

This, it should seem, is not at all what has become the universally accepted account of this voluminous dispute—an account derived, it appears, from Bayle's Dictionary. The realistic schoolmen were not such dolts as to contend for an incognizable reality beyond any powers we have for apprehending it, nor for the existence of universals as the objects of general conceptions existing outside of the mind. They only contended (against the sceptical or nominalistic tendency) that reality, or the truth of things, depends on something besides the actual courses of experience in individual minds, or is independent of differences and accidents in these; and that truth is not determined by the conventions of language, or by what men choose to mean by their words. So far from being the reality commonly supposed—that is to say, the vivid, actual, present contact with things—the reality of the realists was the final upshot of experience, the general agreement in all experience, as far removed as possible from any particular body's sight; or hearing, or touch, or from the accidents which are inseparable from these. Yet it is essentially intelligible, and, in fact, is the very most intelligible, and is quite independent of conventions in language. The faith of the realists (for theirs was a philosophy of faith) was that this result of all men's experience would contain agreements not dependent on the laws and usages of language, but on truths which determine these laws and usages. Modern science affords ample evidence of the justness of this position.

—That this truly was the position of the realistic schoolmen, Mr. Peirce contends; and he bases his opinion and belief on an original examination of their works, such as has not, we venture to say, been undertaken, outside of Germany, for a very long time. In spite of the confirmation of this position which modern science gives, the course of the development of modern science has, nevertheless, as Mr. Peirce points out, been closely associated with the opposite doctrine—nominalism, the representative of the sceptical spirit. This appears in Berkeley's philosophy, who is a nominalist, notwithstanding his *penchant* for Platonic ideas or spiritual archetypes. Hume, a complete representative of the nominalistic and sceptical spirit, is an historical product of Berkeley's nominalism; and, though commonly regarded as the author of modern philosophical movements, was not, historically considered, so different from Berkeley but that Mr. Peirce regards the latter as entitled to "a far more important place in the history of philosophy than has usually been assigned to him." So far as Berkeley was a link in the chain, this is undoubtedly true. So far as Hume (in common with all independent thinkers of the sceptical type) was not such a link, he was, we think, a starting-point in the movement of thought which has resulted in English empiricism, or the so-called "Positivism" of modern science, which Mr. Peirce seems inclined to attribute to a regular development of philosophical thought. Scepticism, though perhaps never original, as we are taught by orthodoxy, and only a revival of old and the oft-exploded errors, is, nevertheless, by its criticism, the source of most of the impulses which the spirit of inquiry has received in the history of philosophy. The results of modern science, the establishment of a great body of undisputed truths, the questions settled beyond debate, may be testimony in favor of the realistic schoolmen; but this settlement was the work, so far as it depended on

the impulse of philosophy, of the nominalistic or sceptical tendencies of modern thought, which has put itself in opposition, not to the faith of the realists, as Mr. Peirce understands them, but to their conservatism and dogmatism, to their desire to agree with authority—that admirable devotion of theirs. It is curious that these things, the most certain of all on which the actual arts of life are now dependent, should be the results equally of the faith of the realists and the sceptical inquiries of the nominalists. But this is enough to account for the gratitude and the indifference which we owe to both of them, especially as the confirmation which science has afforded is not of the sort which the realists anticipated. It is the empirical conjectures of the visionary, not the inspired teachings of the wise, that have established realities for themselves and for truth in general. There are many other curious points of history and criticism in this article which will engage the scrutiny of the student of metaphysics, and doubtless afford him great delight. We are afraid to recommend it to other readers, as Mr. Peirce's style reflects the difficulties of the subject, and is better adapted for persons who have mastered these than for such as would rather avoid them.

13 (14 December 1871) 386

MR. PEIRCE AND THE REALISTS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: In your far too flattering notice of my remarks upon mediæval realism and nominalism, you have attributed to me a degree of originality which is not my due. The common view that realism is a modified Platonism has already been condemned by the most thorough students, such as Prantl and Morin. The realists certainly held (as I have said) that universals really exist in external things. The only feature of the controversy which has appeared to me to need more emphasis than has hitherto been put upon it is that each party had its own peculiar ideas of what it is that is real, the realists assuming that reality belongs to what is present to us in true knowledge of any sort, the nominalists assuming that the absolutely external causes of perception are the only realities. This point of disagreement was never argued out, for the reason that the mental horizon of each party was too limited for it to comprehend what the conception of the other side was. It is a similar narrowness of thought which makes it so hard for many persons to understand one side or the other, at this day. C. S. PEIRCE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., Dec. 10, 1871.