WILLIAM OF OCKHAM

ON HERETICS
Books 1-5

and

AGAINST JOHN
Chapters 5 - 16

translated and introduced by

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Preface

In 1993, at the initiative of the British Academy Medieval Texts Committee, work began on a critical edition of the Latin text of the *Dialogus*. At the time the best texts available were two 15th century editions, which suffered from the usual defects of texts handed down in manuscript copies of copies; and the old editions were printed from not the best of the surviving manuscripts. Thirty years later (!) the *Dialogus* project is nearly complete. Over the years successive drafts of Latin text and English translation have been published on the British Academy website. The final version of the Latin text will occupy six printed volumes, of which four have now been published in the British Academy series Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi. The whole work amounts to some half a million words.

The present volume contains English translation of the first five books of Part I (ABME vol.35), amounting to about one-fifth of the *Dialogus*. English translation of most of the rest of the work is published on the website. Some parts of the critical text have also been translated into German (by Jürgen Miethke) and Italian (by Alessandro Salerno).

The present volume also contains translation of part of a work its modern editors have entitled *Contra Ioannem*, in which Ockham puts forward in an assertive way some of the points discussed in Part I of the *Dialogue*.

For help and encouragement throughout the project we are grateful to the other members of the editorial team, George Knysh, Volker Leppin, Jan Ballweg, Karl Ubl and Semih Heinen; to the members of the Medieval Texts Editorial Committee of the British Academy, including its chairs David Luscombe and John Marenbon; to the publications staff of the British Academy and Oxford University Press; and to the staff of Macquarie University Library. We are grateful also to Professors Arthur Stephen McGrade and Jürgen Miethke; their friendship, and their contributions to the study of Ockham's social philosophy, have been of great value over the years. And to Anne Kilcullen and Nettie Simonis for sharing our lives with Ockham.

We thank the copyright holders, Francis Bennett and William Offler, for permission to publish translation of part of *Contra Ioannem*, which was included in the volume Guillelmi de Ockham *Opera Politica* accuraverunt R.F. Bennett, H.S. Offler, vol. III, edidit H.S. Offler (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956).

We dedicate the volume to the late David Luscombe, who invited us to the *Dialogus* project and encouraged and facilitated our work over many years.

John Kilcullen, Canberra
John Scott, Bega
May, 2023.

Preliminary Note

This volume contains an English translation of parts of *Dialogus* and *Contra Ioannem,* written in Latin c.1332-c.1335 by William of Ockham, written as part of an unsuccessful campaign conducted by members of the Franciscan Order to have Pope John XXII and his successors, Benedict XII and Clement VI, removed from the papacy, for the reason that these popes were heretics.

To readers who have never read anything by Ockham before, we suggest you go straight to the text, at p.61, and mostly ignore the footnotes. The introduction and notes are for a second reading.

Introduction

Ockham's life, political writings and vision of the Church

John Kilcullen

Ockham wrote his *Dialogus* to mobilise support for removing from power a pope he believed had become a heretic. This pope, John XXII, was succeeded by two other popes, Benedict XII and Clement VI, who were also, in Ockham's opinion, heretics. The works Ockham wrote during the last twenty years of his life were all written as contributions to a campaign to remove these popes. The campaign failed: the Catholic Church still lists these three men among the successors of Saint Peter and predecessors of the present pope.

In the course of this campaign Ockham developed ideas and arguments that are of permanent value as contributions to a liberal social philosophy — ideas on simplicity of life, on property rights as a matter of social convention (and therefore subject to redefinition), on natural rights (or as we would say "human" rights), on the limits of the power of Christian prelates over their flocks, on the rights of unbelievers in a predominantly Christian society, on the life of believers in a predominantly non-Christian society, on the limits of the powers of secular government, on the importance of both unity of leadership and decentralisation of power within a world order.[1] He was not intentionally a social philosopher. His social philosophy was developed incidentally to his campaign against the three popes.

The text translated in this volume includes an argument for freedom of thought and speech within the Catholic Church. It is not an argument for freedom of thought and speech generally, as if

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1. Book-length treatments of Ockham's political philosophy: McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham;* Knysh, *Political Ockhamism;* Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages*. For a summary account see Kilcullen, "The Political Writings"; Boehner, "Ockham's political ideas". (Publication details are given in "Publications referred to", below p.473.)

in Catholic medieval Europe Jews and Muslims might be permitted to explain and advocate their beliefs. It is an argument for freedom within the Church, so that Catholics may advocate opinions they think are Catholic even if they are in fact heretical. Catholics these days believe that popes and general councils are (in some circumstances) infallible, but according to Ockham the pope is not infallible, neither is a general council; no one is infallible. In his view it is possible for a heresy to spread almost throughout the whole Church.[2] However, Christ's promise "I will be with you all days" (Matthew 28:20) guarantees that a heresy will never be accepted by the whole Church — that is, accepted by all Christians at once: there will always be someone in the Church who speaks out for the truth.[3] It must be possible, therefore, for dissenters to get a hearing, since even a lone dissenter may be right. If the dissenters are wrong, that is, if their opinion is in fact a heresy, they will not be heretics if they are willing to be corrected through discussion, but anyone who tries to impose a heretical opinion coercively *is* a heretic and ceases to be a member of the Church, and, if he is pope, ceases to be pope. Ockham's accusation against Pope John and his successors was that they were trying to impose heretical opinions coercively.

John XXII first fell into heresy, in Ockham's view, when he rejected doctrines basic to the life of the Franciscan Order. The Order of Friars Minor (*Ordo fratres minorum*, "of lesser brothers"), to give it its official name, began to gather around Francis of Assisi in the first decade of the 13th century. The order tried to put into practice Jesus' saying to the rich young man: "If

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2. This would *not* mean that almost all had become heretics. On Ockham's view, it is possible to believe a heresy without being a heretic.

3. The person who speaks out for the truth may be a woman; below, p.313, p.409ff. The pronouns in this volume will usually be masculine, which reflects medieval reality, but occasionally Ockham explicitly mentions women. Matters of faith concern women as well as men, since "in the new man there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). Women should (when necessary) take part in general councils of the Church: "Where the wisdom, goodness or power of a woman is necessary to the discussion of the faith... the woman should not be excluded from the general council"; 1 Dial. 6.85.

you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor… and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). The Franciscans owned nothing, either as individuals or as an Order. They renounced legally-enforceable rights altogether. The brothers travelled about as poor men preaching the Gospel to the poor. After a while, some priests joined the Order, and the Order sent its members to universities and established schools of its own to train priests and to provide for the continuing education of the brothers.[4] These developments brought the Order into much conflict, especially with the parish clergy and with the secular masters in the universities. John XXII tried to put an end to the conflict but provoked more.[5] John asserted that no one can live without ownership, at least of food and other necessaries that cease to exist when used. He asserted that Christ and the Apostles had property and that the early Christians had property.[6] In Ockham's view these assertions were heresies, as were many other things John asserted.[7]

William of Ockham was born sometime around 1285, probably in the village of Ockham southwest of London.[8] While still a boy he entered the Franciscan Order. He studied philosophy and theology, probably in the Franciscans' London school. The Order then sent him to Oxford where he studied and taught theology in the Franciscan school in the University. At Oxford he lectured on the

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4. For the Franciscan education system see Courtenay, *Adam Wodeham,* and Courtenay, *Schools and scholars in fourteenth-century England.*

5. Douie; Congar; Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages,* pp.39-49; Kilcullen, WND, "Introduction", pp.18-20. (Abbreviated titles are spelled out in "Publications referred to", below p.473.)

6. Despite Acts 4:32: "And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul: neither did anyone say that aught of the things which he possessed, was his own; but all things were common unto them".

7. For a list of John's errors and heresies see LFMOW, pp.4-12. See also CE.

8. On Ockham's life see Courtenay, "The Academic and Intellectual Worlds of Ockham", and Courtenay "Ockham, William". "Probably" and "perhaps" are frequent in Ockham's biography because records of his life are sparse. We do not know what he looked like. A sketch of "Frater Occham" sometimes reproduced (e.g. on the cover of Spade, *Cambridge Companion*), comes from a manuscript copied in 1341 in Magdeburg by a 22-year-old student (see OPh I, p.32*/32), who may never have seen Ockham.

main theology textbook, *The Sentences* of Peter Lombard, probably in 1317-1319. He advanced to the level of "inceptor", which means, apparently, that he had qualified to begin work as a Master of Theology, but he was never inducted into that office.[9] Sometime after 1319 he seems to have left Oxford to teach elsewhere, probably in the London school.[10] Some of his opinions proved controversial. In 1323 positions he had taken were discussed at a meeting of Franciscan theologians,[11] in 1323/1324 he wrote a defence of his theology of the Eucharist,[12] and in 1324 he was summoned to the court of Pope John XXII in Avignon for an inquiry into possible heresies and errors. The inquiry progressed through various stages but was never completed.[13]

During the night of 26 May 1328 the Minister General (head) of the Franciscan Order, Michael of Cesena, its Procurator (agent in legal matters), Bonagratia of Bergamo, and several other members of the Order including William of Ockham and Francis of Marchia, hastily left Avignon. They had come to believe that John XXII had become a heretic and had therefore ceased to be pope. Seeking protection from the pseudo-pope, the dissident Franciscans travelled to Italy to meet the Roman Emperor[14] Ludwig of Bavaria, who was in conflict with John XXII over John's claim that Ludwig's election as emperor needed papal confirmation. When in 1330 Ludwig returned to his capital, Munich, the dissident Franciscans went with him. There they

9. Little, "The Franciscan School at Oxford", p.866, note 6, reports that William Woodford (writing toward the end of the fourteenth century) refers to "inceptor Ockam, inceptor Warus, inceptor Cowton, inceptor Chatton": here "inceptor" seems to mean a qualification or status, like a modern degree. Religious orders sometimes cut short their members' university careers and moved them to work elsewhere, so an inceptor might never actually teach as a master in a university. That was Ockham's case.

10. See Gál, OPh I, p.47*-56*. Courtenay, in "Ockham, Chatton and the London Studium", argues that, while Ockham probably went to London, he may have remained in the Oxford Franciscan convent, teaching in a Franciscan school that was not part of the University.

11. Etzkorn, "Ockham at a Provincial Chapter".

12. De quant. and De corp. Christi, OTh X. See p.23*ff/22 on the date of composition.

13. Koch, "Neue Aktenstücke"; Larsen, *The School of Heretics,* pp.76-92.

14. That is, the then head of the medieval empire claiming descent from the ancient Roman empire, which had been "transferred" to the Franks and then to the Germans.

worked together to send out a stream of books and pamphlets against the heresies of John and his successors. The writings Ockham produced in this campaign are usually called his "political" writings, though (since politics was never his main concern) they would perhaps be better called simply "polemical". As far as we know, Ockham spent the rest of his life in Munich. He died, without submitting to the then pope, Clement VI, in 1347 or 1348.[15]

Understanding the good news: Theology in Medieval Universities

To understand Ockham's life and work we may try to imagine how Christianity seemed to thoughtful people in the Middle Ages. In his *Church History of the English People* Bede tells the story of the conversion of the English to Christianity. Edwin, Anglo-Saxon king of Northumbria, asks for advice on how to respond to missionaries preaching the new doctrine. One of his counsellors answers:

> The present life of man upon earth, O king, seems to me, in comparison with that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the house wherein you sit at supper in winter, with your ealdormen and thegns, while the fire blazes in the midst, and the hall is warmed, but the wintry storms of rain or snow are raging abroad. The sparrow, flying in at one door and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry tempest; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, passing from winter into winter again. So this life of man appears for a little while, but of what is to follow or what went before we know nothing at all. If, therefore, this new doctrine tells us something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed.[16]

The "wintry tempest" may make us think of the cosmic tempests that we believe happened before, and will happen after, the brief time of human existence, and we may suspect that no entity in the universe besides ourselves cares about humankind, or will care

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15. Gál, "William Ockham died 'impenitent' in April 1347"; Miethke, "Zu Wilhelm Ockhams Tod"; Knysh, *Ockham Perspectives*, p.27-8; Miethke, "Einleitung", Wilhelm von Ockham, *Die Amtsvollmacht von Papst und Klerus,* p.32 note 38.

16. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, p.117.

after we are gone about anything we have cared about. In contrast, the Christian message is that God cares eternally about each one of us individually. The world is in good hands. It is created by God, God's providence extends to every detail, even the flight of the sparrow; God is good, benevolent, just, the upholder of moral goodness; he loves humankind so much that he sent his own Son to die to save us; he gives us a role in shaping the world. This is the "good news" (which is the meaning of Anglo-Saxon "godspel") that the missionaries brought. If this encouraging doctrine could tell us "something more certain", then it would indeed deserve to be followed.

But from early on it was clear that the Gospel was problematic. Over the several centuries during which Christianity spread among the Jews and Greeks and throughout the Mediterranean world its message was an object of critical study and debate. Jews held strongly that there is only one God, but Christians believed that the one God is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each is the one God, but the persons are really distinct. How can God be one and three? The Greek philosophers held that the most perfect being must be unchanging, but Christians believed that one of the three divine persons had become a man and had suffered, died and risen again. How can an unchanging God suffer and die? The reflections of earlier Christian writers on these and other difficult questions were gathered by twelfth-century theologians into anthologies of problematic passages.[17] One of these collections was the work of Peter Abelard, *Sic et non*, i.e. "Yes and No".[18] Another was Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, i.e., "judgments", a comprehensive, organised survey of the often-conflicting opinions of earlier Christian thinkers about many aspects of the Christian faith with Peter Lombard's own tentative solutions.[19]

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17. On the upsurge of intellectual activity at the time, see Haskins, *Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*; Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*.
18. For translation see Throop. On Peter Abelard see King and Arlig.
19. For translation see Silano. On Peter Lombard see Colish, Rosemann, Monagle.

During the Middle Ages in Europe an immense effort was made to grasp the meaning of the Gospel and its bearing on the history and nature of the universe as understood by philosophy and science — Greek, Arabic, Jewish and Christian.[20] This effort took place especially in the schools and universities, in particular in the faculties of Arts and Theology. Members of educational institutions did not think of themselves as being engaged in deep questioning of the beliefs accepted in their community. They simply carried out the tasks of study and teaching that the institution put before them. Sometimes their disagreements became heated, but generally they worked in harmony with one another. Young academics criticised the positions of their seniors, tried to produce better answers to the customary questions and raised new questions. Their rewards were largely material: academic jobs in the short term, offices in Church and State in later life for the most successful.[21] But the sum of these routine activities amounted to a thorough testing of the Christian faith that their pagan ancestors had embraced.

Universities had come into existence in some towns from the 12th century by the association of already-existing urban schools.[22] A university was not itself a teaching institution. Students continued to be taught in the schools. The schools (except those of religious orders) were essentially businesses. The university was like a guild or trade union. It was an association of masters or students, or both, living and working in the same town, formed to promote the reputation of the schools in the town, to secure good treatment

20. For the continuation and development of the Greek philosophical tradition in the Christian, Jewish and Islamic worlds see Marenbon, "Medieval Philosophy".

21. On careers see Dunbabin; Moraw. Some graduates worked as teachers all their lives, but most soon moved on to some other occupation.

22. In monastic schools Christian literature and theology was studied in a devotional way. See Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire For God.* In the new urban schools of the 12th century the study was dialectical and critical. Some regarded the new schools as dangerous places where presumptuous sophists debated doctrines that should be held by humble faith. On the conflict between conservatives and innovators see Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century,* pp.270-3, 310ff; Monagle, Chapter 3.

from the people of the town and to further other common interests.[23] Schools of higher studies also existed outside the universities, sometimes in towns in which no university had formed. The Franciscan order had their own non-university schools of higher education in many places (for example in London and Norwich) and also schools in the universities, notably in Paris and Oxford.[24] Every Franciscan house was supposed to have a *lector* (lecturer) trained in a higher school, whose task was to continue the education of the brothers. The Order used their schools in the universities as the highest level of their educational system. Ockham began in the London school, went on to higher studies in Oxford, then returned to teach in the London school. His pupil and colleague Adam Wodeham studied and taught in the Franciscan schools in London, Oxford and Norwich.[25] The network of schools was international. John Duns Scotus, the leading Franciscan theologian in the previous generation, studied and taught in Oxford, possibly in Cambridge, and in Paris and Cologne.[26]

Universities were organised into faculties, typically Arts, Law, Medicine and Theology. A faculty was a collection of schools each conducted by a master assisted by his *bacularii* ("bachelors", advanced students acting as assistant teachers).[27] In Arts and Theology teaching was by *lectiones* (lectures, i.e. commented readings of the set texts) and *quaestiones* or disputations. Some lectures were cursory readings of the book. Some were more elaborate, carefully dividing the text into its segments and explaining and discussing the meaning of each segment. Some commentaries, including most commentaries on Lombard's

23. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*; Southern, "From Schools to University", p.26ff; Verger, "Patterns"; Verger, "Teachers".

24. Courtenay, *Schools and scholars in fourteenth-century England*, p.66-9.

25. Courtenay, *Adam Wodeham*, chapter 4.

26. Catto, "Theology and Theologians 1220-1320", p.506.

27. Masters sometimes had secretaries. On the secretaries of Thomas Aquinas see Torrell, vol. 1, pp.198-9, 229-30, 239-44. In Ockham's *Dialogus* the Student may be a bachelor who acts as the Master's secretary in writing the book.

Sentences, were collections of disputed questions. A disputation began with a question framed so as to require an answer "yes" or "no", followed by arguments on both sides put forward by senior students, then a "determination" by the master of the school ("I answer that..."), followed by his replies to the preliminary arguments.[28] Some disputations were held within a single school, but for more advanced exercises members of the various schools within the faculty met together. Some public disputations were *de quolibet* ("about whatever"), inviting questions on any topic from members of the audience. Lectures and disputations were often reported (a *reportatio*), edited (an *ordinatio*) and published, i.e. deposited with the university *stationarius* for copying.[29] Occasionally a bachelor or master published a treatise or "tract", usually brief, like an essay, on a topic perhaps outside his usual teaching duties, maybe a matter of current controversy.[30]

Students entering the theology faculty were required to have studied philosophy. The Franciscans and Dominicans studied philosophy in their own schools, others in the faculty of Arts.[31] The main texts in philosophy were works of Aristotle. Christian scholars well knew that Aristotle's philosophy was at various points in conflict with Christian belief.[32] According to Aristotle God is first cause but not creator; he causes of necessity, not by free choice; the world has existed forever and will exist forever; God does not know or care about individual human beings. There

28. "For those who wish to get clear of difficulties it is advantageous to discuss the difficulties well; for... it is not possible to untie a knot of which one does not know... Hence one should have surveyed all the difficulties beforehand... Further, he who has heard all the contending arguments, as if they were the parties to a case, must be in a better position to judge"; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, III.1, 995a 23-b5. Aristotle's writings include outlines and criticisms of the views of his predecessors.

29. Pollard; Foster and Piper.

30. On the genres used in medieval philosophy and theology see Kenny and Pinborg; Sweeney; Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, pp.79-99.

31. Hoenen.

32. Aristotle's logic was already well-known through the translations made by Boethius. When the rest of Aristotle's work started to become known, the teaching of his natural philosophy was at first forbidden in Paris: Gilson, *History*, p.244-5. Apparently the prestige of Aristotle was so great that competition for students between universities soon made Aristotle's works the basis of the curriculum.

was significant cultural exchange between Christians, Jews and Muslims.[33] Jews and Muslims also knew that Aristotle's philosophy conflicted with their religious beliefs.[34] Philosophical, religious and scientific texts were translated from Greek, Hebrew and Arabic into Latin.[35] Christian scholars studied Aristotle's philosophy under the guidance especially of the Muslim writers Avicenna and Averroes.[36] In the mid-thirteenth century the Dominican theologians Albert of Cologne and Thomas Aquinas engaged in an ambitious project to produce detailed commentaries on Aristotle's books for use in schools of Arts, to replace the commentaries of Avicenna and Averroes, in the conviction that, though Aristotle's philosophy contained errors dangerous to faith, it included much that was true and therefore compatible with Christian truth.[37] Ockham's commentaries on Aristotle seem to have been motivated partly by a wish to correct what he regarded as misunderstandings of Aristotle's philosophy.

After graduating from the Arts faculty or some equivalent school of philosophy, theology students had many years of study before them, during which they would play various roles (*opponens*, *respondens*, *bacularius biblicus*, *sententiarius*, *bacularius formatus*) before they could become masters.[38] Masters in Theology lectured on the Bible and conducted disputations. A *sententiarius* lectured on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*; these lectures, which often contained a good deal of philosophical

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33. Muslim influence on Christians was mainly through writings translated into Latin. Jews lived among Christians and there was some face-to-face dialogue. Hasse; Marenbon, "Introduction" in Abelard *Collationes*, pp.xvii-cxxi, esp. p.xxxviii; Sapir Abulafia; Seeskin. See Shank on the interchanges in Vienna preceding the 1420-1421 atrocity of the Gesera.

34. Griffel; Sadik.

35. Marenbon, "Medieval Philosophy", sec. 1.3

36. Gutas; Ben Ahmed and Pasnau.

37. Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, pp.203-34; Torrell,vol. 1, pp.224-46.

38. Courtenay, *Schools and scholars*, pp.41-8.

material, were often a theologian's main work.[39] During the fourteenth century the *quaestiones* in Sentences commentaries came to be long and complex, with the inclusion of sections presenting and criticising the ideas of other "modern" writers.[40] Ockham interacted especially with his Franciscan confreres, Walter Chatton[41] (his colleague and critic) and Adam Wodeham (his student, later co-worker).[42]

This intense debate was subject to some constraints. Medieval academics valued debate as a means of advancing understanding of the truth, but they also believed that individual participants needed guidance from the academic body, from its senior members and from the Church — not only because individuals make mistakes, but also because Christian faith includes truths that can be known only by divine revelation communicated through the Church. The authorities occasionally issued lists of propositions not to be maintained,[43] including philosophical propositions with

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39. Evans, *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences*, vol. 1; Rosemann, *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences*, vols. 2 and 3. Thomas Aquinas published a *Commentary on the Sentences;* his main works were however his *Summa theologiae* and his *Summa contra gentiles*. Duns Scotus produced several commentaries on the *Sentences* (which he "read", i.e. lectured on, in several universities). On the development of the *Sentences* commentary genre see Rosemann, *Peter Lombard*, p.199-209.

40. For an example of the *quaestio* form as it was in the thirteenth century see Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. For an example of a fourteenth century *questio* including detailed discussion of the opinion of another recent master see Kilcullen, "Translation of William of Ockham, *Ord.*1 d.2 q.6", where paragraphs 3-84, 90-142 criticise the position of Duns Scotus (or in Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals*, pp.153-190). On the development of academic technique see Courtenay, *Changing Approaches to Fourteenth-Century Thought,* pp.19-20, 24-35. In the course of the fourteenth century it became the practice for *sententiarii* lecturing in the same year to debate one another's opinions, leading to another genre, the "principial debate". See Courtenay, *Adam Wodeham*, pp.89-90, 172-7, Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, pp.59-60; Courtenay, *Changing Approaches,* pp.28-35; Shank, pp.35-56.

41. Keele, "Walter Chatton".

42. Courtenay, *Adam Wodeham*, pp.160-4; Ockham, OPh I, pp.53*-55*/54.

43. Putallaz, "Censorship"; Larsen, *The School of Heretics*; Thijssen, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris*, pp.90-112, 169-178; Thijssen, "Condemnation of 1277"; CUP vol.1 pp.543-58, vol.2 p.610-4 (Johannis de Mirecuria); Courtenay, "Inquiry and inquisition: Academic Freedom in Medieval Universities"; Courtenay, "Preservation and Dissemination of Academic Condemnations at the University of Paris in the Middle Ages"; Courtenay, "Papal Policy on Judging the Orthodoxy of University Masters"; Koch, "Philosophische und Theologische Irrtumslisten von 1270-1329"; Miethke, "Papst, Ortsbischof und Universität".

implications for the faith (though "purely" philosophical propositions were apparently not subject to censure).[44] Theologians were sometimes required to withdraw some of their theses.[45] Academics often made a "protestation" of willingness to correct their statements if they were judged contrary to faith.[46] Provided he did not definitively assert a heresy, an academic was permitted to present arguments contrary to Christian faith. Ockham sometimes says that he is not asserting but merely "reciting" or reporting opinions for the sake of "exercise" or to offer material for thought. In this way it was possible to argue boldly without risk of being a heretic, or of being accused of being a heretic. Ockham used such protections in his academic writings[47] and later in his polemical writings.[48] The following is from the prologue to 3.1 Dial.:

> Student: ...Just as we see Catholics disputing as an exercise about the faith without risk of just accusation (for doctors of sacred theology publicly dispute about the faith in the schools, and, arguing as sharply as they know how against the truth of faith, they incur no charge, though neither at the

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44. See Koch, "Neue Aktenstücke", where the *magistri* do not censure opinions "purely philosophical", "not contrary to faith and good morals", pp.347-9, 359-60. According to Ockham, some say that "purely philosophical assertions not pertaining to theology should not be solemnly condemned or forbidden by anyone, because in such matters anyone ought to be free to say freely what pleases him", below p.148.

45. Nicolas of Autrecourt (somewhat after Ockham's time) was required to burn his own book, Thijssen, "Nicholas of Autrecourt". Nicholas nevertheless later became dean of Metz cathedral. "Censure had little serious effect on subsequent careers even for the obstreperous"; Courtenay, "Inquiry and inquisition", p.180.

46. For example, John of Paris: "I make solemn declaration that in nothing I assert do I purpose anything against faith, good morals or sound doctrine, or against the reverence due to the person or office of pope. Should anything detrimental to any of these be found in my book either directly or indirectly I wish it to be withdrawn and I want it to be understood that this declaration applies to each and every individual argument I advance"; *On Royal and Papal Power* (c.1302), p.73-4. Marsilius: "if anything is there [in *Defensor pacis*] found determined, defined or otherwise enunciated or written less than catholically, it was not said in obstinacy [pertinaciter]; and we submit it to the authority of the catholic church or general council of Christian faithful to correct and to determine"; *Defensor pacis*, III.iii, p.558. Pope John XXII made a similar protestation regarding his opinions on the beatific vision: CUP vol.2, pp.435-6. Protestations were routine in the universities; see Courtenay, *Adam Wodeham,* p.174.

47. For examples see De quant. and De Corp. Christi, OTh X, pp.5-6/36, 90/122, 125/156 (translated Birch pp.4, 80-1, 121); Expos. Phys., Prol. § 1, OPh IV, pp.3-4/16. He often uses a short form of protestation: "the question can be answered, *without prejudgment and rash assertion*, in another way...", e.g. Ord.1 d.41 q.un, OTh IV, p.605/628.

48. SD, p.4; PEP, p.71; AP, p.228. The *Dialogus* "recites" opinions without assertion; below, p.62.

> time nor ever afterwards do they determine the truth of the disputed question...), so it is possible praiseworthily to dispute as an exercise about the power of the highest pontiff. Since, therefore, you would not be going to say anything against the power of the pope as an assertion or as an expression of doubt but only as a recital..., you should not be afraid to investigate the power of the pope and all the other things I have mentioned as requiring discussion...
>
> Master: It can be shown in many ways that it is permissible to recite falsities without assertion or doubt... And therefore... I will recite even views and opinions which I regard as wrong, even heretical. I will argue for these as strongly as I can.[49]

Ockham as university theologian

Before he was summoned to Avignon in 1324, Ockham spent some years studying and teaching philosophy and theology in Oxford and London (above, p.4). His written output during that time was prodigious. His chief work was a commentary in the form of *quaestiones* on the four books of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. His other main theological work was a volume of *Disputed Questions*. Among his philosophical works there are several on Aristotle's philosophy of nature, including a major commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, a set of questions on physics, and two summaries. Someone, probably not Ockham himself, extracted material from his commentary on the *Physics* to make a tract *On Successives* (on motion, place and time). His other main concern was with logic, which he constantly used to disentangle issues in every area of philosophy and theology. He wrote commentaries on several of Aristotle's writings on logic and a *Summary of Logic*.

Students of Ockham's political thought will want some idea of his work during this period of his life, just as students of his academic philosophy and theology will want to understand his "political" writings. He was the same person: did his earlier academic

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49. Ockham, 3.1. Dial. Prol.40-64, OP vol.8, pp.116-7. Cf. SD, p.4; PEP, p.71; AP, p.228. "Follow first the first opinion, because, though I regard it as heretical, I wish to know how its assertors try to find a basis for it, and how they try to answer arguments and texts against it -- for the sake of exercise, so that I will understand the truth more sharply"; 1 Dial. 6.2.

philosophy carry over into his later writings? I will come back to that question later (p.35). In the following I will attempt a brief summary of his academic philosophy and theology.[50]

A suitable starting point is his account of universals. A universal is a word or concept any occurrence[51] of which can be predicated[52] of members of a class of similar things, for example “human being”, “horse”, “animal”, “living being”, “planet”, “chair”, “individual”, “universal” — there are numberless examples.

Plato held that the nature common to the members of a class, human nature for example, is a single real thing (an Idea or Form) separate from the many individuals, which somehow share in this thing. Aristotle rejected the separate existence of the natures. Medieval thinkers followed him in this, but many of them still attributed some kind or degree of reality to shared natures and held that the shared nature is a constituent part of each of the many individuals, to which it has been “individuated”. In a decisive break with the Platonic tradition, Ockham rejected all such theories. On his view nothing can be, in any way, a part of several individuals. Every individual is individual of itself, right through, in all its constituents, and it does not need to be “individuated”. In his account of universals the place of the shared nature is taken by an individual thing, such as a word or a concept, functioning as a sign. A written word is an individual collection of ink particles, a spoken word is an individual disturbance in the air, a concept is an

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50. In this section of the introduction I will keep references to a minimum. For a fuller sketch of Ockham’s philosophy and theology, with references to his writings and to modern secondary literature, see PhilTheol.html on the Dialogus website. Brief accounts of Ockham’s philosophy, with more information than I give about his reasoning, include: Moody, “William of Ockham”; Courtenay, “Ockham, William”; Keele *Ockham Explained*; Spade and Panaccio in the *Stanford Encyclopedia*. For longer treatments see WO and PWO. For translations see PWS, QQ, OTT.

51. “There will ordinarily be about twenty ‘the’s on a page, and of course they count as twenty words. In another sense of the word ‘word,’ however, there is but one word ‘the’ in the English language;” C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol.2, p.142. A word in the former sense he calls a “token”. In the statement “Some human beings are old, and all human beings are mortal”, there are two occurrences, two tokens, of the term “human being”.

52. In statements of the form “S is P”, “P” is *predicated of* “S”.

individual mental act or event. Such individuals can function as signs that can "stand for" other individuals that resemble one another. (A sign does not necessarily resemble the things it stands for, but the things it stands for resemble one another.)

We progress in understanding human beings not by reflecting on the Idea or Form of human nature but by studying the resembling individuals. How closely human beings resemble one another is a factual question; there may be unusual individuals who in some ways don't resemble most other human beings.

We get factual knowledge of individuals through what Ockham calls "intuitive" cognition. An intuitive cognition gives us immediately (i.e. not by any process of inference) evident knowledge of present-tense statements about an individual's existence or non-existence and other contingent facts about it. Besides intuitive cognitions, Ockham posits abstractive cognitions. These are sufficient for knowledge of a thing when it is absent and its current existence and state is unknown. You have intuitive knowledge of the page you are reading; you have abstractive knowledge of the book you read yesterday, which may meanwhile have been destroyed. Abstractive cognitions are sufficient to cause knowledge of necessary propositions, i.e. propositions that are true no matter what contingent propositions may be true or false. There are also "imperfect" intuitive or "recordative" cognitions (which are kinds of abstractive cognitions), which enable us to assert that some contingent proposition *was* true (that you read a book yesterday). From abstractive cognitions and the habits that accompany them we form universal concepts, e.g. of a book.

Some of his contemporaries tried to explain perception by positing "*species in medio*", a chain of effects from the thing perceived through the medium to the sense organs of the knower, leading to an intellectual "species" (likeness) known by the intellect. According to Ockham such entities are not needed to explain

perception — in fact, if the *species* were what we perceived, we would not perceive the thing. Perception is explained by action at a distance: the thing perceived acts on us immediately from a distance, if the distance is not too great.

A universal term can stand for any member of a class because the members resemble one another. Resemblance (likeness, similarity) is a relation. Some of Ockham's contemporaries regarded relations as real entities. If you are looking at a white wall, and someone in Rome is painting a wall white, then as you look at your wall another entity imperceptibly comes upon it, namely a likeness with the wall in Rome. Ockham rejected such views. It is not true that relations must be things or entities.[53] The only realities involved in our example are the wall I am looking at, the whiteness of this wall, the wall in Rome, and the whiteness of the wall in Rome; the walls are alike and the whitenesses are alike, but the likeness is not an additional *res parva* (“little thing”) or *res media* (“linking thing”) that comes to exist when another wall is painted white.

In rejecting shared natures Ockham did not deny that things of the same kind are really alike (i.e. truly alike, i.e. that it is true to say that they are alike); likewise in rejecting relations as things he did not deny that things really are related. Even if no mind existed, things would still be similar and dissimilar, the rest of the universe would still have whatever unity and order it has now.

Other “little things” also proved dispensable. Motion, time and space are not things additional to bodies. Space and time do not wait empty for things to be brought into existence in them; there is no space or time “outside” or “before” the world. Aristotle’s categories (substance, quality, quantity, relation, action, passion,

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53. Rejecting the view that all *must* be does not exclude the possibility that some *may* be. In Ord.1 d.30 q.1 (OTh vol.4, p.281ff) he asks whether, apart from the authority of the faith and of any philosopher, it would be easier to deny than to hold that *every* relation is something real distinct from any absolute or absolutes; his answer is yes (p.306). He does see reasons for acknowledging that *some* relations are things additional to the things related. See Adams, *William Ockham*, pp.267-276.

time, place, position and habit) are a classification not of entities but of terms. Terms of substance, some terms of quality and some relations signify things, but the other category terms signify a substance or quality and convey additional information about it.

Ockham's arguments against the entities he wants to get rid of sometimes run like this: "To posit X as a thing would be problematic — would it be a substance, would it be an accident? how exactly would it fit into the framework of Aristotelian philosophy? and there are various objections against recognising it as a thing" (e.g. that the *species in medio* would prevent perception of the thing). "*And anyway we don't need it* — whatever could be explained by positing X as a thing can be explained well enough in other ways" (e.g. by action at a distance). "We don't need it, so it should not be posited" is these days called "Ockham's razor"; he did not invent it, and no one in the Middle Ages referred to it as his or called it a razor.

The "razor" is often referred to as the "principle of parsimony", meaning a requirement that explanations be as simple as possible. But Ockham did not believe that the universe is as simple as possible. "God does many things by many that he could do by fewer".[54] God can make the universe as complicated as he likes. Ockham thought that we find out how complicated the universe actually is by experience, reasoning, and God's revelation. We assert the existence of black swans from experience, black holes from scientific reasoning, angels from revelation.

Here is one of Ockham's most explicit statements of the so-called razor:

> It is pointless to do by many what can be done by fewer (*Frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora*). This is a principle that should not be denied, because no plurality should be posited unless it can be proved [1] by reason, or [2] by experience, or [3] by the authority of Him who cannot be

54. Ord.1 d.14 q.2, OTh III, p.432/454. God may also work more miracles than are needed: "Sometimes more miracles are to be posited about something where it could be done through fewer, and this pleases God";Qdl.4 q.30, OTh IX, p.450/490.

deceived or err.[55]

Thomas Aquinas had tried to establish some of what he called "preambles" of faith, i.e. philosophical propositions that prepare the way for accepting the Christian faith (*Summa Theologiae* 1 q.2 a.2 ad 1). The preambles include God's existence and perfection, including veracity. If we know philosophically that God exists and is truthful, then it becomes reasonable to consider whether a certain message might be a message from God and therefore true. Thus reason prepares the way for revelation.[56] Many Christian thinkers have tried to give philosophical arguments for the preambles of faith. Anselm gave a famous proof of God's existence,[57] Thomas Aquinas offered "five ways" to prove the existence of God,[58] Duns Scotus developed a complex proof of God's existence.[59] In the seventeenth century Descartes wrote his *Meditations* to prove that God exists and that there is a distinction between body and soul such that it is possible for the soul to survive the death of the body.[60] Thomas warned against claiming to prove too much — unbelievers will scoff if Christians try to support the faith with unsound arguments.[61]

Ockham rejected as unsound many of the arguments his predecessors had offered in support of preambles of faith. According to him, it is not demonstrative to argue that God must exist because this world of changing things must have an ultimate cause: it cannot be proved that nothing comes into existence without a cause, that there are conserving causes, that there cannot

55. De corp. Christi, c.29, OTh X, p.157-8/188, punctuation altered. "Nothing should be posited without giving a reason, unless it is known *per se* [i.e. is self-evident] or by experience or proved by the authority of sacred scripture"; Ord.1 d.30 q.1, OTh IV, p.290.1-3/314. See Maurer, "Ockham's Razor and Chatton's anti-Razor".
56. Cf. Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*.
57. Anselm, *Proslogion,* c.2.
58. Thomas Aquinas, ST 1 q.2 a.3.
59. Duns Scotus, *A Treatise on God as First Principle*.
60. Descartes, Prefatory Note to *Meditations*.
61. ST 1 q.46 a.2.

be an infinite regress of causes or that a chain of causes must have a cause outside itself, or that all chains of causes must go back to a single highest cause. It cannot be proved that the action of non-intelligent beings has a purpose, or that such beings are directed by an intelligence to some end. Anselm's argument to prove the existence of a nature than which none is nobler or better cannot prove that there is only one such nature.

If, however, we accept by faith that God does exist, still it cannot be philosophically demonstrated that God's causation of things is contingent and free, that he is the cause of any effect, or that he knows or wills anything other than himself. It cannot be proved that human beings have an intellective soul. Christians believe these things, but they cannot be philosophically demonstrated.

In Ockham's opinion Christians believe not only things that cannot be philosophically demonstrated but also some things against which there are philosophical objections. Duns Scotus sometimes postulates a "formal distinction" or "formal non-identity", i.e. a distinction between entities that cannot *exist* separately but have separate *definitions* (i.e. neither is mentioned in the essential definition of the other). In Scotus's account of universals, the nature shared by members of a class is a real constituent of every individual, and is individualised by another (not shared) real constituent, its "thisness"; between the nature and the thisness there is a formal distinction. A formal distinction is more real than a distinction "of reason" (a distinction that would not exist if minds did not exist) but less real than a distinction between independently existing things (i.e. when one thing can exist even if the other does not). Scotus posited formal distinctions also in the Godhead, and asserted that it is possible to reason about formally distinct entities as if they were really distinct.[62]

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62. "Whatever the real *per se* order would be among things if they were really distinct, that is the *per se* order among them corresponding to the distinction they do have – for example, an order of reason, if they are distinct by reason"; Dumont, "The *Propositio Famosa Scoti*: Duns Scotus and Ockham on the Possibility of a Science of Theology", p.418 (translation modified).

Ockham rejected formal distinctions *in creatures*, and he also rejected Scotus's opinion that relations are always additional realities (above, p.16). Nevertheless, Ockham posited some formal distinctions and relations as realities in God, since he saw no other way to understand the Church's teaching on the Trinity (i.e. the doctrine that God is numerically one, that there are three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each being God while each is not either of the others). As Ockham puts it, the divine essence is "unique, simple, numerically one and most singular, *and yet is several things*".[63] "One absolute thing is several relative persons, really distinct".[64]

Ockham held that revelation trumps human reason. Our minds are in captivity to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), though not to anyone else. Despite whatever philosophical problems there may be in the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation, these doctrines must be true because God has revealed them to us through the Bible and the teaching of the Church.

By faith Christians hold that God acts freely. This is contrary to Aristotle's opinion that every cause acts of necessity. According to Ockham, God did not need to create a universe at all; what he chooses he does not need to choose, and he could choose things he does not choose — what he chooses to do is a sub-set of what he could choose to do. Ockham distinguishes between acts within God's absolute power (*de potentia absoluta*) and acts within his ordinate power (*de potentia ordinata*); things done *de potentia ordinata* are also possible *de potentia absoluta* — the former are a sub-set of the latter. An act is within God's "absolute"[65] power if God could *without contradiction* choose to do it (whether or not he does so choose). Some acts that might seem cruel and unjust or

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63. SL 3-1 c.16, OPh I, p.403.15-6/480 (emphasis added). Cf. ibid. p.404.32-7/481. Also SL 2 c.2, OPh I, p.253.124-130/330.

64. Ord.1 prol. q.7, OTh I, p.202.5-6/244.

65. "Absolute" has various meanings in mediaeval texts. Here it means: without reference to any decision God has actually made.

deceptive are within God's absolute power (i.e. his doing them would not imply any contradiction, since no creature has any rights against God), but Christians believe that God does not choose to do such things.

Everything God does choose to do is an instance of his "ordinate" power, i.e. it is something he has freely "ordained". According to Ockham, God has ordained to give to some human beings the grace that is needed to attain eternal life (understanding "grace" as something God creates in the person). Even without grace and faith it is possible to live a morally good life. However, Ockham says, good actions do not of themselves merit eternal reward; an act merits such a reward only if God accepts it as meritorious, and, by his ordinance, he accepts only acts done by a person in a state of grace. Some theologians before[66] and after[67] Ockham held that God will give grace to those who do their best ("*Facientibus quod in se est deus non denegat gratiam*"), which implies that we will attain salvation if we do our best at every stage, including at the beginning when we have not yet received grace. But as far as I know Ockham nowhere endorses this maxim. He follows Augustine in holding that we cannot ensure our own salvation. From beginning to end, the human will needs to be moved by God's grace to progress toward salvation. God predestines some to salvation. The reason for predestination is (in most cases) that God foresees that the person will be in a state of grace at the time of death. No human being can have such foreknowledge, so no human being can know who is predestined.

Human beings, like God, have free choice, according to Ockham: praise and blame assume free choice, and experience shows that

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66. Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica*, IV, p.993-6; Thomas Aquinas *De Veritate* q.24 a.1 ad 2.
67. Oberman, "Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam: Robert Holcot O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology".

we have it.[68] Our will is free in the sense that we can choose either X or not-X without being determined one way or the other by any cause: we can choose X, and then not-X, even if meanwhile nothing in the universe changes except our choice. Though our choice is free, God knows with certainty what it will be. Ockham rejects Aristotle's view that statements about future events that depend on free choice are neither true nor false; statements about our future choices can be true. We cannot know which of these statements are true, but God does: he has certain knowledge of our free choices before we make them. But they remain contingent, and God's foreknowledge is contingent; the fact that there is a true statement of our future choice does not destroy our freedom. We cannot understand how God can know future contingents. That he has such knowledge is a matter of faith.

Ockham sometimes seems to say that morality consists in whatever rules God ordains for the time being, so that at some other time different moral rules might apply. However, in his most explicit treatment of the question[69] he draws a distinction between the natural law[70] and "positive" morality ("positive" in the sense of "laid down", *positum*, by some authority). The obligatoriness of precepts of natural law is, according to him, self-evident; it is not the case that they are obligatory only because God commands them. Like other medieval theologians Ockham held that God's particular command overrides even precepts of natural law[71] (since according to natural law we must always obey God), but, it seems to me, this does not imply that natural law holds when it does hold

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68. Many modern philosophers would not agree that we have free choice (in Ockham's sense), or that praise and blame assume free choice in that sense, or that experience shows we have it. See Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section 8; Mill, "Of Liberty and Necessity"; O'Connor and Franklin, "Free Will".

69. Qdl.2 q.14, OTh IX p.177/216 (translated QQ, pp.148-50).

70. Kilcullen, "Medieval Theories of Natural Law".

71. See LFMOW, pp.189-90. The Bible in some places approves actions that would normally be immoral. Cf. Numbers 25:7-11, 1 Samuel 15:33, 1 Kings 18:40.

only because it has been commanded by God.[72]

Ockham had much else to say of interest in philosophy and theology, but the above sketch should be enough to show that his work was wide-ranging and that he was not afraid to draw controversial conclusions.

Ockham was one of many contributors to a very active debate on philosophical and theological questions that took place in England in the fourteenth century.[73] Some of his philosophical positions (e.g. on universals, relations, quantity, *species in medio*) for some time continued to be matters of controversy.[74] Walter Chatton and Walter Burley were notable critics, Adam Wodeham and Gregory Rimini sometimes agreed with him.[75] Some theologians accused him of Pelagianism, because of his assertion that *de potentia absoluta* God could accept as meriting eternal life good acts done by one's natural powers, without any infused habit of grace.[76] But despite philosophical and theological criticisms and accusations of heresy, and despite his campaign against three popes, and despite the attempts of one of these popes, Benedict XII, to repress the study of his works in the University of Paris,[77] Ockham's academic writings continued to be copied and studied and quoted and were among the books printed when printing began in the fifteenth century. In his own time academics do not seem to have formed "schools of thought",[78] but during the fifteenth century such

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72. There may be other reasons for attributing to Ockham a "divine command" account of morality. Whether he held such a theory is a controverted question. There are strong philosophical objections to such theories; see Mill, "Blakey's History of Moral Science", pp. 27-29.

73. Courtenay, "The Role of English Thought in the Transformation of University Education in the Late Middle Ages", p.111-2.

74. Tachau, Katherine H., "The Problem of the *species in medio* at Oxford in the Generation after Ockham".

75. See Rode, *A Companion to the Responses to Ockham.* Several works that were once attributed to Ockham, including *De principiis theologiae*, *Centiloquium*, and *De successivis,* were produced by followers.

76. Koch, "Neue Aktenstücke", pp.311-20. In the Avignon process his work was criticised also on many other points.

77. Courtenay, *Ockham and Ockhamism*, p.388.

78. Courtenay, *Changing Approaches to Fourteenth-Century Thought,* pp.13-19.

schools did form and some who called themselves "nominalists" regarded Ockham as one of the founders of their school.[79]

Some historians have blamed Ockham's influence for what they see as the breakdown of the happy synthesis of philosophy and theology that they believe had been achieved in the thirteenth century, notably by Thomas Aquinas.[80] How much influence Ockham had as an individual is difficult to establish. He was one of many late-medieval academics who engaged in "English subtlety", which may be thought to have been destructive even simply by making Christian belief seem complicated. Some of his statements relating to the doctrine of the Trinity, his spelling out the implications of the idea that God owes nothing to any creature, his criticisms of arguments supporting the "preambles of faith", may have disturbed the faith of some. But of course the fact that certain philosophical arguments may have had cultural consequences that some regret is not an objection to those arguments.

Late medieval nominalism clearly influenced some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers. They do not mention Ockham and there is no evidence that any of them had read any of his writings (though some were available in print), but somehow his doctrine of universals came down to Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley

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79. See Thorndike, *University Records,* p.355-60. Ockham did not call himself a nominalist. The term was not in use in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century it was used to refer to Ockham's position on universals together with certain other positions and practices. On the origins of the term see *Vivarium* 30 (1992), articles by Courtenay, Marenbon, Luscombe, Mews and others. See also Courtenay, "Nominalism and late medieval religion" pp.51-3, and *Ockham and Ockhamism*, pp.39-80, 371-4.

80. See Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, chapter 3. Cf. Tierney: "...without a complete understanding of Ockham's doctrines there can be no adequate evaluation of that whole complex movement of *destructive criticism which sapped the vitality of medieval thought and medieval institutions* in the fourteenth century, which opened the way for the Conciliarist attack on the Papacy and, ultimately, for the Lutheran schism and the emergence of the modern state"; Tierney, "Ockham, the Conciliar Theory, and the Canonists", p.40, emphasis added. For a balancing of Gilson's assessment, see Courtenay, *Changing Approaches to Fourteenth-Century Thought.*

and Hume.[81] Hume, for example, wrote: "'tis a principle generally receiv'd in philosophy, that every thing in nature is individual... *Abstract ideas are therefore in themselves individual*, however they may become general in their representation".[82] Ockham's view that species are sets of more-or-less similar individuals made possible Darwin's account of the differentiation of species by natural selection. It is still relevant today, for example to questions about gender diversity, diversity in moral judgments and differences in degree of concern for other people.[83] Human beings, it seems, may not be as much alike as we used to think.

Ockham's campaign against three popes

In Oxford and London Ockham had lived a life typical of academics of his time, studying and teaching the ancient books foundational in his discipline and debating questions arising from them. In Avignon his life was turned upside down. When he came to believe that the pope was a heretic — that is, that the Church was ruled by a man who was not a Catholic at all — he felt compelled to drop what he had been doing and focus on papal heresy as his first priority. After he left Avignon in 1328, he wrote nothing more on the topics he had been so deeply concerned with as a student and teacher of philosophy and theology. When such topics arise in the course of his post-Avignon writings he puts

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81. Kilcullen, "Medieval elements in Berkeley, Locke and Hume"; Brown, "Hume and the Nominalist Tradition"; Hudson, "John Locke and the Tradition of Nominalism".

82. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk.1 pt.1 sec.7 (pp.19-20), emphasis added. Hume's views on causation are like Ockham's. His "impressions and ideas" are similar to Ockham's intuitive and abstractive cognitions. His view that the institution of property rests on human convention is also like Ockham's. His analysis of freedom of the will, however, amounts to a rejection of the views of Scotus and Ockham, and his analysis of morality is a rejection, or at least a radical revision, of the "natural law" theory (see Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume*).

83. Gender diversity: Is every human being either male or female? Diversity of moral judgments: Do all human beings have the same sense of right and wrong? Degree of concern: Do all human beings care about the wellbeing of others, or are some people psychopaths or sadists?

them firmly aside, unless they are relevant to the task in hand.[84] The task was to remove from the papal office John XXII and his successors Benedict XII and Clement VI, for the reason that they were heretics. According to the dissident Franciscans, a pope who becomes a heretic automatically ceases to be a genuine pope (because he ceases to be a member of the Church, and only a member of the Church can be pope), but there is still the task of removing the pseudo-pope from his position of *de facto* power.

In 1 Dial. 7.48 the Student asks, "What ought to be done by... learned persons (whether they be masters or students) should the pope become a heretic?" The Master answers:

> Those amongst them who have been blessed with literary talents will write and compose books, treatises, sermons, and letters, whatever seems most expedient... and publish their works by whatever means are possible to them, concealing or revealing their names as expediency[85] dictates. (For certain works are looked at with greater pleasure because of their author, and in that case it will be useful to state the author's name expressly. In some instances, however, many feel hatred towards the author, and in that situation it is expedient to conceal the author's name from them, so that enemies concentrate not on who is speaking but on what is being said.)... They have the duty, as far as their talents allow, to effectively condemn the pope's errors and to declare the contrary truth, impressing it on all listeners as much as they can, in public lectures and sermons, in private conversations also, whenever there might be an opportunity to speak... [Like fighters trying] to defeat their enemies directly or by ambushes (*insidias*) and all licit methods they can think of, preachers and doctors or masters must destroy the treachery of a heretic pope directly or by ambushes, publicly as well as

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84. See below pp. 132, 212, 228, 313. "The discussion of these [opinions about virtue] I think should be left to the curious, because they have little utility. In this work I think only useful things should be discussed"; 1 Dial. 6.79. A certain matter "cannot be explained in few words, and it could not be understood easily by those not sufficiently instructed in the philosophical and theological sciences, so at present I pass on". In some places Ockham does discuss philosophical technicalities because they are relevant to his campaign against John XXII, either because on these topics John's opinions were not merely philosophically mistaken but heretical, or because some argument could not be cleared up without explaining some technicality. Examples: God's power (WND 95.112ff, pp.643-658; CB 4.3, p.230); sucessives (WND 67.40ff, pp.451-9); virtue (1 Dial. 6.79); various points of logic (WND 43.13ff, pp.372-3; WND 59.20-2, p.407; WND 71.32-8, p.466; 3.1 Dial. 2.17.57-87, pp.194-5, translated LFMOW, pp.160-1); universals and singulars (below p.178).

85. In English "expediency" may suggest lack of principle, but the Latin does not convey this suggestion.

secretly, by methods they find convenient.[86]

Ockham's polemical writings proceed, to use his phrase, "directly or by ambushes". In his direct or "assertive" writings he says directly what he thinks. In other writings he "recites" or reports conflicting views without indicating which (if any) he agrees with.[87] The recitative writings are ambushes in the sense that Ockham does not alert the reader to the fact that he is writing against the pope.[88] For this he had several reasons. First, each copy had to be made by hand and therefore required the goodwill of the copyist and of anyone providing resources for the work. A copyist might stop copying, and a reader might stop reading, if the book was explicitly an attack on the pope.[89] Second, the author of a book attacking the pope might come under suspicion of heresy, but a writer who "recited" a heretical opinion without asserting it was not liable to a charge of heresy,[90] especially if he made a "protestation" that he did not intend to assert any heresy (above, p.12). Third, if opinions were not put forward as being the author's own but reported as the opinions of others, readers would be less likely to be affected by their attitude to the author.[91] Ockham's

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86. Translation Knysh, modified, on the Dialogus website t1d742.html.

87. See Miethke, "Die objecktivierende Methode", *Ockhams Weg zur Sozialphilosphie*, pp.430-444. These are sometimes called his "impersonal" writings, but they are not detached or unimpassioned: some strong language is used, e.g. below at pp.71, 252.

88. A success of the ambush is shown by the fact that a *de luxe* copy of the *Dialogus* was presented by the Franciscan bishop Bartolomeo della Rovere to his uncle, Pope Sixtus IV. For images see https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.4097, and for information, OP vol. 5, pp.338-9.

89. Ockham's "assertive" works explicitly critical of John and his successors were not much circulated. Three manuscripts survive of PEP, one each of EFM, SD, CI and CB.

90. See below, p. 461.

91. See below, p. 62. In many places Ockham mentions as a reason for using the recitative mode the need to eliminate the influence of friendship or enmity: 1 Dial. 7.48.44-50 (quoted above, p.26); 1 Dial. 7.73, epilogue (below, p.38). Also: "I do not doubt that if I explained in it what I think about the matters to be investigated, it would suffer the excessive calumnies of the malignant, to the prejudice of truth and to the detriment of justice. In this tract, therefore, just as you wish, I will not indicate at all which of the reported opinions I think should be approved. Truth will not thereby incur danger but avoid it, since I do not believe that anyone would adhere to the truth more firmly because of my approval, but I fear that, from the malice of hatred, envy and rancour, many would attack it more sharply and more wickedly by both words and deeds — which I am not ignorant is done in connection with other matters by some, prompted by envy against me. However, if ever I

recitative writings assume that readers' intelligence and interest in truth will lead them to the conclusions the arguments actually establish, without needing to be prompted by assertions by him. The recitative writings supply material for readers doing their duty to seek the truth with careful solicitude.

The "assertive" works were written to fulfil a duty to speak out. Ockham believed that Christ's promise, "I will be with you all days" (Matthew 28:20), guarantees that if ever there is a danger that the whole Church will fall into heresy, some Christians will speak out in defence of the truth. In some circumstances, therefore, someone may have a duty to speak out. However, this duty, Ockham says, falls under an affirmative precept, and affirmative precepts "bind always but not for always" — that is, there is always a *prima facie* obligation, but only on some occasions will the obligation be actual.[92] Opponents of a heretic pope were not required to explicitly oppose him with every word, but explicit opposition might be required sometimes. Ockham's assertive writings were intended to meet this requirement. The assertive writings were not widely circulated and persumably had little influence, but they help us interpret his recitative works.

In Munich the dissident Franciscans worked together, accumulating materials for argument[93] and producing some joint writings.[94] Ockham's first individual contribution, based partly on work done already by his colleague Francis of Marchia,[95] was *The Work of Ninety Days* (WND), written probably in the first months

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notice that the truth can be advanced by the expression of what I hold, I will not delay to publish it in express words"; 3.2 Dial. Prol.45-50, translated LFMOW p.237. See also OQ prol.10-21, p.15.

92. See below, p.275. Cf. p.63. Similarly, one is not obliged to seek the truth at every moment, but only "under appropriate circumstances" when there are no more pressing duties, p.193, "at an appropriate time and place", p.390. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, ST 2-2 q.33 a.2. These are what some modern philosophers call "duties of imperfect obligation".

93. Nicolaus Minorita, *Chronica.*

94. Lambertini, "Political Theory in the Making"; Baudry, *Guillaume d'Occam* pp.124ff. On other Franciscans in Munich, viz. Michael de Cesena, Francis de Ascoli, and Bonagratia de Bergamo, see in the publications list articles by Dolcini, Schabel, Wittneben.

95. Lambertini, "Francis of Marchia and William of Ockham: Fragments from a Dialogue".

of 1332.[96] It reports, without asserting,[97] answers to John XXII's constitution *Quia vir reprobus*.[98] Like Thomas Aquinas's and Ockham's own commentaries on works by Aristotle, WND is a close textual commentary. It is a critical commentary on *Quia vir reprobus*. It therefore deals with all the topics John's document raises, including: What constitutes Christian perfection? What is a "state of perfection"? Is living without ownership and other legal rights a more perfect way of life? Did Adam own things in the Garden of Eden? Did Christ and the Apostles own things, individually or as a group? Was Christ a king? Was Christ as king the owner of all temporal goods? Can a Pope contradict a doctrinal statement made by a previous Pope?[99] Ockham argues (or rather, reports that John's opponents argue) that not having property and not enforcing legal rights is a better way for a Christian to live. Against John's claim that no one can rightly live without property rights because no one can justly consume things owned by others, Ockham argues that an owner can give another person permission to use a consumable, i.e. to consume it, without transferring ownership or conferring any legally-enforcable right; the natural right to use things, which has been "tied" by the human institution of property rights, is freed by the owner's permission.[100] WND ends with a chapter about heresy and heretics, reciting arguments

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96. Titles and dates are given as in OP. In many cases the title is due to a copyist or editor and the dates are uncertain. It is possible that Ockham worked on several things at once or left a project for a while and then returned to it. See Offler's remarks, OP vol. 4 pp.89-90. The writings mentioned in the next four paragraphs are discussed in Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages*. Many have been translated: see "Publications referred to" (below p.473).

97. On its "recitative" character see the "Prologue" and "Epilogue", WND pp.47-8, 848-9.

98. For translations of *Quia vir reprobus* and other relevant papal constitutions see Kilcullen and Scott, "Papal Documents Relating to Franciscan Poverty Translated". These include constitutions of earlier popes approving the Franciscan way of life, namely *Exiit qui seminat* (Nicolaus III) and *Exivi de paradiso* (Clement V), and several of the constitutions of John XXII, namely *Ad conditorem canonum*, *Cum inter nonnullos* and *Quia quorundam*.

99. Many topics are indicated in the table of contents, WND pp.ix-xvi. On Ockham's treatment of the main topics, see "Introduction", WND pp.1-46.

100. See WND c.65, p.434-447, translated also in LFMOW p.48ff. See also Robinson, *William of Ockham's Early Theory of Property Rights in Context*; Kilcullen, "The Origin of Property: Ockham, Grotius, Pufendorf, and some others". On natural rights see Tierney, *Idea of Natural Rights*, and Kilcullen, "Medieval Theories of Natural Rights".

to show that many of John's opinions were heretical, that he held them pertinaciously and was therefore a heretic.

Ockham's next work was the first part of a dialogue planned in three parts. The first part (which we refer to as 1 Dial.) was written probably during 1332-1335. It is a "recitative" work also, reporting and discussing a range of current controversies. It takes up the points raised in the last chapter of WND. It discusses the whole issue of heresy: What is heresy? How is it decided whether someone is a heretic? Who can become a heretic? How should a person act toward heretics and their supporters, and toward those who accuse others of heresy? We will return to 1 Dial. shortly, after sketching the rest of Ockham's campaign.

Beginning in late 1331 John XXII preached a number of sermons in which he argued that, until the Day of General Judgment at the end of the world, the saints are not yet in heaven and the wicked are not yet in hell. Ockham added these opinions to the list of John's heresies and attacked him in several more works, viz. *A Letter to the Friars Minor* (LFM, 1334), two pamphlets that have come down to us as Part 2 of the *Dialogus* (2 Dial., 1334),[101] *Against John* (CI, 1335)[102], and *Compendium of the Errors of John XXII* (CE, 1337).

John died in December 1334 and was succeeded by Benedict XII. During Benedict's pontificate Ockham continued to attack John as a heretic and also attacked Benedict for failing to condemn his predecessor as a heretic, but his focus came to be on what he saw as their fundamental heresy, the claim by these popes to "fulness of power" in the sense of power to do anything not forbidden by divine or natural law. Ockham himself attributed to the pope

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101. The two parts of 2 Dial. were not written for inclusion in the *Dialogus* and may not have been written by Ockham (though he may have been the source of some material). See Kilcullen, "Introduction", OP vol.8, p.13.

102. Part of *Contra Ioannem* is translated below, p.423ff.

"fulness of power" in a more limited sense.[103] The limitations include that popes cannot make new articles of faith, that they must respect rights and liberties based on human law and compact — including the rights and liberties of secular rulers and other lay people and the rights and liberties of unbelievers — and that they must respect the Gospel liberty of Christians.[104] In parallel with his position on papal power, he argued that the Emperor and other secular rulers also do not have power limited only by natural and divine law but must respect the rights and liberties of their subjects.[105] His writings during this period included *Against Benedict* (CB, 1337-1338), *Whether a Prince* (WP, 1338-9),[106] *Short Discourse on the Tyranny of some called Popes* (SD, 1340-41), and *Eight Questions on the Power of the Pope* (OQ, 1340-1341). After Benedict died (April 1342) and was succeeded by Clement VI, Ockham wrote *On the Power of Emperors and Popes* (PEP, 1346-7). He seems to have begun work on the third Part of the *Dialogus* about 1339, when Benedict was pope; its two tracts (3.1 Dial. and 3.2 Dial.) were both unfinished when he died in 1347 or 1348. 3.1 Dial. is about the power of the pope, 3.2 Dial. is about the power of the emperor.

"Is there any overarching theme that runs through all his [Ockham's] political works?"[107] At the beginning of his campaign, Ockham's purpose was to defend the essentials of Franciscan life against the heretic pope, and, even more, to defend the Church

103. "Fulness" does not mean absolutely full. For Ockham's various attempts to define the power of the pope see 3.1 Dial. 1.16-17, vol.8 pp.155-160 (translated on the Dialogus website t31d1new.html #zp16); SD 2.20, pp.62-3 (and passages translated or referred to in notes there); PEP chapters 10-13, pp.101-107.

104. Kilcullen and Robinson, "Medieval Political Philosophy", 13.2; Kilcullen "The Political Writings"; Knysh, *Political Ockhamism*; McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham*.

105. Kilcullen and Robinson, "Medieval Political Philosophy", 13.3.

106. "Whether a Prince Can Receive the Goods of the Church for His Own Needs, Namely, In Case of War, Even Against the Wishes of the Pope", translated Nederman, *Political Thought in Early Fourteenth-Century England*.

107. Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages*, p.10. Many answers have been given to this question: secularism, opposition to canon law, conservatism, liberalism, constitutionalism, republicanism... My answer is that what unifies Ockham's post-Avignon works is the purpose of deposing a heretic pope.

against the heretic pope. As the campaign went on, its scope broadened and deepened. The pope's action against the Franciscans might not have much concerned many people — the Order had many critics, some of whom agreed with John XXII that the Franciscan claim to live without legally-enforceable rights of any kind was not legitimate — but John's opinion that the saints are not yet in heaven antagonised many, including the French royal family and many theologians.[108] This heresy, and John's conduct when his opinions were criticised, confirmed the Franciscans' claim that John was a heretic, and it gave them many potential allies. The topic of fulness of power (in CB onwards) deepened the campaign about heresy by providing a unifying theme for what would otherwise have been a long and rather miscellaneous list of heresies and misdeeds: the "root"[109] of John's heresies, and also of his tyranny, was a distorted conception of "fulness of power" in matters both spiritual and temporal.[110] The pope's claim to fulness of power in temporal matters was likely to concern more possible allies, namely secular rulers and the laity generally.[111] The topic of fulness of power broadened the discussion into various questions connected with secular government. The claim made by these popes, and some theologians, that a pope has power to override the rights of secular rulers and the laity also gave a second ground for deposing a pope, namely a serious sin of injustice: while a pope who became a heretic lost office automatically, even a non-heretic pope, if he committed serious sins and was incorrigible and

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108. The King of France convened a meeting of theologians who unanimously rejected John's doctrine: CUP vol. 2, pp.429-432.

109. SD 2.1, pp.17-18; CB 6.2, p.273.

110. For Ockham's way of distinguishing "spiritual" and "temporal" see 1 Dial. 6.8; 3.1 Dial. 1.17, p.158; 3.2 Dial. 2.4, p.142-3.

111. The pope must respect the rights and liberties of "emperors, kings and the rest, believers or non-believers... that they had and could rightly use before the explicit establishment of the gospel law", SD p.51.

scandalized the Church, ought to be deposed.[112] Ockham's campaign was also broadened in another way. The "recitative" works were primarily about papal heresy or injustice, but they dealt with these topics within a larger framework. The *Dialogus,* for example, was addressed to readers interested in a systematic treatment of many matters, "a *summa* about the controversy now taking place among Christians over Catholic faith and many related matters" (below, p.61). To satisfy his readers' interests and increase the circulation of the book, and to camouflage the fact that it was attack on the pope, he needed to include some material that did not directly serve his main purposes.[113] Further topics arose when he wrote in support of, or at the request of, some potential ally (WP, OQ, and *Consultatio de causa matrimoniali*).[114] He was also concerned to distance himself and his Franciscan colleagues from a writer who might well have been taken for one of their allies, namely Marsilius of Padua, whom Ockham regarded as very much mistaken on important points.[115] Thus in various ways what began as a campaign to remove a heretic pope came to touch on a wide range of topics, many of them within the scope of political philosophy. But there was an "overarching theme". The point was always to remove a pseudo-pope from *de facto* power. Ockham could not engage in philosophy for philosophy's sake as long as the Church was ruled by a heretic.

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112. CB 7.12, pp.318-20. To "scandalise" is to cause some Christians to stumble into sin. Ockham's position is based on canon law, D.40 c.6, s.v. a fide devius, vol.1 col. 260; see below, p.286ff. Cf. Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*, pp. 57-67; Tierney, "Ockham, the Conciliar Theory, and the Canonists", pp.47-62.

113. For example, his discussion of the question whether a pope is at fault if he fails to condemn the heresies of theologians, below, p.158ff; whether the Church could change from a monarchy to an aristocracy, 3.1 Dial. 2.20; whether there are Bible passages that cannot be understood, 3.1 Dial. 3.14; what should be the qualities of an Emperor, 3.2 Dial. 1.14.

114. On the connection of these works with political alliances see Offler's introductions, OP vol. 1, pp.2, 220-222, 270-2.

115. See below, 5.14-22, p.340ff. Also, on relations between Ockham and Marsilius, see OP vol.8, pp.360-71. Marsilius argued that the papacy was a human invention, whereas Ockham argued that it was instituted by Christ; Marsilius held that in every community there must be a single coercive power, whereas Ockham held that there must be several centres of power able to correct one another.

Although the flight from Avignon marks a break or turning point in Ockham's life, it seems to me that his life was deeply unified by a committment to Catholic faith. In the first stage this was manifested by a very active exploration of Christian doctrine, in his last twenty years by a very determined campaign to save the Church from heresy. In both stages Ockham dedicated his energy and his penetrating intelligence to the service of God. After he left Avignon he continued to be a theologian (though becoming also something of a canon lawyer). His contribution to the practical work of removing the *de facto* popes was that of a writer, and what he wrote was theology. The main premises of his arguments are theological, i.e. derived from the Bible and other writings authoritative in theology; his conclusions were about what should be held by faith or could be held consistently with faith. As in his academic writings, he writes for university-educated readers willing to follow complex arguments with close attention.[116] He continues to use the typical scholastic literary genres.[117] WND is a detailed commentary on a text, like his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*. Each "book" of SD is equivalent to a disputed question.[118] The *Dialogus* is like a collection of disputed questions (though without the Master's *determinatio*).[119] PEP is a tract or treatise, like his tract *On the Body of Christ*.

A difference is that in his post-Avignon works he aims at being understood by canonists especially and makes much use of authorities canonists would acknowledge.[120] Three of the topics that were now of great practical importance to him — heresy, the

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116. Miethke, "Marsilius und Ockham: Publikum und Leser ihrere Politischen Schriften im Späteren Mittelalter"; Ouy, "Simon de Plumetot (1371-1443) et sa bibliothèque".

117. See above, p.9, note 30.

118. SD p.5, note 4.

119. In the *Dialogus* the Student introduces a question, the Master gives one opinion with its supporting arguments, then another opinion with its arguments, perhaps other opinions, and then answers the respective sets of arguments from the viewpoint of one or more of the other opinions; but he does not give his own determination. See the analysis on the Dialogus web site, e.g. 1d1-5Analysis.html#2.

120. See Miethke, "Kanonisches Recht im *Dialogus* Wilhelms von Ockham".

constitution of the Church, and the relation between ecclesiastical and secular power — had generally been left to canonists. Ockham argues that it is legitimate for any Catholic to criticise and judge popes (canon law seemed to forbid that), that heresy and the constitution of the Church are legitimately, indeed mainly, the concern of theologians, that the Church must respect certain rights and duties that secular rulers and laypersons have independently of canon law, and that in all matters canon law is "subalternated" to theology and moral philosophy.[121] In accordance with his wish to change the minds of canonists, very many of his arguments draw premises from the books of canon law (the *Decretum* and the *Decretales*), collections that included much theological material.[122] Some of Ockham's leading ideas came from canonists: just as he wanted canonists to learn from theology, he himself learnt from the canonists.[123] His role was, in part, that of a theologian "subalternating" canon law.[124]

However, his premises do not include any of the distinctive philosophical or theological positions he developed as an academic in England. His pre-Avignon writings did not deal with the topics of his post-Avignon writings, and the latter do not use, assume or presuppose anything from the former. Several possible connections have been suggested. (1) One is that Ockham's arguments from texts (e.g. of the Bible) presuppose his theory of knowledge, to account for the fact that readers can understand texts.[125] But it seems to me that arguments from texts stand on their

121. See below, pp.67, 81- 85, 90. Cf. SD pp.12-13. See Scott, "William of Ockham and the Lawyers Revisited"; Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages*, pp.63-8.

122. See below, p.80. For examples of Ockham's use of canon law references, see p.394. Gratian's *Decretum*, the canonists' basic text, contained many quotations from theologians, such as Augustine. The books available to the Master (and presumably to Ockham in Munich) were limited: "I have hope of obtaining only the Bible, the *Decretum*, and the five books of the *Decretals*"; 3.2 Dial. Prol.

123. Tierney, "Ockham, the Conciliar Theory and the Canonists". Ockham was not an expert on canon law. In a few cases his references to canon law are wrong (e.g. below, pp.89, 385). Presumably he got help from another member of the dissident Franciscan group, Bonagratia of Bergamo, who was an expert canonist.

124. The story about Grosseteste (p.84) can be applied to Ockham.

125. See Coleman, "The relation between Ockham's intuitive cognition and his political science".

own, without any need to account for the fact that we understand texts. (2) Another suggested connection is by way of the concept of liberty. In his pre-Avignon writings Ockham gave a distinctive account of "liberty of choice" (above, p.22), and in the polemical writings he has much to say about "rights and liberties". But it seems to me that there is really no connection, because these are liberties in a different sense. In whatever way we think of choice — and even if we reject liberty of choice altogether — there will still be "liberties" in the sense that there are actions a person may do that others may not rightly try to prevent. (3) A third suggestion points to a possible conflict between his earlier and later opinions, pointing to a change in a philosophical position. It might be thought that Ockham's concept of the Church as the congregation or collection of believers somehow reflects his view of universals,[126] and that it is then an inconsistency when he attributes actions (such as approving doctrine, below p.455) to the Church. But there is really no inconsistency. It is true that he thinks that a body of people is not an entity additional to its members, but this does not mean that a body of people has no unity and that it cannot act in a unified way. According to his theory of relations (above, p.16), complexes consisting of many members really are (i.e. it is true to say that they are) ordered and unified, and it is therefore possible to attribute action to such a body.[127] (4) Another suggested inconsistency is that in his polemical writings Ockham makes much use of the idea of Natural Law,[128] whereas in his theological writings (it is said) he bases morality on divine command.[129] But in

126. A social body is a collection of persons. "The [Franciscan] Order is not 'an imaginary and represented person', but it is true and real persons, though it is not one person; just as the Church, or the congregation of the faithful, though it is not a unique person, is many true and real persons, because it is the mystical body of Christ, which is true persons"; CB p.191. (Notice the singular verbs.)

127. WND 6.413ff, pp.150-1; 62.206ff, pp.428-31; CB 1.8, pp.189-92. Cf. Miethke, *Ockhams Weg zur Sozialphilosophie*, pp.502-16. See also Pelletier. (That the Church can act as a unity does not imply that the pope or a general council acts *infallibly* on behalf of the Church; below, p.380.)

128. See LFMOW, p.376, index, "Natural law".

129. "That there is truth in the contention that two moral theories are implicit in Ockham's ethical teaching can hardly, I think, be denied"; Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 3.1, pp.118-9.

fact natural law does figure in his theological writings, and it is debatable whether he ever endorses a divine command theory of morality.[130] It seems to me that Ockham's post-Avignon works are consistent with, but do not depend on, his academic works.

On Heretics

Let us take a closer look now at Part 1 of the *Dialogus*, the first five books of which are translated in this volume. WND was an answer to John's answer to Michael of Cesena's appeal against certain bulls John had issued, with John's bulls, Michael's appeal and John's answer all being quoted in full. Ockham manages all this material with the skill of a practised scholastic, but WND is not easy to read. The *Dialogus* is organised much more informally as a long conversation in which a student questions a master on various matters. The Student is an assertive adult, perhaps a Bachelor of Theology. The work is the Student's idea, he prescribes its form, he puts the questions and decides when to move on.[131] He treats the Master as an expert witness under examination. He wants to know "what the learned think" about various topics in dispute.

The Student wants the Master to conceal his own identity[132] and to veil the identities of John XXII and certain others by referring to them by their initials. He wants the master to conceal his own opinion but to include it among the opinions reported. He wants the Master also to report answers to arguments given for the various opinions, not as being the Master's own answers, but as answers some people make or could make, including answers and

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130. See above, p.22.

131. Examples below, pp.95, 118, 146, 153, 167, 399, 401. The situation is pictured in a woodcut used as frontispiece to the 1495 edition, reproduced on the cover of Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages*, paperback edition, also on the Dialogus website, wock.html.

132. Was the *Dialogus* meant to be anonymous? (See above, p.26.) The Master is a fictional character, so concealing his name is not the same as concealing Ockham's name. But according to the (probably authentic) additional prologue, below, p.60, note 1, Ockham originally did intend to conceal his own name.

arguments that may be only plausible or even fallacious.[133] He wants the Master to avoid philosophical technicalities and to make the book as far as possible understandable to canon lawyers.[134] The Student describes himself as "a most sincere and zealous supporter of the same lord highest pontiff [John XXII] and a keen abominator of his opponents and their collaborators", and suggests that the Master must be too. Occasionally the Student firmly rejects some opinion we have reason to believe is Ockham's own opinion.[135] The Student is a proxy for the readers whose minds Ockham wants to change.[136]

At the end of 1 Dial. the Student looks back over what they have done:

> Assuming the *persona* of a reciter, you took care to acquiesce to my wishes, sometimes abbreviating the material being discussed, sometimes reciting false opinions and arguing firmly in support of them, sometimes responding to strong and probable reasons, sometimes leaving sophistical arguments unsolved, sometimes simply declaring truths without proving them; and your generosity applied to all the other issues which I raised. I have certainly found this [recitative] approach to be useful, because, as a result, the love or hatred of your person will not influence anybody either to support or to reject argumentatively any of the issues we have written about. This approach will rather give all readers food for thought. Indeed, I do believe that when these materials will be published, learned and intelligent men who possess zeal for truth and for the common good will respond both to their originality and their usefulness, by attempting to confirm the truths contained herein through manifest arguments and open witnesses of the Scriptures, and by studiously rejecting all the peripheral falsehoods.[137]

The prologue to 3.2 Dial. foreshadows something similar for that part of the *Dialogus*:

> ...experts who are lovers of what is just and useful will be stirred up to produce thoroughly researched works on the above matters… [In] this tract,

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133. Below, pp.107, 417.

134. See p.86.

135. E.g. pp.372, 380, 388, 399, 404, 416.

136. See p.63. Cf. the preliminary note in **WeFr** (below p.61, note 1): "Using in the person of the student many words from which it would seem possible to gather that the student was of the party altogether opposed to me and absolutely would not dare have communion with me...". For passages where the student represents himself as a supporter of John XXII see pp.209, 230, 307.

137. 1 Dial.7.73, trans. Knysh.

> as in the whole of this dialogue, we will not say anything except in reporting. Accordingly… you will report judgments or opinions that are true and false, solid and fantastical, and you should try to defend them pretty strongly. For often not only the assertion and explanation of truths, but also persuasive though sophistical arguments for false and fantastical judgments occasion advance in manifesting, publishing, and exalting the truth, both because they arouse the abilities of the studious, and because their unreasonableness makes the contrary truth shine out more clearly, since opposites placed side by side appear more clearly and truth hard pressed shines more into light,[138] and truth is made bright by questioning, opposing, disputing, and answering conflicting arguments.[139]

Can we know which opinions reported in the *Dialogus* are attributable to Ockham himself? With reference to another "recitative" work, *Octo quaestiones*, Professor Offler suggested that "it is possible to identify with tolerable certainty" Ockham's own opinion "by considering the relative weights of the arguments adduced for and against particular opinions and by comparison of these opinions with those supported or attacked by Ockham in those of his other polemical writings in which he did reveal his own standpoint [i.e. the "assertive" writings]."[140] For the *Dialogus*, I suggest that opinions can be attributed to Ockham if they are not refuted or strongly objected to in other passages, if they are consistent with opinions expressed in his "assertive" works, and if they support the purposes Ockham pursues in those works. The assertive writings most relevant to the interpretation of Part 1 of the *Dialogus* are CI (some chapters of which are translated below, p.421ff) and CB. (Both CI and CB were written later than 1 Dial., so it is possible that Ockham's position may have changed in some ways.) There may be additional clues: the Master sometimes explains with special care, the Student sometimes expresses surprise and asks for fuller explanation. On each of the questions discussed in the *Dialogus* the Master's own opinion, which is

138. Ockham often quotes the saying "truth hard pressed shines more into light" (*veritas exagitata magis splendescit in lucem*): below, p.308; WND prologue, p.47; SD pp.10, 45; CI c.14, below, p.451; CB 6.9 p.290.27. See Miethke, "Der 'Dialogus' Ockhams als Fiktion", p.719 note 46. The source is C.35 q.9 c.7, *Grave*, vol.1 col. 2455.

139. 3.2 Dial., prol., translated in LFMOW, pp.236-7.

140. OP vol.1, p.13.

presumably Ockham's, is one of those presented;[141] if only one opinion is presented (as is the case in much of 1 Dial. 4), it can be attributed to Ockham.

The following is a summary of what I believe Ockham hopes attentive readers will take away from the conversation.[142]

Book 1. Is it for theologians, or for canonists, to determine what is Catholic truth and what is heresy, who is a Catholic and who is a heretic? Answer: Theologians, chiefly. Theology is the study of truths God has revealed,[143] whereas canon law is made by human authorities, who must respect God's revelation and natural law (i.e. morality). Canon law is therefore "subalternated" to Theology and Moral Philosophy. Defining which propositions are heresies and which persons are heretics, defining pertinacity and recognising which persons are pertinacious in heresy, and understanding deeply and evaluating the rules and procedures for convicting and punishing heretics, are the concerns primarily not of canonists but of theologians and moral philosophers.

Book 1 establishes the legitimacy of the theological inquiry carried on in the rest of 1 Dial. (For another, "assertive", argument to this effect see the first book of *Short Discourse*.)

Books 2 and 3 define heresy and heretics.

Book 2. Which assertions are Catholic, which heretical? Answer: Catholic truths include everything the Church teaches, which includes everything in the Bible and some other things besides. The Church cannot fall into heresy ("I will be with you all days", Matthew 28:20); it would be heresy to teach as Catholic truth anything that is not Catholic truth; but the Church teaches as Catholic truth some things not found in the Bible; therefore Catholic truth must include some things not found in the Bible. There are in fact five kinds of truths that Catholics may not reject (below, p.113) and correspondingly five kinds of "deadly errors" (p.134). Decisions of popes and councils when rightly made are based on truths of three of the five kinds (p.114), namely truths of Scripture, Apostolic tradition and possible new revelations attested by miracle (p.153). A pope cannot add new Catholic truths, because Catholic faith does not depend on human wisdom or will but only on divine

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141. Below, p.62. Cf. Knysh, *Fragments of Ockham Hermeneutics,* p.72.

142. On the Dialogus website, at 1d1-5Analysis.html, there is a summary of the argument of 1 Dial. 1-5, with hyperlinks to parallel Latin text and English translation. There are similar analyses of other parts of the *Dialogus*.

143. There is a broader sense of the term, according to which theology is the study of every truth that must be believed for salvation, Qdl.5 q.1 a.2, OTh IX, p.476/516 (translated QQ, p.397). In yet another sense, theology is the study of God, carried on partly in Metaphysics.

revelation (1 Cor. 2:4-5). The writings of saints are not sure sources of Catholic truth, since the saints are sometimes wrong, as is proved by the fact that they sometimes contradict one another; their writings are approved by the Church in respect of everything that has not been corrected by the author or by others.

Heresy is any false doctrine contrary to Catholic truth. Every possible heresy has been condemned already, at least implicitly. Only a pope or a council can explicitly define truths and condemn heresies judicially. Bishops, inquisitors and other lower Church authorities cannot take judicial action against heresies not condemned explicitly by pope or council except by referring them to pope or council. (The pope or lower authorities can sometimes temporarily forbid the public defence of certain opinions even though they may not be heretical.) Individuals who do not have judicial authority, for example theology teachers, can condemn a heresy in the sense that they can characterise an opinion as heretical, but they cannot inflict any penalties (below, pp.65, 129).

Popes sometimes fail to condemn heresies taught by theologians. When this is excusable, it is because popes who are not theologians may not be able to decide difficult theological questions. "Better god-fearing doubt than rash definition." A pope should not condemn a doctrine unless he clearly sees for himself that it is heretical; he should not follow advice he does not understand (below, p.164). In questions of faith the pope should not rely on the consciences of men (1 Cor. 2:4-5) but only on divine authority, that is, on the Bible and the established teaching of the Church.

Book 3. Which errants count as heretics? Answer: baptized persons who hold some heresy pertinaciously. Not everyone who believes an heretical opinion is a heretic. Heretics are baptized persons who doubt or err against the Catholic faith *pertinaciously*. Catholics are those who believe every Catholic truth at least implicitly (e.g. by believing that everything the Catholic Church teaches is true[144]) and do not pertinaciously hold anything inconsistent with Catholic faith.[145] Many who believed that the Catholic faith is true have been condemned as heretics because they pertinaciously held something they did not realise was actually inconsistent with Catholic faith.[146] Some saints (e.g. Augustine, Jerome, Cyprian) have erred but have not been regarded as heretics because they were not pertinacious in error. Those who "seek truth with careful solicitude, ready to be corrected when they find it, are not to be counted among the heretics" (Augustine). It should be presumed that people are ready to be corrected unless it is clear that they

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144. Elsewhere (CI, below, p.426) Ockham says that it is not enough to explicitly believe *only* that whatever the Catholic Church teaches is true: a Catholic must also believe some other Catholic truths, at least those that are generally believed even by uneducated Catholics.

145. Pertinacity may be not a permanent disposition but only a matter of present intention. See below, p.224.

146. Thus one may be a heretic unknowingly. See below, p.214.

are not.

Up to this point, Ockham's account of heresy and heretics is not much different from that of Thomas Aquinas;[147] this is not surprising, since they both rely chiefly on texts of Augustine quoted in Gratian's *Decretum*. But in Book 4 Ockham offers an apparently novel account of the signs of pertinacity, an account that seems to have had some influence in later Catholic thinking;[148] it is at any rate not inconsistent with Catholic tradition. This account lays a foundation for a discussion in Book 5 of papal heresy, which the chief topic of the rest of 1 Dial.

Book 4. How can pertinacity be recognised? Pertinacity is a state of mind that can be inferred, though fallibly,[149] from certain external signs. If a person rejects the Christian faith, or rejects all or part of the Bible, or holds that the Church has erred, or denies a truth he is presumed to know the Church teaches, or rejects a Catholic truth he had previously accepted as Catholic truth, then he can be regarded as a heretic immediately without further examination (i.e. without dialogue to find out whether he is ready to be corrected) — unless it seems possible that he acted in fear of death or torture or can prove (e.g. by oath) that he was in fact ignorant of something Catholics are presumed to know. If a person who errs is "legitimately corrected" — i.e. if it is shown clearly to him (e.g. by showing him a relevant text of the Bible), in a way suited to his education and understanding, that his opinion conflicts with Catholic truth — but he still holds to his opinion, then he is pertinacious and a heretic.[150] The "bare admonition of a prelate",[151] i.e. the bare say-so of some person in authority, without an explanation suited to the person's capacity, does not oblige anyone to abandon an opinion, even if it is actually heretical, because faith does not rest on human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:4-5). A person not yet legitimately corrected may defend what is in fact a heresy a thousand times even before the pope himself (below, p.258) without being pertinacious or a heretic. On the other hand, a prelate legitimately corrected by a layperson must retract his heresy: with respect to being bound to put aside a heresy it does not matter who shows that the opinion is a heresy. (It does matter in other

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147. Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages*, pp.77-80; Kilcullen, "Medieval Concept of Heresy".

148. Mann, "William of Ockham, Juan de Segovia, and Heretical Pertinacity".

149. Hence Ockham always writes "should be regarded as a heretic", or "is called a heretic", not "*is* a heretic".

150. On fraternal correction and legitimate correction see Shogimen, *Discourse*, c.3.

151. *Praelatus* is the perfect passive participle of the verb *praeferre*, which (in some contexts) means to make someone superior to others; cf. "preferment".

respects, below, p.129.)

Attempts to impose heretical doctrines on others also indicate pertinacity. A person can be regarded as a heretic, without further examination, if he tries to force others by commands, threats, punishments, promises, oaths, or in any other way, to defend a heresy pertinaciously, or if he forces someone to deny Catholic truth, or swears that he will always assert as Catholic an assertion which in fact is heretical, or persecutes defenders of Catholic truth, or errs against Catholic truth and refuses to submit to correction and amendment by those whose concern it is (e.g. a pope who teaches some heresy and prevents the holding of a Council), or refuses to be instructed though the learned censure his statement as heretical, or shows by deeds or words that he will not retract an assertion which is heretical, or prevents reading of Catholic writings or preaching or publication of Catholic truths, or fabricates and defends new errors in defence of heresy, or, purporting to be pope, solemnly defines an error against the faith, or supports someone purporting to be pope in defining a heresy. In short, the pope and other Church authorities (and this is true also of persons without authority) must not try to impose false beliefs[152] as Catholic truth. If they do try to impose any belief that is not Catholic truth, then, without further examination, they can be judged to be heretics, and as heretics they are incapable of office in the Church.

Ockham goes on in Book 5 to develop what seems to be a new account of the Christian faith community. A crucial aspect of his theory, viz. that every Catholic is fallible, was not accepted by later Catholics, who hold that, under certain circumstances, God will ensure that a pope or general Council will not define a doctrine as Catholic truth if it is in fact an error.[153]

Book 5. Who can become a heretic? Answer: any Catholic may become a heretic. The pope, all the cardinals, the church of Rome, a general council, all the clergy, all the laity, may become heretics — but not everyone at once. Christ's promise to be with his Church all days until the last day (Matthew 28:20) guarantees only that there will always be at least *one* individual in the Church who will speak up against an error being proclaimed as Catholic truth. No individual Christian, no sub-set of Christians, is infallible, i.e. incapable of religious error, but Christ's promise guarantees that Christians

152. Or, according to some people, even true beliefs if they are not Catholic truths, p.147.

153. Both Ockham and modern Catholics hold that God will not necessarily intervene in any special way in the process of theological research and consultation leading to a doctrinal decision, but if some error survives to the point of general acceptance, God will intervene in some way: modern Catholics would say, to make sure the pope or council does not define an error; Ockham would say, to make sure that not every Catholic acquiesces in the teaching of this error as Catholic truth. Cf. Kilcullen, "Ockham and Infallibility".

will not all err simultaneously. The Church may therefore go largely astray, with only one or a few individuals trying to bring it back to the truth. We cannot know whether unbelievers will capture Rome and hold it until the last day, or whether Roman Christians will all become Muslims or follow the anti-Christ. The future is known only to God and those (if any) to whom he reveals it. Christ has promised that the faith will persist until the last day, but at some future time it may survive only in a few scattered Christians hiding in lands ruled by unbelievers.

In a lengthy digression Master and Student discuss theses put forward by Marsilius of Padua (who is not named or quoted). The Master reports that some say that (1) Peter did not by Christ's decree have rule over the other Apostles and (2) was never bishop of Rome; (3) it was by a decision of the Apostles that Peter acquired primacy over them. (4) No priest has by Christ's decree any power over other priests. (5) Before the Emperor Constantine the church of Rome did not have rule over other churches but acquired it from Constantine. The discussion surveys the arguments for and against these theses. Later, in 3.1 Dial., Ockham returns to the views of Marsilius for a more thorough discussion. The position of Marsilius is rejected: Christ did give Peter and his successors headship in the Church.

How does the argument of 1 Dial. advance Ockham's overall project (above, p.31) of removing the heretic pope? According to canon law (dist. 40 c.6), "A pope is to be judged by no one, unless he is found to deviate from the faith". This text implied that a pope could deviate from the faith (there were several examples, which Master and Student discuss below, p.288), and it implied that, if he did deviate, someone could judge him. But canon law seemed to provide no procedure for judging and removing a heretic pope. The problem had been discussed by the canonist Huguccio, and Ockham took over and modified Huguccio's solution.[154] Any Catholic, without having or claiming judicial authority (below, p.92), can judge that the pope has in fact become a heretic and that therefore, *by that fact, and by virtue of the divine law itself,* i.e.

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154. See Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*, pp.62-6; Tierney, "Ockham, the Conciliar Theory, and the Canonists", pp.47-62. Ockham does not adopt Huguccio's requirement that the pope's heresy must be one already explicitly condemned: according to Ockham, implicit condemnation is enough, and all heresies have already been condemned implicitly by the canon *Excommunicamus* (below, p.136ff). This means that anyone can judge (non-judicially) concerning new heresies.

without needing action by a court or any human authority, he has ceased to be pope.[155] Then, if those who have made this judgment can mobilise enough power, they can declare that this man is a heretic and remove him from office. Since he is no longer pope, in fact no longer a member of the Church, he may be judged and removed by any Catholic who has the power.[156] A heretic may repent,[157] but repentance does not restore a person to the papal office after he has lost it by becoming a heretic — a heretic pope who returned to orthodoxy could not become pope again except by being elected again. To justify deposition, therefore, it is enough to show that *at some time* the pope pertinaciously asserted a heresy, even if he may since have retracted. The beginning of this process is an accusation by someone (anyone) that the pope is a heretic. If the accuser is apparently not motivated by malice, then other Christians should pay attention and investigate, and they should defend the accuser unless and until it appears that the accusation is false and malicious.[158] The task of 1 Dial. 5 is to show that even a pope, in fact anyone, may become a heretic. The task of 1 Dial. 1-4 is to explain how to decide that a person is a heretic. The task of 1 Dial. 6 and 7 is to explain how people who do not yet know that the pope is a heretic should respond when an accusation is made and what they should do if convinced.

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155. See p.302. Cf. CB 7.1-5, pp.303-8.

156. The deposition of a heretic pope is discussed "recitatively" in 1 Dial. 6 (not translated in this volume), and more briefly and "assertively" in CB Book 7. See CB 7.8-11, pp.311-317. Ockham remarks: "The [canon] laws establish explicitly that a pope can be accused of heresy, but they do not expressly discuss *before whom* he should or can be accused of heresy". He offers his own answer "saving a better opinion". He suggests a sequence of possible judges, later members of the sequence acting if the earlier are unwilling or unable to act: a heretic pope can be accused before the bishop in whose diocese he is staying, or before the metropolitan or primate of the province; or, if the clergy cannot or will not act, before the Emperor or other secular ruler or the laity. "The orthodox laity can supply the defect of the clergy... for otherwise the Church in its necessities would not be sufficiently provided for"; p.313.18-20. The laity need not wait until the clergy ask them to take action. The lay rulers are not beasts, unable to understand Catholic truth explained to them by experts. "For often a learner, because of clearer judgment of intellect or reason, understands what he hears better and more deeply than the teacher"; p.316.25-32. Ockham is perhaps remembering his own student days!

157. No one is absolutely incorrigible, p.224. Cf. CB 7.14, p.321.21ff.

158. See 1 Dial. 6:37-54 (translated Knysh, on the Dialogus website t1d6c.html).

John XXII had tried to impose heretical opinions coercively, including opinions contrary to Catholic truths recognised as such throughout the Church. The dissident Franciscans, on the other hand, coerced no one. Even if they were mistaken in their opinions, they would not be heretics as long as they remained genuinely open to correction. No one could judge that they were heretics without attempting "legitimate correction", which would require discussion, thereby giving them an opportunity to show that their opinions were correct. This is the argumentative strategy of the book: to show that, if John's doctrines are heretical, then he is pertinacious and a heretic, whereas the dissident Franciscans are not heretics even if they are wrong, and other Christians should consider their accusations even if at first they do not seem correct.

Ockham's vision of Christian Life

In the course of 1 Dial. we get a picture of Christian life as Ockham imagined it.[159] Ockham writes from a conviction that John XXII had become a heretic, but he does not suggest that Christians need normally be much concerned about becoming heretics. Not to become a heretic is, on Ockham's account, quite easy: it is enough not to try to impose one's opinions coercively on others and to be willing to listen and learn. The most usual way of learning the Christian faith is by listening to the Christians among whom one lives. A Christian normally learns from family, friends and neighbours that the Christian faith is the true faith, that the Christian faith is what is taught by the Church, that everything contained in the Bible is true, that the whole Church will never fall into heresy (though some may not have heard this, below, p.227), that Christ was crucified and rose again, and so on (p.229). The Bible and the teaching of the whole Church are the "rule" of

159. See Shogimen, *Discourse,* c.3.

faith[160] by which errors are corrected. If someone brought up as a Catholic comes to suspect that some widespread belief is wrong (as it may be, if the belief is not *absolutely* universal), he or she should check the Bible and determinations of the Church (bearing in mind that the Bible is often difficult to interpret and that what purports to be an official determination of the Church may not be). However, Christians cannot disregard common Christian belief and believe only what they know to be in the Bible and the official determinations of the Church (p.233); they should continue to believe what Catholics around them believe unless and until they ascertain that that belief is mistaken.

Some Catholics need to be more learned than others. For example, theologians should know more than laypeople. There is no single body of knowledge that every expert theologian or Church official must know; it depends on their role and their circumstances, including the training they have actually had. Experts can make honest mistakes: Jerome erred because he did not remember something in the Gospel according to Luke (p.251), though he had translated it himself. All Catholics, expert or lay, must believe anything they do know to be Catholic truth — e.g. if they happen to find it in the Bible — even if it has not been solemnly defined by a pope or council, even if it is not commonly known, even if it seems unimportant.[161] Christians cannot, without ceasing to be Christians, suspect that the Bible is wrong, though they can suspect a mistake in text transmission, translation or interpretation. A Catholic who suspects that some purported determination by pope or council is wrong (as it may be) can check it against the Bible and other determinations, and also against the universal belief of the present generation or some previous generation of

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160. At p.233 it is said that the rule of faith is the Bible. In other places the teaching of the universal Church is mentioned along with the Bible: pp.139, 177, 227, 335. In CI Ockham says that "sacred Scripture and the teaching of the universal Church, which cannot err, are the rule of our faith" (CI, below p.466).

161. Anyone who happens to read in the Bible that Bilhah was the mother of Dan (Genesis 35:25) is then obliged to believe it explicitly (unless he forgets); CI, below, p.432.

Christians — since Christ has promised that all Christians will not err simultaneously, complete unanimity at any period[162] can be taken as proof that the belief is derived from one of the sources of Catholic truth (namely the Bible, apostolic tradition or some other divine revelation), even if its source cannot now be traced.[163] In all such investigations it is permissible to state, argue for, and defend one's conclusions, as long as one does not try to impose them on others and remains ready to be corrected by others. Being mistaken does not make a person a heretic.

The account of the Church that transpires is as follows. The Church is the congregation of believers, forming an ordered whole, with Christ as head and (normally) the pope as head on earth. The members of the Church include some, perhaps many, who, unknowingly and without pertinacity, believe some things that are in fact heretical. Theologians have the special role of advancing understanding of the faith; they cannot, normally, be silenced or obstructed by Church officials and canon lawyers.[164] Theologians are entitled to inquire freely and say what they think as long as

162. Not only the Church through the ages, but also the Church of the day, cannot in all its members fall into any error: "When he says that he would not believe the gospel [unless he believed the Church] Augustine ... speaks of the Church that includes the apostles, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, and all supreme pontiffs and other orthodox bishops and Catholic peoples who succeed one another [down to the present day]… This Church, which includes all of those, is somehow of greater authority than any gospel writer, because the whole is greater than its part. ... *It must be noted, however,* that although no Church living at the same time in this mortal life [*quae simul vixit in hac vita mortali,* i.e. no Church of any "day"] after the apostles' time is of greater authority than the gospel [cf. CI, below, p.457], nevertheless the whole Church in every one of its members cannot err against the faith, because of Christ's promise (Matthew 28:20), 'I am with you *all days*, until the end of the age'. And therefore whatever the whole congregation of the faithful with no exceptions believes is to be held without doubt, because *the whole congregation of the faithful living together in this mortal life at the same time cannot err*"; CB 4.10, pp.260-1, emphasis added.

163. A clear teaching of the Universal Church must be believed even if it seems to contradict the Bible text. In such a case one must suppose that the Bible text is corrupt, that the translation is faulty, or that one does not understand it. See CI, below, p.467.

164. Ockham regarded Benedict XII as a heretic because of his assertion that once a question of faith is referred to the pope no one should make any statement on it until the pope issues his decision: CB 4.2, pp.244-5; CE 7.272-314, pp.75-6; PEP, p.168. "Concerning many questions of faith those learned in sacred letters can be certain of Catholic truth, notwithstanding the question or doubt of anyone else whomsoever" CB 4.3, p.250.4-6; cf. CB 4.3, pp.246.3-12, 247.35-9. Although those who know need not be silent until the pope decides, they cannot act judicially against heresy until the pope (or a general council) decides; CB 4.13, p.263.27-35.

they do not try to impose heretical views on others, as long as they are ready to be corrected, and as long as they do not cause scandal in the Church (i.e. undermine the faith of other Christians — if that is happening, bishops can impose a temporary pause on theological discussion). Theological inquiry is also permitted to the pope and other prelates; a pope who makes a mistake, if he does not try to impose his opinions or show pertinacity in other ways, is not a heretic and does not lose office (p.302). Not only theologians and prelates but all believers, men and women, including the unlearned, are entitled to inquire and say what they think. Members of the Church learn from and teach one another.

There are various special roles within the Christian community. Some have a professional teaching role, in which they are expected to think boldly and deeply; they will sometimes make mistakes, as any Christian may. Some members of the Church are prelates, who have various functions — administration, making the body of Christ, conferring the sacraments, teaching, etc.[165] Bishops, inquisitors, pope and councils have power to punish heretics, for example by excommunication. Bodily penalties can also be inflicted; Ockham does not challenge this, though he strongly criticises the practice of the inquisitors.[166] Church authorities may temporarily, if there is a good reason, forbid public advocacy of some doctrine, even if it may be true (p.172). If some heresy is newly asserted, lower authorities cannot take judicial action against its proponents; they must refer suspected newly-asserted heresies to the pope, who should in difficult cases convene a council; pope and council have authority to explicitly define truths and condemn heresies, though they are not infallible. The fact that they can be mistaken does not mean that they cannot exercise authority while they are not actually mistaken (p.313). Popes and Councils should not attempt to determine every question; better

165. Cf. PEP, p.101.

166. Inquisitors often do not make allowance for innocent mistakes; they often proceed unfairly and unjustly, being ignorant and blinded by greed, pp.252, 260.

god-fearing doubt than rash definition (pp.163, 390). Any Christian may, and should, correct the mistakes of prelates by explaining their mistake to them and may appeal to other authorities. Even a single person may be right, as in the case of Paphnutius at the Council of Nicaea, who held the correct opinion at first alone but eventually convinced the Council (p.171). Appeal is never exhausted, a mistake is always subject to correction.

But justice may not be done in this world. Innocent people may be condemned as heretics; they may have to put up with the injustice, confident that God will judge them justly. Heretics or unbelievers may take over positions of power in Church and state; true believers can try to remove them, but they may have to protect themselves by flight or by force, or they may have to suffer patiently.[167] Europe may not always be Christian. There is no guarantee that Christians will always be safe. The day may come when Saracens or other unbelievers rule Europe and Christians are a scattered few (pp.415, 416). Anti-Christ will come one day (p.416).

A feature of this conception of the Church that may seem surprising is that there is a good deal of redundancy and substitutability. Not only the pope but also a Council can rule on questions of faith, and any Christian can correct a mistake made by pope or Council. Appeal can be made repeatedly in any of several forums (pp.391, 392). One member can perform functions that usually belong to another. God can intervene miraculously at any time. There is a similar redundancy in Ockham's conception of the state,[168] according to which there is no absolutely final authority with a monopoly of power, and on occasion one member may

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167. See pp.259, 389, 391. On running away see PEP, p.70.

168. Some of the distinctive features of Ockham's conception of the state are sketched already at p.346, in opposition to ideas apparently derived from Marsilius. For more on Ockham's political theory see p.1 above, note 1.

carry out functions that normally belong to another.[169] Such multiplicity is in fact compatible with the so-called "razor" (p.17), since the multifarious means of correcting error are either specified by revelation[170] or justified by experience. They serve the survival and well-being of an institution composed of fallible and imperfect individuals.

The Church does not include any infallible official or body. Ockham's interpretation of Matthew 28:30, "I will be with you all days", is distinctive and fundamental to his view of the Church: any individual or body within the Church may fall into error or heresy, but it will never happen that all members of the Church err at the same time. (See his explanation below, p.317). Matthew 28:30 had never before, as far as I know, been interpreted in this way, and Ockham's interpretation has not been generally adopted.[171] Did Christ's promise really mean as little as this, that at least one person would avoid error? Need it mean as much — what if all Catholics erred (not pertinaciously), but a book survived somewhere from which the truth might be re-discovered (cf. 2/4 Kings 22:8-13)?

Ockham and Liberalism

At the beginning of this Introduction I suggested that in his

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169. "Just as, in a natural body, when one member is defective, another member, if it can in any way, supplies the defect of the former -- for one who cannot walk on his feet otherwise crawls or rolls, and one who cannot use his hand takes the food he needs with his mouth from the ground or other place, as he can, and because he cannot cut his bread with a knife he tears it with his teeth, if he can -- so, in a mystical body and in a collective or in a corporation, if one is defective, another, if he has the natural ability, supplies his defect. For where there are no knights, rustics fight for the fatherland, if they can, and when men are lacking, women, if they can, defend the fatherland and themselves. So the pope and clergy, if the laity are deficient, ought to involve themselves in secular business necessary to the public good; from which, however, when these things can be carried forward as they should be by the laity, the clergy are bound to abstain"; OQ 8.6.50-62 (pp.200-1). Cf. 1.11.106-110 (p.48). See Bayley, "Pivotal Concepts in the Political Philosophy of William of Ockham".

170. Various Bible texts supported the headship of Peter (3.1 Dial.4; see on the Dialogus website 31Analysis.html#zq77). The role of Church councils could be supported from Acts 15.

171. Marsilius also interpreted Mt. 28:20 as a promise that the Church would never err, but took this to mean that a general council would not err: *Defensor pacis*, II.xix.2 (pp.360-1).

polemical writings Ockham contributed to what we would now describe as a liberal social philosopy, and, in particular, that in "On Heretics" he argued for a measure of freedom of thought and freedom of speech.[172] Some have suggested that he was an advocate of toleration.[173] The terms "Toleration", "Liberalism", "The Open Society" are contested. "Ordinary language" analysis does not help much. These terms need to be understood historically. They are labels, not necessarily quite appropriate, affixed to bundles of norms amounting to a complex peace treaty that emerged from religious, political and ethical conflicts that took place over several centuries.[174] As we read medieval texts these normative conceptions may prompt reactions, perhaps half-conscious, of approval or disapproval. We may like some of Ockham's positions, for example, that if you keep an open mind you will not be a heretic even if your opinion is wrong; but on the other hand we notice that Ockham accepts that those who are heretics should be excommunicated and punished — mildly by the Church, perhaps severely by the State. We notice also that Ockham believes that bishops and popes should watch out for and eradicate heresy. We may like Ockham's argument that no individual or group is infallible, but perhaps not his opinion that Church and university authorities should silence a discussion (temporarily) if it may cause some Christians to fall into heresy. We notice that Ockham does not imagine that Europe will always be Christian, but also that he does not envisage a harmoniously multicultural society. Modern readers may be prepared to overlook some of the things that seem illiberal, reflecting that after all Ockham was a medieval friar. But instead of this vague tolerance, it would be better to try to understand the changes in thinking that led from where he was in the fourteenth century to where we are

172. Ockham makes other contributions to liberal thought in his other writings, some of which are translated in LFMOW.

173. Cf. Shogimen, "William of Ockham and Medieval Discourses on Toleration".

174. See Kilcullen, "Reciprocity arguments for toleration", section 5, *Sincerity and Truth,* pp.126-129. See pp.109-110 for criticism of a common analysis of "toleration".

now. Notable contributors to this process included Locke, Bayle and J.S. Mill.

One change was in thinking about what is a person's duty in matters of belief. Medieval theologians generally held that religious belief is a matter of choice. They held that, at least if there is not enough evidence to compel belief, a person can, from some motive other than evidence, decide to believe by an act of will; that the choice to believe the Christian faith in the absence of compelling evidence is a meritorious choice; that in becoming a Christian the believer promises to continue to believe and live as a Christian; and that the promise can rightly be enforced by the Christian community to whom it was made.[175] The newer view was that belief is never a matter of choice and misbelief is therefore not culpable; there can therefore be no duty to believe or to continue to believe, and there is no enforceable promise. The duty, if there is one, is not to believe but to inquire. According to Bayle, we ought to inquire as much as we believe we ought, and inquiry may change our belief; if we do what at the time we believe we should or may do, our action will be right, and even praiseworthy, even if our belief is wrong.[176] Whereas Ockham thought that theological experts could judge (though fallibly) whether errants who had been "legitimately corrected" had been shown their error sufficiently (below, p.258), Bayle[177] and Locke[178] believed that no human being could judge whether another person had inquired properly.

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175. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, ST 2-2 q.2; q.10 a.8.

176. "[A]n Action done in consequence of a false Persuasion, is as good as if done in consequence of a true and firm Persuasion... On the other hand, an Action done against a false Persuasion is as sinful as if done against a true Persuasion"; Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, p.234.

177. "We have not the gift of searching the heart, and we ought to suppose that a man is not convinced of his error as long as he protests he is not: and whatever conjectures we may have to the contrary, we have no right to act by him according to our conjectures"; Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pp.368-9.

178. "I imagine it is beyond the power or judgment of man, in that variety of circumstances, in respect of parts, tempers, opportunities, helps, etc. men are in, in this world, to determine what is everyone's duty in this great business of search, inquiry, examination; or to know when anyone has done it"; Locke, *A Second Letter Concerning Toleration*, pp.103-4.

Another change was in opinion about who has the right to coerce, and for what purposes. A common medieval view was that the secular ruler is not the only authority with a right to coerce; they believed that Church has an independent power to enforce its own laws on its members, and that that a Christian secular ruler should enforce the judgments of the Church.[179] A different opinion was put forward by Marsilius of Padua. According to him, only the secular ruler, or someone authorised by the secular ruler, has any right to coerce; and the secular ruler cannot coercively enforce religious law as such, since Christ wills that divine law should be enforced only in the afterlife, to give every opportunity for repentance before death.[180] A similar position was widely adopted in the seventeeth century, for example by Locke and Bayle. According to Locke, only the secular ruler can coerce, and the only legitimate purpose of coercion is to protect this-worldly interests; no human being has any right to enforce religious rules.[181] Bayle argues that if we suppose that God has commanded rulers to enforce the true religion, rulers will be obliged to enforce the religion *they believe* to be true, and they will do no wrong even if their religion is in fact not true: given the diversity of religious opinion and the difficulty of resolving differences of opinion, attempts to obey this supposed command will lead to wars of religion. Since God foresees everything that will ever happen, he must have foreseen that such a command would have this consequence, and God would therefore be responsible for all this suffering: which is unthinkable. It must be, therefore, that God never issued any such command. This leaves the ordinary rules of morality to govern human relationships, and those rules forbid

179. See Lateran IV, Canon 3, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1215-1215,_Concilium_Lateranum_IIII,_Documenta_Omnia,_EN.pdf. The Church did not claim a right to compel unbelievers to become believers. “For what business is it of mine to judge those outside?” (1 Cor. 5:12).

180. Marsilius, *Defensor pacis*, pp.233-4. According to Marsilius, a secular ruler can enforce a rule that happens to be a law of some religion, if there are this-worldly reasons for doing so. For such reasons a ruler can exile heretics and unbelievers.

181. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, pp.10-13; *A Third Letter for Toleration*, p.212.

coercion except for the enforcement of "political" laws.[182]

The third change, or set of changes, the last I will mention, is in the circumstances of public debate. Many kinds of experts, including theologians, have a reduced authority, and people not socially recognised as experts are these days quite likely to contest the opinions of the recognised experts. Church authorities, and also (in most countries, in most subjects) other authorities, can no longer silence or restrict public discussion, and if they try to do so liberal opinion will condemn the attempt.

For J.S. Mill, as for Ockham, no one is infallible. According to Mill, "All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility."

> The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. (*On Liberty*, p.229)

> [I]f the lists are kept open, we may hope that if there be a better truth, it will be found when the human mind is capable of receiving it; and in the meantime we may rely on having attained such approach to truth, as is possible in our own day. This is the amount of certainty attainable by a fallible being, and this the sole way of attaining it. (*On Liberty*, p.232)

But just as Ockham sees a role for experts, so Mill acknowledges that we all need to defer sometimes to expert authority,[183] since we do not have time to hear and assess every opinion on every subject we need to think about:

> It is, without doubt, the necessary condition of mankind to receive most of their opinions on the authority of those who have specially studied the matters to which they relate. The wisest can act on no other rule, on subjects

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182. See "Introduction" to Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pp.xvi-xxi. J.S. Mill also argued for a similar restriction, in terms of broader conceptions of sanctions and norms. According to Mill, only socially recognised duties *to others,* and not duties to self, can rightly be enforced by sanctions of any kind; Kilcullen, "Mill on Duty and Liberty".

183. See Friedman, "An Introduction to Mill's Theory of Authority" and "A New Exploration of Mill's Essay *On Liberty*".

with which they are not themselves thoroughly conversant.[184]

Mill distinguished between "organic" and "transitional" periods in social history. In an organic period all or most of the special students of socially-important subjects agree with one another, and the multitude willingly follow their lead. In a transitional period the special students disagree, and the multitude are left without clear guidance. Even in an organic period the lists are kept open, in the sense that anyone can freely challenge the experts' opinion (though they may not get a serious hearing).[185] Mill believed that in his day practical unanimity had been achieved among experts in the physical sciences, but not in other fields of inquiry. He hoped that the social transition he believed to be happening would lead to another organic period, in which the truths of economics and political philosophy would be presented to the multitude by an educated class as united in their opinion as astronomers are (or were, in Mill's time) on questions of astronomy. Democracy, in his view, can be a rational form of government only if voters show deference to experts.[186]

Mill assumed that the special students of a subject were a known

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184. Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, p. 313. "[T]he great majority of mankind will need the far greater part of their time and exertions for procuring their daily bread.… Those persons whom the circumstances of society, and their own position in it, permit to dedicate themselves to the investigation and study of physical, moral, and social truths, as their peculiar calling, can alone be expected to make the evidences of such truths a subject of profound meditation, and to make themselves thorough masters of the philosophical grounds of those opinions of which it is desirable that all should be firmly persuaded, but which they alone can entirely and philosophically know. The remainder of mankind must, and, except in periods of transition like the present, always do, take the far greater part of their opinions on all extensive subjects upon the authority of those who have studied them"; *Spirit of the Age*, pp.241-2.

185. "We never hear of the right of private judgment in physical science; yet it exists; for what is there to prevent anyone from denying every proposition in natural philosophy, if he be so minded? The physical sciences however have been brought to so advanced a stage of improvement by a series of great men...The compact mass of authority thus created overawes the minds of the uninformed: and if here and there a wrong-headed individual... impugns Newton's discoveries,... he is not regarded.... In [the moral and social] sciences this imposing unanimity among all who have studied the subject does not exist; and every dabbler, consequently, thinks his opinion as good as another's;" Mill, *The Spirit of the Age*, pp.239-40.

186. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, pp.506, 508, 512; Mill, *Essays on Politics and Society Part 2*, Appendix B, pp.650-53.

few; the difficulty was for those individuals to achieve consensus. In our time there are the traditional experts, for example in universities, who are equivalent to Mill's known few. There are also what we might call "popular" experts. If when I do my own research I generally end up agreeing with you, I may come to regard you as a trustworthy guide, and I may also follow people you recommend as guides. If the people you and I trust come to be trusted widely, they may emerge as popular experts. Rival experts may emerge, trusted by other sets of people. The popular experts may not belong to the traditional colleges of experts. In our time in many socially-important fields there are competing sets of experts, some belonging to the traditional colleges, some not. Consensus seems a long way off.

Ockham imagined the Christian community as being on a disciplined journey together toward deeper understanding of Catholic truth. There were scouts out ahead, working especially in the universities, exploring new questions and new ideas; there were community leaders — senior academics, bishops, popes, general councils and other bodies — who considered the new ideas, sometimes rejecting them, sometimes endorsing them, sometimes letting discussion continue unrestricted, at other times ruling that a certain discussion should be adjourned for the time being. All the participants are fallible, but if discussion among Christians reaches absolute unanimity, then according to Ockham the outcome must be correct. But in Ockham's time (if not before) the disciplined community started to break up. There was a great schism (1378-1417), with rival popes and rival colleges of cardinals. Some theologians alleged that heresy (especially "Pelagianism") had become widespread in the Church. Secular rulers took sides and backed rival religious leaders in wars of religion. In the universities, and also outside the universities, philosophers and scientists built up new conceptions of the universe in which the Christian God had no place. At least since

the fourteenth century Europe has been in a transitional state from which an organic state has never emerged; perhaps islands or continents of consensus have emerged in some places at some times, but they have often broken up again. No missionaries from a superior culture have come to tell us "something more certain". It seems that the best we can do is to think critically for ourselves and try to identify people whose advice we think we can trust, provisionally and to some extent.

Medieval academic culture took from the Greek philosophers and handed down to modern times the practice of serious critical inquiry. From the medieval universities we can learn to question boldly, to look for new answers, to develop arguments thoroughly, to criticise in detail, and we can, as they did, try to improve the institutions and practices that facilitate such discussion — now not only in schools and universities but in all the institutions and networks through which complex modern societies develop opinions and policies. From Ockham *On Heretics* we can perhaps learn that we must give a hearing (on appropriate occasions)[187] to people who seem to be wrong, we must be prepared to change our minds, and we must not to try to impose our opinions coercively on others.

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187. On the duty to seek truth "at an appropriate time and place" see above, p.28, note 92. See Kilcullen, "Ethics of Belief and Inquiry".