei genuisset, et tunc plures potuissent genuisse eundem Filium Dei, et sic etiam Domina Mea non per electionem nec divinam providentiam sed fortuitu et creaturaliter facta fuisset mater Dei.” Nat. Bibl. Vienna Cod. 4306. fol. 102v.
Using the *potentia absoluta* of God as the common denominator, this is related to the two mentioned characteristics: the sovereignty of God and the quest for divine immediacy. Although these two seem to oppose autonomy, it is the *potentia absoluta* in the form of the dome-motif which creates the possibility for the *viator* to find his own way, unhampered by the supernatural world. With its voluntarism Nominalism is a continuation of the Franciscan school tradition with a Scotistic turn toward individualism. While the miscalculations of the pagan philosophers proved the unreliability of human reason, the will (in the Occam-Biel line) is more independent and free than ever it was in the Franciscan-Augustinian tradition.

Sin is involved not in the nature of man himself, but only in his relationship with God. Within the dome man is free, even free to love God for His own sake. Some weak rays shine through the roof of the dome, but this exemplifies no more than God's general *concursus*. God is so distant that man's actions cannot be judged according to God's absolute standards, but only according to the contingent circumstances in which acts take place.

In his own realm man is free to choose between good and evil, and under the dome he is alone.

D. **Scepticism — Secularization**

In his loneliness Nominalistic man is anxious to keep close to the reality of the world around him, an anxiety quite naturally accompanied by a secularization of his interests. Man is still the

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*Note* that Duns Scotus introduces the term *ultima solitudo* in his definition of the person. Opera Ox. III d 1, q 1, nb. 1.

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"... unde illa potentia dicitur esse libera quae dominium habet plenum tam respectu objecti quam respectu actus proprii."


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"Cum loquimur de puris naturalibus, nonexcluditur generalis Dei influentia. ... Sed per pura naturalia intelligitur animae natura seu substantia cum qualitatisibus et actionibus consequentibus naturam exclusis habitibus ac donis supernaturaliter a solo deo insulis." Gabriel Biel, II Sent. d 28, q 1, a 1, n 2.

"Occam agrees with Scotus "quod substantia actus virtuosi et vitiosi potest esse eadem, sed dicitur esse virtuosus propter conformitatem ad circumstantias requitas. ...” III Sent. q 13, C.

Cf. the sharp analysis of Iserloh, op cit., p. 61.
viator to the heavenly Jerusalem, but his newly won freedom gives him the heavy responsibility of guarding against hallucinations. He can no longer afford to keep his eyes constantly on his ultimate goal, as did the Augustinian man, nor to trust his reason to the same extent as did the Thomistic man. We must view Nominalistic scepticism in this light, and we should beware of singling it out as the main characteristic of this movement.

Although we disagree with Böhner when he goes to the opposite extreme, that of denying the sceptical character of Nominalism altogether, it is certainly true to say that this is not the tired Hellenistic scepticism but the vital scepticism which we have come to acknowledge as prerequisite for a sound scientific attitude. This provides the link to the above-indicated secularization of the school of arts, represented by Buridan and Oresme.

At the same time, we grant Joseph Lortz his contention that this vital scepticism in the course of history endangered the religious character of the theological enterprise.

IV. Conclusion

In his Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters, after having dealt with the autonomy and freedom of man as concerns Ficino, Pico and Pomponazzi, Paul Oskar Kristeller concludes: "These ideas were never entirely forgotten during the Middle Ages. But we are under the impression that since the beginning of Renaissance humanism the emphasis on man becomes more persistent, more systematic, and more conclusive. It would be well to point out that there is reason to extend this statement to Nominalism as a concurrent movement, while, at the same time, indicating the restrictions under which this extension is permissible.


Neither Italian Humanism nor Nominalism teaches the self-sufficiency and absolute autonomy of man. The introduction of God’s grace in both systems indicates that man *per se* is not complete. But there is a striking identity in their common emphasis on man’s individuality; in both systems man ends up going his own way — be it in a horizontal or vertical direction. Let us leave aside the obvious parallel between Occam’s and Biel’s scepticism and some similar traits of Ficino and Pico, fully worked out by Pomponazzi. This would not, as we suggested, be to deal with the central thrust of these movements. It is the freedom and autonomy of man — whether expressed as independence from nature, cosmos or God — which makes of Nominalism and the early Italian Renaissance parallel movements.

Anthropology — like philosophy in general — was still in an undeveloped stage in the earlier part of the Renaissance. It was in the second part of the fifteenth century that a distinct expression of the long-time implicit belief in human autonomy and freedom was given.

We call attention to Marsilio Ficino († 1499) and Pico della Mirandola († 1494) not because they constitute one disciplined school of thought, but because they stand in contrast to the preceding period, which is characterized by what is now generally called “classical humanism,” and in contrast to the succeeding period, which cannot be qualified with equal right as a rebirth of Plato and Aristotle.

While in Nominalism epistemology was shown to be a consequence of its concept of God and man, the too often isolated conception of man’s freedom in the Renaissance should be analyzed in direct connection with its epistemology.

“With Ficino the glorification of man assumes a more definite philosophical significance. He emphasizes mainly two aspects: man’s universality and his central position. Man’s universality is reflected in his relation to all parts of the universe and in his unlimited aspirations. His position in the center of the universe, moreover, gives man an importance unrivaled by any other being except by God Himself.”

One can say that Ficino's man is the microcosmos and is placed in the hierarchy of Being where he experiences the tension between ascent and descent. But Ficino's man is, at the same time, the man Ficino; in other words, his metaphysics are to be understood "from the phenomenon of internal experience or internal consciousness." 46

The experienced tension is that between the nostalgia of the soul for the celestial Fatherland and the impulses and needs of the body. This tension has not merely psychological, but also ontological significance: man is the middle term between God to Whom he should ascend and the created world over which he is appointed to rule as a god. It has been remarked that in Renaissance thought God received human epithets and man divine epithets; and, indeed, man is again and again described as "little less than the angels."

One aspect of this — and here epistemology becomes important — is that man by way of contemplation of the Intelligibles or Ideas can rise to the knowledge of God Himself. While it is true that all beings have a natural appetite for their own good, only man can transcend the corporeal world and can therefore have more than an appetite for finite good. In this context it appears that, in contrast to the irrational appetite which necessarily follows sensation, the will as rational appetite follows the Intellect and is thus utterly dependent on it.

As the rational appetite, will is identified with the cognitive process, involved in drawing a particular judgment from a universal proposition which results in a choice. Therefore, it is important for the understanding of Ficino to read the single words "reason" or "will" as the compound "reason-will."

Finally, it should be added that in the final rise of the soul from the Ideas to God it is the will without reason which takes the initiative independent of the Intellect. The will, drawn by the intellect to the heights of the Ideas, is raised the rest of the way by God. Although the superiority of will and love over the intellect seems to be Ficino's more mature theory, the will before this rapture operates within the cognitive dimension.

From the fact that man in this life never can reach his proper end in temporal existence, Ficino contends that the soul must be

possessed of immortality by nature; but, granting that the greater share of human souls enter into this eternal bliss, he is careful to point out that this is not true in every case. For us it is important to note that it is not the will of man which is the source of his damnation. The will always desires the highest good in desiring its own good and is, therefore, not ontologically deficient. The fact that sin is not a result of corrupted will, but rather of misguided will, indicates again that in Ficino's emphasis on the dignity of man the concept of free will is integrated in the cognitive sphere.

We can say that salvation is not much more than a question of proper education. Divine contemplation, it is true, is a product of an act of grace while the soul is yet in the body; but, even here, it is man through his own initiative who goes more than half way. Man depends primarily on himself for his salvation; in this venture he is not dependent on the Church with its sacraments, nor even on God Himself. Man goes his way, somewhat melancholy and alone; but he can do so with little fear of failure because his ultimate arrival in the celestial sphere is the natural fulfillment of his natural desire.

In Pico, Ficino's most famous disciple, one encounters philosophical ideas which in their general outline bear strong resemblance to those of Ficino.

Although Ficino's three layers: God, Man, Nature, are less sharply distinguished, Pico's man is still the center of the world. In the first part of the Oration on the Dignity of Man Pico's man is considered a being created subsequent to and apart from the rest of the creation for the purpose of ruling and appreciating the world which God created. Once separated from the order of being, man's nature loses the ontological limitations it possessed for Ficino: "Neither a fixed abode," Pico's God tells man, "nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire." 47 48

Although for Pico the three layers are there, and although he

accepts salvation as the chief aim of man’s earthly life, man is far more horizontally interested.

A joy of sheer activity that we are tempted to call Calvinistic replaces the mystical desire to flee the world: “We prefer constantly to seek through knowledge, never finding what we seek, rather than to possess through love that which without love would be in vain.”

This change of emphasis goes together with another difference. Ficino’s definition of man circles around his capacity to reason; for Pico the human ego is not centered in reason, but rather in will. As far as reason goes, Pico could say “finiti et infiniti nulla proportio.” The intellect at its peak of development can know God’s infinite attributes; but to know these is not to know God; “... all that we say and perceive thus is a mere trifle, considering the infinite distance which separates Divinity from the capacity of our minds.” Alone in the creative power of our will we have a faculty which, like God’s, is infinite, absolutely free, and perfect, and it is through this common faculty that we should ultimately come to his presence. The union is effected through our capacity to love, which for Pico is a central operation of the will.

Again, the extent to which the individual achieves perfection in his actions depends not on the will which always desires the good, but upon the extent of the knowable. The intellect and reason can lead the will to the threshold of heaven. From there, not the will, but God Himself replaces the cognitive power as the guide of the will; and, as an act of grace, He reveals Himself as the ultimate good sought by the infinite desire of the will.

We can in part repeat what we said about Ficino — that salvation is not much more than a question of proper education. Although love has replaced contemplation and the ontological layers are barely visible, free will is integrated in the cognitive sphere. The nearest Pico comes to the concept of original sin is when he confesses that in this world we never find what we seek. God’s grace does not change the will, but removes its cognitive limitations. Except for the final act of God’s grace the question of man’s temporary possession of God within this life and of the

49 On Being and Unity, Mediaeval Philosophical Texts, 3, Marquette, 1943, p. 25.
50 Ib., p. 23.
eternal vision of God after death is a matter of man’s own efforts. As with Ficino salvation is not acquired through the Church and her Sacraments but depends on man’s own initiative. Without a trace of melancholy man goes alone through a world he enjoys, certain that the same will happen in the world to come.

It has often been suggested that the development of individualism at the end of the Middle Ages was caused by the slackening of the ties with the Church and by a desanctifying (Entsakralisierung) of its functions.\textsuperscript{51} There are two considerations, however, which should warn us to be cautious. First, there is sufficient evidence to believe that there was a more common interest in the sacred sphere at the end of the Middle Ages than at its height. Secondly, this movement of increasing individualism did not break out in numbers, as did the Reformation, but was for a long time limited to small learned circles at universities and later at courts of princes.

Attention should be called to the common reaction of Nominalism and Italian Renaissance against Averroism, which by necessity was an interest of the happy few. The condemnations of 1270 and 1277 are a recurring motif in the writings of the Nominalists while for Ficino, Pico and Pomponazzi, the Padua-school was a physical reality. This Averroism which taught a subtle determinism and denied personal immortality was in its determinism offensive to the Nominalist; in its denial of the immortality of the soul offensive to the Italian humanist; for its attack on the dignity of man offensive to both.

A second point at issue is the analogy of the dome-motif and the three-layer motif. Although these seem different at first sight, in both structures man has his own realm in which he is the \textit{Deus in terris}\.\textsuperscript{52}

While it may be that the immanence of God is exemplified in the hierarchy of being, if we go from Ficino to Pico and then to Pomponazzi, this immanence becomes first less essential, and


\textsuperscript{52} Cf. P. O. Kristeller, \textit{The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino}, p. 81.
finally invisible. In both systems man as the vicar of God reigns in his own domain; the Church which accompanied medieval man from cradle to grave is not abolished, but integrated and adapted to this anthropology. Only beyond the top layer and beyond the roof of the dome does man need God’s gracious mediation.

Here we touch on a third point of basic agreement on the dignity of man. The traditional definition of the God-man relationship in terms of sin and grace is thoroughly revised. In both movements the concept of grace is not lost but moved to the margin. As its natural antipode sin no longer marks the need of God’s saving presence but has become naturalized as the tragic consequence of man’s aloneness in this world. In Nominalism it is the unpleasant, but surmountable, consequence of a decree of God which has no metaphysical ramifications. In the Italian Renaissance it is the tragedy of our restless existence, bound as we are to the limits of our body, and the lack of insight on the part of reason and Intellect which thus misguides the will.

This thesis should, however, be qualified by two restrictions. The adage “finiti et infiniti nulla proportio” is brought to bear by the Nominalist on the systems of both Plato and Aristotle, meaning that he did away with exactly that form of epistemology which proved to be so central for the representatives of the Italian Renaissance. Ultimately this marks the difference between a rational and an irrational philosophical frame of reference. In Nominalism the double road of contemplation and love—in the sense of eros—is narrowed down to the single road of eros, love _ex puris naturalibus._

A second, and related, restriction should be observed in the differing points of departure. For Nominalism it is the omnipotence of God and the dialectics of his _potentia absoluta_ which proved to be the common denominator of its four major aspects. These aspects themselves—sovereignty of God, quest for divine immediacy, autonomy and freedom of man, and finally scepticism—we can find also in the early Italian Renaissance.

As we have seen, the _potentia absoluta_-principle, as the hallmark of Nominalism, indicates that the dome within which man reigns is a sign of God’s omnipotence. While the three-layer anthropology of Italian humanism is the expression of the essence
of man himself, the Nominalistic dome marks the contingent way in which God expressed His will. Man’s dignity is not the result of his participation in being, but of God’s decision to grant him this realm of freedom.

Qualified by these two restrictions, Nominalism and the early Italian Renaissance share a persistent, systematic, and conclusive emphasis on the autonomy and freedom of man.