Naming Particulars:

A Thirteenth-Century Debate on Whether Individuals Have Proper Names

by Rachel Anna Bauder

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Department of the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto

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Thesis Abstract

This dissertation is about a debate that occurred in thirteenth-century philosophy over an apparently bizarre question: Can individuals really have proper names? While scholarly studies have appeared previously on philosophers in the fourteenth century who discussed this question (most notably John Buridan), I show that the question was widespread in the thirteenth century and involved many participants. Historically, I offer the first comprehensive account of how the thirteenth-century debate over the possibility of proper names arose. I argue that it was instigated by Michael Scot’s translation of the *Metaphysics* and perpetuated by tensions within the new Aristotelian metaphysical and cognitive theories of the 1230’s-1260’s. Philosophically, I offer a detailed analysis of the arguments on both sides of the question, presenting and explicating over 15 arguments for and against proper names, in texts by eight different philosophers: Richard Rufus of Cornwall, Adam Buckfield, Geoffrey of Aspall, Robert Kilwardby, Pseudo-Kilwardby, Roger Bacon, Siger of Brabant, and Richard of Clive.

The questions I ask are the following. First, how was it theoretically possible to doubt the nameability of individuals? To answer this question, I look at the medieval traditions in the language arts. Specifically, I argue that Boethius’s commentaries on Aristotle’s *Perihermeneias* provide criteria for what counts as a *nomen* or “name” in a philosophical sense, but those criteria specifically exclude words that might otherwise be regarded as *nomina* or “nouns” in a grammatical sense. Granting this distinction, I then ask the second question of the thesis: On what reasonable grounds might a philosopher think that a name of an individual is merely a
grammatical “noun” rather than a genuine philosophical “name”? Here the answer seems to be that individuals cannot be named as such because they cannot be understood as such. I investigate two broad motivations in the arguments: (a) human cognitive faculties are not equipped to grasp the individual as such, and (b) individuals are unknowable in themselves because they are composites of matter (which is unknowable) and form (which may be knowable, but which may also be common to many individuals).
The Naming of Cats

The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter,
It isn’t just one of your holiday games;
You may think at first I’m as mad as a hatter
When I tell you, a cat must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES.
First of all, there’s the name that the family use daily,
Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo, or James,
Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey —
All of them sensible everyday names.
There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter,
Some for the gentlemen, some for the dames:
Such as Plato, Admetus, Electra, Demeter —
But all of them sensible everyday names.
But I tell you, a cat needs a name that’s particular,
A name that’s peculiar, and more dignified,
Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular,
Or spread out his whiskers, or cherish his pride?
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum,
Such as Munkstrap, Quaxo, or Coricopat,
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum —
Names that never belong to more than one cat.
But above and beyond there’s still one name left over,
And that is the name that you never will guess;
The name that no human research can discover —
But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.
When you notice a cat in profound meditation,
The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:
His ineffable effable
Effanineffable
Deep and inscrutable singular Name.

~ T. S. Eliot, Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats (1939)
The naming of cats and the writing of dissertations are both difficult matters. Here I would like to thank the many people who have helped bring this dissertation, with all its difficulties, to completion. My supervisor Martin Pickavé provided inexhaustible guidance, expertise, and refinement at every stage of the thesis; and my committee members Peter King and Deborah Black gave me unvarying support. Special thanks go to John Magee for saving me from embarrassment regarding Boethius, and to Henrik Lagerlund for his invaluable insights as my external reader. Needless to say, any remaining errors are strictly my own.

Throughout the course of this project, several scholars shared transcriptions of unedited texts with me, some of which significantly altered the findings of my thesis. Many thanks to Alessandro Conti for passages from Kilwardby’s commentary on the *Isagoge*, Timothy Noone for q. 49 of Richard Clive’s *Metaphysics* commentary, and most of all Rega Wood for a wealth of material from Richard Rufus of Cornwall, without which this dissertation likely would not have materialized. I also thank Simona Vucu and Ian Drummond for their unwavering moral support and encouragement, along with my parents and my incomparable husband Wayne, without whom I probably would not have kept my sanity.

Given that this dissertation makes frequent reference to cats, it is a little surprising that I am not dedicating it to a cat. Rather, I am dedicating it to my twelve pet gerbils. It was their mutual indiscernibility that first made me take the main topic of this dissertation seriously. The gerbils I could not distinguish from each other never did receive proper names. In a somewhat practical spirit, therefore, I present this study on the reasons for which some philosophers in the thirteenth century thought that individuals cannot properly have their own names.
Sigla

CCSL  Corpus Christianorum Series Latina; Turnholt: Brepols, 1953-

CIMAGL  Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen-Âge Grec et Latin; Copenhagen: Saxo Institute, 1969-


E  Erfurt, Bibl. univ., Amploniana, Q.312


M  Madrid, Bibl. Univ. 73

PE  Cambridge, Peterhouse 206


PR  Prague, Archiv Prazeskeho Hradu 80


W  Worcester, Cathedral and Chapter Library, MS Q. 13

Note on Translations

All English translations of primary source material in this study are my own, unless otherwise noted.
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Introduction

This dissertation is about proper names and what made them interesting to philosophers in an age long before Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. It is the first comprehensive account of a debate that occurred in the thirteenth century over an apparently bizarre question: Can individuals really have their own names?

Problems with proper names are not unknown in philosophy, especially twentieth-century analytic philosophy. In the last hundred years, so many logical and linguistic conundrums have involved proper names that, although philosophers may still apply utterances like “Electra” or “Jellylorum” to their pet cats, no philosopher thinks these utterances are straightforward or easily explicable. Analytic philosophy’s preoccupation with proper names tends to involve puzzles over identity conditions and the epistemological constraints on name-users. Thus we find concerns over what it means to use “Electra” and “Jellylorum” in sentences about the same cat when the speaker does not know that it is the same cat; we worry about our ability to speak of Hodge, the favorite cat of Dr. Samuel Johnson, in the possible world where he was never owned by Dr. Johnson and was not called “Hodge”; and we wonder what happens to the name “Garfield” when Garfield goes out of existence, or if he never exists at all.

What contemporary philosophy has taken for granted, though, is that proper names are paradigmatic names.¹ Proper names may present us with problems, but they are the simplest kinds of names, and they provide the model of clarity to which more complex sorts of naming are to conform. The “more complex” sorts of naming in question tend to be common names or natural kind terms. Natural kind terms appear, to the contemporary eye, not only to inherit versions of the puzzles already apparent in proper names, but to add further puzzles of their own. Thus, we find worries about whether “cat” names a kind which exists to be named in the first place, whether it names an abstraction or a concept or a set or a family resemblance, and what happens when there are borderline cases of cats or machines cleverly constructed to look like cats. Philosophers are happy when they can wrestle their accounts of “cat” down to the comparative simplicity of “Electra” and “Jellylorum.” Proper names are always primary, and no one nurses a doubt but that they are genuine instances of the phenomenon of naming.

¹ See, for example, the SEP: “Proper names are paradigmatic referring expressions. If there are terms that refer — that somehow ‘attach to’ things in the world — then proper names are surely among them.” Reimer, Marga, “Reference,” in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2010 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/reference/>.
What is not so well known is that philosophers in the thirteenth century had worries about names as well (both proper and common), though they did not address them in twentieth-century terms or with analytic philosophy’s tools. That medieval philosophers were interested in language is of course a platitude: from Anselm’s De grammatico to the sophisticated treatises on supposition theory in the fourteenth century, scholastic philosophers earned the stigma of being hair-splitters and logic-choppers for their analyses of linguistic and logical problems. Within the thirteenth century alone, extensive research has been done on medieval philosophy’s developments in semiotic theory, the emergence of speculative grammars, and sophistic literature.² Many aspects of this research have given us detailed pictures of what thirteenth-century philosophers thought about proper names. Recently, it has even come to scholars’ attention that some philosophers in the thirteenth century doubted whether individuals could have proper names as such.³

Historians of philosophy have known for a few decades that thirteenth-century philosophers occasionally expressed peculiar concerns over proper names. Richard Rufus of Cornwall, for instance, first attracted scholarly attention in the 1990’s for his explicit arguments


that individuals cannot be named as such. In the 2000’s, Geoffrey of Aspall’s *Metaphysics* commentary underwent detailed analysis for its question on whether individuals can be named. Geoffrey’s question is unique for its expansiveness, insofar as he lists six arguments against proper names, seven arguments for them, and gives three concluding “expositions” on the question. Geoffrey’s list has been studied in relation to similar discussions in texts by two of his contemporaries, Adam of Buckfield and Pseudo-Kilwardby. But what no one has demonstrated (until now) is that these philosophers were not alone or idiosyncratic in asking whether individuals can be named. In fact, as this study reveals, proper names were something of a theoretical embarrassment for most of the thirteenth century, and arguments surrounding the nameability of individuals can be found in the texts of at least eight different philosophers. The embarrassment stemmed from the fact that certain aspects of the new Aristotelian material, which the Latin West inherited from the Arabic world in the thirteenth century, seemed to be incompatible with any straightforward account of how words could function as signs of individuals as such. Signs of common entities, universals or natures and so on, did not present insuperable difficulties; but the question of how a sign could be constructed for just one particular, *qua* particular, ran into extraordinary trouble.

The source of the trouble is the subject of this dissertation. Why were the names of individuals such a difficult matter for Aristotelian philosophers in the 1230’s to 1290’s? It is well known, for instance, that the names of God were a difficult matter. But what I will show is that the proper names of any and all individuals could be equally difficult. In showing why this was so, I relate three diverse strands of medieval philosophy that are usually not studied together.

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4 See Karger (1998).
5 Brumberg-Chaumont has edited this question in Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), pp. 100-103.
7 Though they did present difficulties. The foremost debate in thirteenth-century philosophy of language was whether common terms like “cat” functioned as signs of actual common natures, concepts of the mind, or sub-conceptual mental entities called “*species*.” The general trend in the thirteenth century was to move away from saying that common terms are signs of private mental contents (*species*) and toward common natures (like the natural species Cat) or universal concepts in the mind. John Duns Scotus himself refers to the discussion as *a magna altercatio* (*Ordinatio* I, d. 27, q. 3; ed. Vatican, vol. 6, p. 97, §83). The literature on this debate is vast: see, *inter alia*, Claude Panaccio (1992), “From Mental Word to Mental Language,” *Philosophical Topics* 2.2, pp. 125-147; Dominik Perler (1996), “Things in the Mind: Fourteenth-Century Controversies over ‘Intelligible Species,’” *Vivarium* 34.2, pp. 231-253; Giorgio Pini (2001), “Signification of Names in Duns Scotus and Some of His Contemporaries,” *Vivarium* 39.1, pp. 20-51; and Pini (1999), “Species, Concept, and Thing: Theories of Signification in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8, pp. 21-52.
The three strands are (1) the analysis of language as a system of signs, traditional throughout the Middle Ages, (2) the analysis of concept formation as the thirteenth century inherited it from Aristotle and the Arabs, and (3) the metaphysical analysis of individuals as composites as matter and form. Each of these strands presents its own trajectory of philosophical development throughout the thirteenth century. But they all intersect on the topic of proper names.

Linguistic analysis required that proper names be signs of individuals, and sign theory (as I will explain below) required that a sign of a particular be successful at bringing that particular to mind. But the cognitive theory inherited from Aristotle and the Arabs did not seem to have the resources to explain how individuals could be “brought to mind” as such. Meanwhile, metaphysics presented individuals as being at least partially constituted by matter, a component that was thought to be unknowable. Because material individuals were material, there was at least a possibility that they were unknowable in themselves and were only knowable as instances of kinds. If so, how was it possible to use a sign not only for the kind but also the individual in all its particularity? These three concerns—metaphysics, cognitive theory, and semiotics—fueled a worry that was first voiced by philosophers in the 1230’s but continued to be discussed as late as the 1270’s or 1290’s. Were proper names possible at all—or were they really names?

Because the “problem of proper names” lies at the intersection of such major philosophical issues, the nature of the evidence we have for this problem deserves note. The question “Why did thirteenth-century philosophers have a problem with proper names?” cannot be answered by simply surveying thirteenth-century treatises on proper names. That is because there weren’t any. Philosophers never addressed proper names as a topic for its own sake. Rather, they discussed proper names as derivative problems in relation to the three main topics of sign theory, concept formation, and the individuation of material composites. Consequently, most of the groundwork for this dissertation had to be done by unearthing relatively obscure passages in treatises that are about something else—metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and so on. But this difficulty results in a fruitfulness of its own, for one of the findings of this study is that the growing sophistication of thirteenth-century metaphysics and epistemology is precisely what made proper names so problematic.

This study is written for two kinds of readers. In the first place, I am writing for fellow medievalists working in the field of philosophy. These medievalists will at once recognize the three trajectories above as crucial themes in medieval scholasticism after the re-introduction of Aristotle. These three topics have enjoyed extensive attention in recent scholarly literature, and I
am focusing that attention on the unique intersection of these topics at the point of proper names. In the second place, I am writing for contemporary philosophers with an interest in intellectual history, though not necessarily with any background in medieval philosophy. These philosophers will at once note that I do not generally make use of the technical terms “sense” and “reference,” or of many other conceptual tools that are ready to hand in analytic philosophy. One reason for this omission is the desire to avoid anachronism, even in cases where a particular medieval view lends itself readily to a contemporary translation. Another reason, however, is that in most cases the translation is not so ready and is in fact fraught with difficulties.

To appreciate the difficulties surrounding proper names, it is necessary to know a few things about medieval philosophy of language. The rest of this introduction will give the reader a general grounding in the philosophy of language as a thirteenth-century philosopher would have inherited it. Readers already conversant with this material may wish to skip the following sections and pick up the story at Chapter 1. There I present the circumstances in which the actual debate over the status of proper names arose in the thirteenth century, and I ask the question that the rest of this study will seek to answer: What principled reasons could motivate a responsible philosopher to deny that Electra and Jellylorum really have their own proper names?

* * * * *

Rome was not built in a day, and medieval philosophy of language did not develop from any single philosopher or text. But if it could be summed up in a single idea, it would be this: language is a system of signs. There are many sorts of signs in the world, but all signs have two fundamental characteristics in common: (1) they are perceivable in some fashion, and (2) by means of being perceived, they put the perceiver in mind of something other than themselves. Signs are therefore defined by a basic psychological-causal property. They make a perceiver think of something else.

There are many kinds of signs, but medieval philosophers standardly classify them into two groups: natural and conventional. An instance of a natural sign is a cat’s pawprint. When we perceive the muddy pawprint on the Oriental rug, the pawprint causes us to think of

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9 Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* II.i.1: “A sign is a thing that makes something else come into our thought, beyond the representation that it presents to the senses; just as when we see animal tracks, we think of the animal whose tracks they are.” *Signum est enim res praepter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, alius aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire, sicut vestigio uestisce animal, cuius vestigium est, cogitamus* (CCSL vol. 32, p. 32). Cf. *De dialectica* V: “A sign is something that offers itself to the senses, and something else beyond itself to the soul.” *Signum est quod et se ipsum sensui et praepter se aliquid animo ostendit* (ed. Jackson and Pinborg [1975], *De dialectica*, Dordrecht-Boston: Reidel, p. 86).
something else—our naughty cat Bombalurina, for instance. The sign is “natural” insofar as it is the effect of a strictly non-voluntary cause, in this case the deposit of mud from a paw as the paw presses into the carpet. The print is “non-voluntary” insofar as it is not up to Bombalurina or anyone else whether the print is an effect of the mud or thereby brings to mind Bombalurina’s paw at a later moment. A conventional sign, on the other hand, is one which is in an agent’s power. If Bombalurina presses her inked paw at the bottom of a letter she has just written, in a context where doing so indicates authorship, then the pawprint is a conventional sign of her authorship in addition to being a natural sign of the former presence of her paw.10

The use of seals and signets on documents, arrows to indicate directions, nods to convey approval, and bells to mark the time are all instances of conventional signs.

In medieval philosophy, spoken and written languages are treated as systems of conventional signs. The hallmark of a conventional sign is that it must be intentionally “instituted” as such in order to acquire the function of a sign. Natural phenomena such as nods and guttural sounds may be natural signs on their own—perhaps of sleep (as when one nods during sleep) or pain (as when one groans during a toothache). But in order to function as conventional signs, some transformation must occur. These natural phenomena must somehow be made to function as signs for things quite other than what they might naturally be signs of. How does one get from the choking sounds ca—ca—cat to a word that makes people think of a kind of animal? How does the institution of cat as a sign take place? Medieval philosophers thought that the explanation of the transformation must involve the mental states of the name-giver or name-users. But the role of mental states in turn led to further questions. What sorts of mental states must a speaker or hearer be in, in order to effect the transformation from mere sound into sign? What do mental states presuppose about the knowledge of natural kinds? And what does language end up being about—the mental states themselves, or the things in the world

10 Augustine makes the distinction between natural and conventional signs in De doctrina christiana II.1.2. Medieval philosophers standardly use it to interpret Aristotle’s discussion of words as signs in Perihermeneias 16a3-9. Medieval authors also most commonly expressed the voluntariness of conventional signs by calling them signs “at pleasure” (ad placitum). “By convention” is a common English translation, and it captures the fact that a given sign may be established by a complicated nexus of conventionality involving many sign-users. For discussions of medieval theories of signs, see inter alia Michael Fuchs (1999), Zeichen und Wissen. Das Verhältnis der Zeichentheorie zur Theorie des Wissens und der Wissenschaften im dreizehnten Jahrhundert, Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorff; Alfonso Maiorù (1981), “‘Signum’ dans la culture médiévale,” in Kluxen et al (eds), Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter, vol. 1, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 51–71; and Marmo (1994). For analyses of the medieval discussions from a more contemporary perspective, see the essays collected in Umberto Eco and Costantino Marmo (1989), On the Medieval Theory of Signs, Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
that we want to name? From these questions proceeded all the medieval analysis of human language.

On the textual level, medieval inquiry into language developed originally from encounters with the arguments of Aristotle. These were mediated to the Middle Ages predominantly by Boethius in the sixth-century. Boethius was a Roman intellectual who adopted the project of translating Aristotle’s texts into Latin and composing commentaries on them. Thanks to Boethius, most of Aristotle’s reflections on language and logic survived into the Middle Ages, including a text that will be of crucial importance to our study: the *Perihermeneias* or *On Interpretation*. Also of crucial importance is Boethius’ translation of the *Isagoge*, a philosophical introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories* written by the third-century philosopher Porphyry. Because Boethius’ commentaries on these texts are so important for understanding medieval philosophy of language, the rest of this introduction will be devoted to the way Boethius approached the analysis of language as signs.

Boethius laid much of the groundwork for the medieval philosophy of language in his second commentary on Aristotle’s *Perihermeneias*. Already in the *Perihermeneias*, we find Aristotle raising four significant issues surrounding nouns and verbs as signs. Those four issues are: (1) the conventional institution of words in general as signs, (2) the specific criteria which words must meet in order to be signs, (3) the character of the objects of which words are signs (e.g., mental contents versus things in the world), and (4) the ability of words to function as signs both primarily and secondarily. These four issues are compactly packaged together in Aristotle’s opening discussion of nouns and verbs in *Perihermeneias* 16a3-9. Whereas Aristotle’s original Greek text contained several ambiguities that produced rival philosophical interpretations in the Greek commentary tradition, Boethius’ translation and interpretation of the passage helped to solidify for the medieval West a specific approach to thinking philosophically about language in general. The text of Aristotle’s *Perihermeneias* 16a3-9 as it appeared in Boethius’ Latin translation ran as follows:

> What is spoken is a sign of the passions which are in the soul, and what is written is a sign of what is spoken. And in the same way that letters are not the same for all, vocal sounds are not the same for all. But the passions of the soul, of which they are

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11 Boethius composed two commentaries on Aristotle’s *Perihermeneias*, both edited by Karl Meiser, of which I use the second and longer one. See Boethius, *Commentarii in librum Aristotelis Peri hermeneias (comm. maior)*, ed. Meiser, Leipzig: Teubner, 1880. I will abbreviate Boethius’ commentary as “In Periherm. II” and give both the book/chapter reference and Meiser’s page and line references.

12 For Boethius’ relation to the Greek commentary tradition and the way in which he handled ambiguities in the Greek text, see John Magee (1989), *Boethius on Signification and Mind*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 7-63.
primarily\textsuperscript{13} signs, are the same for all; and the things of which [the passions] are similitudes are the same.\textsuperscript{14}

Aristotle here presents words as signs or symbols—\textit{notae} in Boethius’ translation, though Boethius uses the verb \textit{significare} in his commentaries to describe what written and spoken words do. “Signification,” or the ability to function as a sign, is first and foremost in the analysis. Notice that Aristotle does not say what it is that makes words to function as signs, or how they come to be \textit{notae} in the first place. What he does is to emphasize that both written and spoken words differ from language to language. We might say that Aristotle is here interested in the conventionality of language. The conventionality of language itself indicates that words’ ability to function as signs is the result of some conventional “institution” that makes them to be signs. Words don’t occur in nature; they must be constructed, construed, or instituted somehow in order to work as signs in the first place.

Boethius makes precisely this point in great detail. Vocal utterances receive the ability to signify by being “constituted” or “established” (Boethius uses the words \textit{componere} and \textit{positio}), in contradistinction to thoughts and things, which occur naturally and are thus the same everywhere. What changes a mere vocal utterance into a sign is literally the good pleasure of the person constituting the word.\textsuperscript{15} This good pleasure must be understood in a certain way. Boethius does not suggest that the institution of words as signs is completely random or haphazard, or that a speaker makes an arbitrary decision about “how to view the world,” inventing signs that carve nature in an epistemologically arbitrary way. Boethius’ point is not,

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{13}]The reader will note that the Latin text (cited below, note 14) does not have “primarily” but the genitive plural \textit{primorum}. Magee argues at length that Boethius’ \textit{primorum} accurately translates a genitive plural in the Greek, in which case the line would read “The first passions of the soul, of which they [the vocal utterances or written words] are signs, are the same for all.” The “first passions” could presumably be the first thoughts or simple thoughts that Aristotle discusses in De \textit{Anima} 432a10-14. (See Magee [1989], pp. 21-29, 33-34.) In his commentaries, however, Boethius interprets Aristotle’s meaning adverbially: words are primarily (\textit{principaliter}) signs of passions in the soul (see \textit{In Periherm.} II, lib. 1, c. 1; Meiser 33.27-34). This reading was to become the standard interpretation of Aristotle among the scholastics, and since it had consequences for thirteenth- and fourteenth-century discussions of “primary” and “secondary” signification, I translate \textit{primorum} as “primarily.”
  \item[\textsuperscript{14}]\textit{Sunt ergo ea quae sunt in voce earum quae sunt in anima passionum notae, et ea quae scribuntur eorum quae sunt in voce. Et quemadmodum nec litterae omnibus eaedem, sic nec eaedem voces; quorum autem bae primorum notae, eaedem omnibus passiones animae sunt, et quorum bae similitudines, res etiam eadem} (Aristotle, \textit{Peri hermeneias vel De interpretatione}, trans. Boethius, c. 1, 16a3-9; ed. Minio-Paluello and Verbeke [1965], \textit{Aristoteles Latinus} II.1-2, Turnhout: Brepols, p. 5).
  \item[\textsuperscript{15}]“A name is not a significative utterance absolutely but at pleasure. It truly exists ‘at pleasure’ insofar as it is made suitable according to a specific imposition and according to the pleasure of the impositor. For no name is or ever was constituted as a subject in nature, such that [a thing] is named from an utterance coming from nature. But the human species imposes names because it is able to, both in reason and in speech.” \textit{Nomen vocem esse significativum non simpliciter, sed secundum placitum. Secundum placitum vero est, quod secundum quandam positionem placitumque ponentes aptatur. Nullum enim nomen naturaliter constitutum est neque uquequam sicet subjiciet res natura est, ita quoque a natura venienti vocabulo nuncapatur, sed hominum genus, quod et ratione et oratione viget, nonma posuit} (Boethius, \textit{In Periherm.} II, lib. 1, c. 2; Meiser 54.29-55.7).
\end{itemize}
for instance, that Bombalurina may arbitrarily decide that bitter things are sweet and thus impose the word “sweet” for both sweet and bitter things. Of course, it may turn out that Bombalurina can do this, and it may turn out that this ability is a straightforward consequence of language being a system of conventional signs. But this is not the sort of conventionality which Boethius has in focus, or which subsequent generations of medieval philosophers explored. Rather, Boethius is interested in the conventionality of words as such, as opposed to natural phenomena. He begins by assuming a certain normativity of natural phenomena in the world: what it is to be sweet or bitter, or white or black, is roughly the same everywhere.\(^{16}\) He also assumes a certain normativity on the part of perceivers in the world: Romans and Greeks and Franks all have the same sorts of eyes and ears and other perceptual equipment with which to perceive the world.\(^{17}\) The exercise of their “good pleasure” plays a role only in their choice of which vocal utterances to apply to which natural phenomena. Thus, the Romans designate white by the utterance *album*, whereas Greeks designate it by the utterance *leukon*. The things in the world, and the perceivers, are all of the same sorts. Only the utterances are different.

The term that medieval authors came to use for the act of turning an utterance into a sign was *impositio*, “imposition,” with its verbal form *imponere*. A person who coined a word or otherwise caused a word to signify something was an *impositor*. Because imposition came to be an indispensable notion in medieval philosophy of language, I wish to sketch out a simple medieval distinction before returning to Boethius’ own analysis of words as signs. On the standard account that developed throughout the Middle Ages, a word’s “imposition” was closely

\(^{16}\) “Those things which are sensed do not vary, since they are constituted naturally. For sweetness and bitterness, or the white and the black, along with whatever else we sense with the five senses, are the same for all. Nor is it the case that something is sweet to the sense of the Italians, while the same thing seems bitter to the Persians. Nor does something appear white to our eyes but black to those from India. (The exception is when a sense has been altered by sickness, but this does not affect the nature.) Therefore, because these things are so naturally, they remain the same among all people.” *Ipsa vero quae sentiuntur, quoniam naturaliter constituta sunt, non mutantur. Dulcedo enim et amaritudo, album et nigrum et quaeque alia sensibus quinque sentimus, eadem apud omnes sunt, neque enim quod Italis dulce est in sensu, idem Persis videtur amarum nec quod album apud nos oculis adparet, apud Indos nigrum est, nisi forte aliqua sensus aegritudine permutetur, sed hoc nihil attinet ad naturam. Igitur quoniam ista sunt naturaliter, apud omnes gentes eadem manent* (In *Periherm.* II, lib. 1, c. 2; Meiser 55.15-24).

\(^{17}\) “This is proved by the fact that, if names were in nature, all the kinds [of names] would be the same for everyone. That is because the senses, since they are natural, are the same for everyone. For all people see only with eyes, hear only with ears, smell only with noses.... If therefore names also seemed to be natural, they would be the same for all people without suffering any alterations. But now the Latins, the Greeks, and the various tribes of barbarians call even man himself by different utterances. Such disagreement in the imposition of names is a sign that it is not natural, but that names are composed for things at the pleasure and will of the one imposing them.” *Hoc autem illo probatur, quod, si natura essent nomina, eadem apud omnes essent gentes: ut sensus, quoniam naturaliter sunt, idem apud omnes sunt: Omnes enim gentes non aliis nisi solis oculis intuentur, audient auribus, naribus odorantur.... Si ergo et nomina naturalia esse viderentur, eadem essent apud omnes gentes nec ullam suscipiendam mutationem.... Quae in ponendis nominibus dissensio signum est non naturaliter, sed ad ponentium placitum voluntatemque rebus nominauisse composita* (Boethius, In *Periherm.* II, lib. 1, c. 2; Meiser 55.7-31).
analogous to what we might think of as a baptism. The act of imposing a word required that there be a verbal utterance that was assigned by fiat to a thing in the world. But the “thing” on which a word was imposed was generally thought to be a non-particular thing (a nature or a formal feature, for example), and at the bare minimum, it required an understanding of a thing’s essential or at least distinctive qualities. The distinction that medieval philosophers made regarded the various formal features that could come into play. In an act of imposition there could be an understanding of the features from which a name could be imposed, as opposed to an understanding of the thing on which the name was imposed. For instance, say that Bombalurina wishes to impose the utterance “gerbil” as a sign of a species of rodent that is generally desert-dwelling and furry-tailed. In doing so, Bombalurina might use the features “desert-dwelling” and “furry-tailed” as helpful features by which to identify the entities she wants to signify with the term “gerbil,” but she might intend “gerbil” to be a sign of the rodents themselves, whether or not they happen to be dwelling in the desert or have furry tails at any given moment. The favorite medieval example used to illustrate this distinction was the word lapis, “stone.” According to widespread belief, lapis derived from laedet pedem, “it hurts the foot.” Thus the person who had first imposed lapis as an utterance for stones did so “from” an understanding of the stones’ accidental qualities of foot-hurting. But philosophers frequently pointed out that it was ridiculous to say that the name lapis simply signified “that which hurts the foot.” Clearly, lapis was imposed as a sign for the stone-nature itself, not just one of its qualities. So the quality from which the name was imposed was not the same as the thing on which the name was imposed, or the thing which the name was a sign of. An understanding of the thing’s qualities

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18 Medieval discussions about the original “impositor” generally center around the imposition of species-names and what special kinds of knowledge (grammar? metaphysics? natural philosophy?) must be involved in their imposition. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, takes Adam to be the original impositor and states that he had a perfect knowledge of the natures of the species he was naming (Summa Theologica I, q. 94, ad 3). The “modistic” philosophers of the thirteenth century also tend to take a high view of the criteria for imposition. Boethius of Dacia argues that the imposition of names requires philosophical knowledge of what pertains exclusively to a given nature (Modi Significandi q. 39; cf. qq. 12 and 17), and Michael of Marbais says that the initial imposition of words requires both grammatical knowledge and natural philosophy (Summa de Modis Significandi; ed. Kelly, p. 12). John of Dacia argues that no single “impositor” (metaphysician or otherwise) was responsible for inventing words, but that grammarians, metaphysicians, and other specialists each impose names within their own disciplines, based on their specialized knowledge (Summa Grammatica; ed. Otto, pp. 188-193). In any case, the original impositor is almost invariably credited with specialized knowledge of some kind, though whether the imposition requires perfect knowledge of a nature is not always clear.

19 This clever etymology seems to have originated with Isidore. See his Etymologiarum sine Originum libri XX, lib. 16; ed. W. M. Lindsay (1911), vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 16.3.1.
could be distinguished from an understanding of the thing’s nature; and the understanding triggered by the word *lapis* was a thought of the nature and not the qualities.\textsuperscript{20}

In this distinction we can already discern a complex interplay between language as a sign-system and the criteria that go into constituting and using utterances as signs. Internal criteria, such as the volition of the impositor, play a crucial role; but so do the features of things, both accidental and essential. We might ask a number of questions. Granted that Bombalurina can impose a name on a stone “from” its accidental qualities, does it matter which of those qualities she has in mind, and does it matter whether she *also* has a stone’s essential qualities (or at least some of them) in mind? Moreover, once Bombalurina has imposed the word, do the criteria for imposing a word carry over to become criteria of the word’s functioning as a sign? Suppose she imposes the word *lapis* on a stone, based on its ability to hurt the paw but with the intention of signifying the stone nature itself. Does that mean that, in order for *lapis* to continue to be a sign, future cats must also have in mind the relevant qualities that Bombalurina had in mind during its imposition? Medieval philosophers did not agree on the answers to these questions.\textsuperscript{21} But they did agree that both the act of instituting an utterance as a sign, and the continued use of an utterance as a sign, required some mental grasp of some features or other. Signs could not be such without involving *both* mental content and some reference to the nature or features of things in the world.

This brings us to our second issue: the respective roles played by mental content versus things themselves. Notice that in the foregoing discussion of imposition, my examples all have Bombalurina imposing words as signs for things (gerbils, stones, etc). But in the context of the *Perihermeneias*, Aristotle and Boethius do not say so straightforwardly that words are signs of things.\textsuperscript{22} Aristotle instead says that words are signs of “passions in the soul.” He gives us two

\textsuperscript{20} For this distinction, see Aquinas, *Quaestiones de veritate*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 8; and *Summa Theologica* I.13.8 corpus and ad 2. See also Ashworth (1991), pp. 49-50.


\textsuperscript{22} They do say this elsewhere, however. In the *Categories* Aristotle speaks as if words signify things or the qualities of things themselves. In his translation of that text, Boethius uses the verb *significare* to express the relation of non-complex utterances to things: “Of those things which are said without composition, they either signify substance or quantity or quality or relation or where or when or position or disposition or action or passion.” *Eorum quae*
pieces of information about these “passions”: (a) they are the same for everyone, and (b) they are “similitudes” of external things. Boethius argues that “passions of the soul” should be interpreted as concepts.\textsuperscript{23} Words, then, signify concepts. But here a tension arises. If words signify concepts, then why do we often use words as if they signified things? The medieval example of lapis itself clearly indicates that the word lapis is supposed to be imposed on, and to signify, a real thing in the world and not just a concept of it.\textsuperscript{24}

Boethius’ general solution is to distinguish between what words are signs of primarily, and what they are signs of in a secondary or derivative sense. This brings us to our third issue, the difference between primary and secondary significatio. Words are primarily signs of concepts, but Boethius argues that concepts themselves are “likenesses” of things.\textsuperscript{25} Because concepts are likenesses of things, then the words which signify concepts will also be signs of the things that the concepts are likenesses of. Thus, when Bombalurina utters the word “gerbil,” it will primarily be a sign of a gerbil-concept; but secondarily it will be a sign of gerbils themselves.

Boethius’ most crucial claim in linking up words as signs of concepts, and concepts as likenesses of things,\textsuperscript{26} is the claim that concepts are the same for everyone. \textit{Because everyone

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Passio} is of course a term that can also include a range of sub-intellectual phenomena, from sensory images to emotions like joy or sadness. Boethius contends that Aristotle specifically has concepts in mind, however: “Aristotle calls concepts ‘passions of the soul,’ because concepts, which we usually indicate by speech and by uttering discourses, are put forward because of some cause and some utility.” \textit{Aristoteles autem idcirco passiones animae intellectus vocat, quod intellectus, quos sermonem dicere et oratione proferre consuevimus, ex aliqua causa atque utilitate proferri sunt (In Periherm. II, lib. 1, pr.; Meiser 12.23-31). The surrounding pages contain a discussion about the propriety of \textit{passio} as a term for \textit{intellectus}, and the refutation of Andronicus’ position that the use of \textit{passio} in the \textit{Perihermeneia} indicates that the work is not genuinely Aristotelian. See Meiser 11.13-13.24. Later in the first chapter, Boethius argues that words do not signify sensations or images, and that images alone are not sufficient to enable us to use names (see Meiser 26.21-29.16).}

\textsuperscript{24} Boethius acknowledges a similar objection deriving from Alexander of Aphrodisias: “Alexander asks: If names are of things, why would Aristotle say that words are signs of the first concepts? For the name is imposed on the thing, such that when we say ‘man’ we indeed signify a concept, but the thing on which the name is imposed is a mortal rational animal. So why are the words that are imposed not much more imposed on the first things than on the first concepts?” \textit{Quaerit Alexander: si rerum nomina sunt, quid causae est ut primorum intellectuum notae esse noces dicere Aristoteles? Rei enim potentur nomen, ut cum dicimus homo significamus quidem intellectum, rei tamen nomen est id est animalis rationalis mortalis. Car ergo non primarum magis rerum notae sint noces quibus ponuntur potius quam intellectum? (In Periherm. II, lib. 1, c. 1; Meiser 41.1-7).}

\textsuperscript{25} “Though words signify things and concepts, they principally signify concepts, but secondarily they signify the things which the intellect itself grasps through the mediation of concepts. For the intellect is not without certain passions which arrive at the soul from things.” \textit{Nam cum ea quae sunt in voce res intellectusque signifiquent, principaliiter quidem intellectus, res vero quae ipsa intelligerint comprehendit secundaria significatio per intellectum medieatum, intellectus ipsis non sine quibusdam passionibus sunt, quae in anima ev subjectis veniunt rebus (In Periherm. II, lib. 1 , c. 1; Meiser 33.27-34).}

\textsuperscript{26} The later medieval tradition went further. In addition to viewing concepts as “likenesses” of things, they thought of concepts as \textit{signs} of things. Because a concept itself was a (natural) sign of a thing, a word signifying the concept
forms the same mental likenesses of things in the world, and because the things (or natural kinds) in the world are also the same for everyone, then any given natural kind term can be safely taken to be not only a sign for a concept but also a sign of a thing. But why think that this is true? Most fundamentally, Boethius thinks that our concepts of real things arise from the ways in which our sensory apparatus interacts with the world. All the perceivers of a species (say Bombalurina and Coricopat and Munkstrap) are set up with the same sorts of senses that will causally interact with the world in the same sorts of ways. So three different gerbils may appear to Bombalurina in Rome, to Coricopat in Paris, and to Munkstrap in Oxford, but in each case, the same gerbil-shapes will affect the cats’ eyes, the same gerbil-squeaks will affect their ears, and the same gerbil-smells will affect their noses. Because the cats’ sensory organs will be affected in the same sorts of ways, and because the cats’ internal cognitive faculties will process the sensory information in the same way, all three cats will form the same concept of a gerbil. They may then go on to institute different vocal sounds to signify their concepts. In each case, the vocal sound will be a conventional sign of a concept. But since the concepts are involuntary effects and products of the cat-way-of-experiencing-the-world, the vocal sounds will also be secondary signs of gerbils themselves.

The view that words are signs of both concepts and things is commonly known in the secondary scholarship as a “triadic” semantic view or the “Boethian triangle.” That is because the view holds in tension the three constituents of words, thought, and things. In Boethius’ case, the relation that holds between words and concepts is the primary relation, while the

would also be a sign of the thing. For references to concepts as signs, see Boethius, *In Periherm* II, lib. 1, c. 1 (Meiser 24.14-15); and Roger Bacon, *De signis* I.1.1 (Fredborg 82).

27 See Boethius’ discussion of concept formation in *In Periherm.* II, lib. 1, c. 1; esp. Meiser 34-35. I’ll note that my cats in these example are anthropomorphized. The concept-formation abilities that I attribute to these cats are ones that Boethius and the medieval philosophers standardly reserved for humans.

28 As Boethius explains it, “The whole order of speech is complete with three elements: things, concepts, and words. For a thing is conceived by the intellect, a word signifies the conceptions of the intellect and soul, and those very concepts both conceive the things subjected to them and are signified by words. For there are three things through which every speech and discourse is completed: the things which are subjected, the concepts which conceive the things and which are again signified by the words, and the words which signify the concepts.” *Tribus his totus orandi ordo perfectur: rebus, intellectibus, vocibus. Res enim ab intellectu concepitur, vox vero conceptiones animi intellectusque signifiit, ipsi vero intellectus et conceptis sueectas res et significantur a vocibus. Cur igitur tria sint hae per quae omnis oratio conlocutio perficitur, re quae subjectae sunt, intellectus qui res concipiant et rursus a vocibus significentur, voces vero quae intellectus designant* (In Periherm. II, lib. 1, c. 1; Meiser 20.15-24). The medieval tradition owed the “triangle” to Boethius, but Boethius himself drew on the Greek commentary tradition. Magee (1989) notes that “the word-thought-thing scheme is apparently traceable to Alexander, Herminus, Boethius, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Syrianus, principally in connection with the *Categories*” (p. 16). For a discussion of the ancient commentators’ ways of parsing this relationship, especially in regard to Boethius’ own understanding of the Aristotelian text, see Magee (1989), pp. 7-18. Taki Suto argues that the “triangular” view is actually best represented in linear fashion, since Boethius does not intend concepts to function as a veil between words and things. For this interpretation, see Suto (2012), *Boethius on Mind, Grammar and Logic*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 33-34.
relation between words and things is secondary. But by the thirteenth century, a serious
discussion had arisen over which relation was indeed primary. In keeping with Boethius, nearly
everyone thought that words—particularly common names—were signs of both concepts and
things. But the question was one of order: it was increasingly tempting to view names primarily
as signs of things and only secondarily as signs of concepts.29 The “things” also were open to
dispute. Grammarians tended to adopt a formula specifying that names were signs of substances
with qualities, or substances by means of qualities.30 But few or no philosophers in the
thirteenth century thought that common names were signs of individual substances. They
tended to say instead that common names were signs of universal substances or natures.

This is important to note because it is not obvious, given the structure of triadic
semantics alone, that individual things can fit as neatly into the triangle as universal things can.
What happens, for instance, if individuals cannot be conceptualized? Bombalurina may see a
gerbil-shape and smell and gerbil-smell, and perhaps from these she will conceptualize what it is
to be a gerbil. But will she be able to form a concept of what it is to be this gerbil in particular?
We will see in Chapter 3 that, for various reasons, she may not be able to do so. If this is the
case, and if Bombalurina cannot form a concept of an individual as such, then it is not clear
what happens to the Boethian triadic semantics. Without a concept to function as the link
between signs and things, will it be possible for Bombalurina to construct a sign for the
individual itself, of which individual she does not even have a concept?

This brings us to our fourth issue. While all language may be a system of signs, the
Boethian tradition insists particularly on the link between concepts and names or nouns. States
of mind figure large in the criteria for a noun’s being a sign. Aristotle gives a very brief but
clearly “mentalistic” description of what it is for nouns and verbs to “signify” in the third
chapter of the Perihermeneias. Aristotle’s broader question is whether verbs are signs in the same
way nouns are; and in claiming that they are, Aristotle mentions two criteria that must be met in
order for an utterance to count as a noun or name: (1) it must bring about an intellectus or

29 At the end of the thirteenth century, Scotus could reflect back on the “great dispute” (magna altercatio) as to
whether things or thoughts were the primary objects of signification. In point of fact, most of the thirteenth-
century philosophers who opted for thoughts (conceptus, intellectus) qualified them in such a way that thoughts
contained the essences of things and therefore were not purely psychological. Very few philosophers seem to have
claimed that names signify purely internal mental entities. For a study of the various positions, see Pini (2001) and
(1999).
“understanding,” and (2) the hearer must acquiesce or “rest” in some way. As Boethius’ translation tells us:

In themselves, spoken verbs are names (or nouns) and signify something. For he who says [them] constitutes an understanding, and he who hears [them] rests.31

Notice that both of these criteria seem to concern states of mind. “Constituting an understanding” can clearly be read against the background of Boethius’ discussion of the passions of the soul or concepts. We have just seen that words are primarily signs of concepts and secondarily signs of things. So when Aristotle and Boethius say that a signifying name or noun “constitutes an understanding,” it seems that we should read this to mean that the word causally produces a concept in a speaker or hearer, or at least that it puts the speaker/hearer in mind of something. But what does it mean that the hearer of a noun “rests”? Boethius’ commentary on this passage indicates that the issue here is completeness. When one hears a signifying utterance, one asks no further questions about the word’s meaning. The word manages to convey information that is in some sense complete in itself.32 The word “man,” for example, makes us think of what it is to be a man (Boethius says we think “mortal rational animal”).33 We may ask of course about a context or an entire sentence—“the man does what?”—but those questions concern something extraneous to the names or verbs as signs in themselves.34 By way of contrast, when we are confronted with utterances we simply do not understand, our minds cast about in vain without working out a definite meaning.35 Our
restlessness in the face of an unknown word is important because it seems to indicate how the two criteria for signification are related. The “rest” of the hearer is possible only if the word does indeed “constitute an understanding” or trigger some genuine thought in the hearer.

A signifying word, particularly a noun or name, therefore meets at least two criteria: (1) it causes a thought or concept of something, and (2) it conveys enough information to be sufficiently complete. What counts as being “sufficiently complete,” however, is obviously still open to question. In a way, the rest of this study will concern precisely that problem. How detailed a concept must accompany a word in order for it to count as a real “name”? If the basic job of a name is to bring something to mind, what sorts of concepts or qualities precisely must be involved? Suppose that individuals are not the sorts of things that we can conceptualize in that rich sort of way. What then happens to our attempts to name or signify individuals?

One further note about Boethius is in order. When we ask what qualities must be involved when we name individuals, Boethius does seem to provide an answer. He explicitly discusses proper names in his second Perihermeneias commentary, and he offers a few crucial observations on their relationship to individuals. He starts by distinguishing between common qualities and radically individual qualities: common qualities can occur in multiple individuals, whereas individual qualities are unsharable. Boethius indicates that the common qualities are named by common nouns (like *humanitas*), but that the individual qualities usually do not have names. We could, however, make up names for individual qualities if we wished—we could call Plato’s radically individual quality “Platonity.” This individual quality is important for the use of Plato’s proper name because it is the reason for our being able to think of Plato uniquely when we hear the proper name “Plato”:

36 “For we see that there are other qualities of this kind in reality, which cannot come together in another but only in one individual and particular substance. For an individual quality, such as that of Plato or Socrates, is different from what presents itself in one and all as something shared with many.” *Videmus namque alias esse in rebus huiusmodi qualitates, quae in alium convenire non possit nisi in unam quanquamque singularem particularumque substantiam. Alia est enim qualitas singularis, ut Platonis vel Socratis, alia est quae communicata cum pluribus totam se singulis et omnibus praebet, ut est ipsa humanitas* (Boethius, In Periherm. II, lib. II, c.7; Meiser 137.04-137.15).

37 “Hence the latter is common to all, but the former indeed is incommunicable to all but is proper to one. Now, if it is permissible to make up a name, I will give that particular quality, which is incommunicable to another substance, a made-up name so that the form of what I am proposing may be clearer. Let the incommunicable property of Plato be called Platonity.” *Unde fit ut haec quidem sit communis omnibus, illa vero prior incommunicabilis quidem cunctis, uni tamen propria. Nam si nomen fingere licet, illam singularum quandam qualitatem et incommunicabilem alium aliis substantiis sus facio nomine nuncuparem, ut clarior fieret forma propositi. Age enim incommunicabilis Platonis illa proprietas Platonitas appelletur* (Boethius, In Periherm. II, lib. II, c.7; Meiser 137.28-137.37).
Because Platonity is found only in one thing, Plato, the mind of the person hearing the word “Plato” refers it to one person and one particular substance. But when he hears “man,” he refers the concept to as many things as he knows to be contained within humanity.\textsuperscript{38}  

Boethius’ emphasis here seems to be on the uniqueness of an individual as a referent for a proper name. A proper name requires a unique referent, and a referent becomes unique by having a radically unique property. Boethius does not give us a complex story about the way in which our minds grasp this unique property, and he does not say either that the proper name signifies the property itself or the whole individual, or even the thought of the property or individual. But he indicates clearly that the presence of this unique property is at least partially responsible for the fact that we use proper names to refer to one and only one substance.

This link between proper names and proper qualities was to become crucial for later medieval discussions of proper names. The twelfth century in particular saw renewed interest in individual qualities and proper names, especially in Gilbert of Poitiers and Petrus Helias.\textsuperscript{39}  

But when we turn to the thirteenth-century debate over proper names, at least as far as I can tell, we find that this passage is conspicuous by its absence. None of the primary texts presented in this study refer back to Boethius’ “Platonity,” or to radically individual qualities. The philosopher who comes closest to doing so is Richard Rufus of Cornwall, who seems to admit at least the possibility of individuals having their own individual forms; but even he does not invoke Boethius’ text on Platonity while talking about proper names. This absence in itself is suggestive. To my mind, it indicates that the thirteenth-century philosophers who doubted whether individuals had proper names did not find it persuasive to invoke individual qualities as such. Perhaps this lack of persuasiveness regarding individual qualities helped to set the stage for a sustained thirteenth-century debate over whether individuals can have proper names at all.

\textsuperscript{38} Unde fit ut, quoniam Platonitas in unum convenit Platonem, andienis animus Platonis vocabulum ad unam personam unamque particularem substantiam referat; cum autem audit hominem, ad plures quosque intellectum referat quoscumque humanitate contineri novit (In Periherm. II, lib. II, c. 7; Meiser 137.13-18). De Rijk (1981) notes the variant reading referatur for the first occurrence of referat (line 16) and observes that it accords better with the spirit of the text, such that the soul is being directed to something, rather than referring or connecting a word to a thing; see “Boèce logicien et philosophe: ses positions sémantiques et sa métaphysique de l’être,” in Obertino (ed.), Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani, Roma: Herder (143 n. 8). However, there is no variant reading for the second occurrence of referat (line 17), where it seems that the subject of referat is the soul of the hearer and has the object intellectum, which the soul directs ad plures. Given that Boethius is constructing a parallel between the two cases of “man” and “Plato,” my instinct is to think that if referat in the second case is active and takes an object, it must be active and take an (implied) object in the first case as well.

Our study of the proper-name debate will proceed in the following way. There are two main reasons for which words may fail to be signs of individuals, *qua* individuals, in the thirteenth-century paradigms. The first reason has to do with human cognitive functioning. Sensation, internal perception, and intellection themselves problematize the sorts of accounts we can give for how (or whether) we know individuals at all, and thirteenth-century theories of cognition were especially sensitive to such problems. These issues will be addressed in Chapter 3. The second reason has to do with individuals as metaphysically complex beings. Individuals are composites of form and matter, or they instantiate natures with individual differences. If it should turn out that their metaphysical constituents are unknowable, or if it should turn out that their constituents are all common, then questions about the knowability of the individuals as such must also be raised. These questions will form the capstone of our study in Chapter 4.

Before we can proceed to these core issues, however, there is a considerable body of material we need to examine in the philosophy of language of the thirteenth century. This material concerns grammar and logic at a more advanced level, and it impinges on proper names directly. We must ask questions like “What distinguishes genuine *nomina* from words that look like *nomina* but aren’t?” Chapter 2 will be directed at this question, and it will lay the foundation for the worries that culminate epistemologically in Chapter 3 and metaphysically in Chapter 4.

At the outset, of course, we have an even more basic question to ask. Who were the philosophers who denied that individuals could have proper names? When did the debate begin, and who were the players? And most importantly, what were the factors that instigated some of those players to embrace the view that individuals simply *could not* have proper names? These are the issues which we will begin to address in Chapter 1.
In 1267 we find Roger Bacon complaining about a peculiar problem. In the course of his De signis, a lengthy treatise on language, Bacon chastises certain philosophers of his day for holding the view that *particularia non habent nomen*—particulars do not have names.¹ Who were these philosophers? This chapter is dedicated to sketching out the philosophical-historical details of who exactly was claiming in the 1260’s that particulars could not have names, and how the view originally arose.

Bacon’s chastisement of these philosophers occurs as he is evaluating whether there might be certain kinds of things (imaginary entities, non-entities, privations, the vacuum) which cannot be named or otherwise designated with linguistic signs. In each case Bacon argues that the kind of thing in question is indeed nameable. The last case he addresses is that of composite substances, or as we would say, material things like cats and gerbils. Bacon’s own opinion is that there is no problem with naming such entities—in fact, they seem *prima facie* nameable, since the definition of a name (according to Priscian) is to signify substance with quality, and composites are substances with qualities.² But there is one possible objection that someone might raise on the basis of Aristotle’s Metaphysics. Someone might be under the impression from Metaphysics book VII that particular things do not have names. Bacon, hardly giving us any information about this objection or its context, claims immediately that this view arises from a mistaken translation:

If someone says that particulars do not have a name according to Metaphysics VII, it can be answered that on account of the defect of a very bad translation, the text here presents something other than Aristotle’s intention, as it does in many other places.³

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¹ See De signis II.2.19-22; ed. Fredborg, Nielsen, and Pinborg (1978), “An unedited part of Roger Bacon’s Opus Maius: De Signis,” Traditio 34, pp. 79-136 (hereafter DS). Of all the texts in the proper-name debate, Bacon’s De signis is the one that can be dated with most precision; see the introduction to the edition, pp. 76-79.

² As Bacon remarks, “There is no problem with composite [substances], since they have the composition which the character of a name presupposes.” *De compositis non est difficultas, quia habent compositionem quam ratio nominis praetendit* (DS II.2.23; Fredborg 89). In the context, Bacon is contrasting the case of substances with the case of accidents. In DS II.2.22 Bacon faces the objection that the nine accidental categories (quantity, quality, relation, etc.) cannot genuinely be named because their “names” would not signify substances with qualities: *Si vero obiciatur quod nec prima causa nec forma prima nec novem genera generalissima accidentium propter simplicitatem possum nominari, eo quod nomen significat substantiam cum qualitate, dicendum quod...* (DS II.2.22; Fredborg 89). But if the ratio or definition of a name is to signify substance with quality, then composites should be nameable *par excellence*: they are substances that have qualities.

³ *Quod si dicatur quod particularia non habent nomen secundum quod dicitur in VII Metaphysicae, potest dici quod propter vitium translationis pecuniae aliquid praetendit textus ibi sicut in multis aliis locis quam sit intellectus Aristotelis* (DS II.2.23; Fredborg 89).
Bacon is characteristically swift to blame a translator for this peculiar objection, and he is also quick to offer us his own interpretation of the controversial passage in *Metaphysics* book VII. But the next three paragraphs of his response betray several indications that the issue over the names of particulars is much less tractable than Bacon wishes it to be. In the first place, Bacon indicates that “many” people have been duped by the claim that particulars do not have names. Bacon is of course known for his colorful rhetoric, and the present case is no exception: he speaks of “the many who have been deceived,” who are now “destroying the intelligibility of both grammar and logic.” But there is nothing to suggest that Bacon does not genuinely feel himself to be on the defensive on the issue. That in itself is remarkable. Those who held, or who interpreted Aristotle to hold, that particulars do not have names must have had sufficient numbers or influence in Bacon’s milieu to provoke a correspondingly forceful response.

In the second place, Bacon’s response indicates that the reasons for denying that particulars have names are not merely textual but philosophical in nature. After a discussion of the text of *Metaphysics* book VII, Bacon gives us an equally long discussion of an argument that was apparently used to show why particulars could not have names, on the grounds of their unintelligibility. Bacon cites the argument in a very compressed form, but there is no doubt that it derived from philosophical motivations regarding the nature of cognition. The argument states that if we cannot understand (*intelligere*) particulars, we cannot name them; and in particular, we cannot always understand particulars because they are not always actively present to our perceptive faculties:

> If it is said that, according to *Metaphysics* VII, particulars are not understood or manifested when they withdraw from the senses, and that therefore they are not named nor have names nor could be named, except while they are sensed...  

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4 Bacon frequently blames translators for their lack of skill in rendering Aristotle’s Greek into Latin, and he explicitly associates their errors with misinterpretations and errors in Latin philosophy. See his *Compendium studii philosophiae* ch. 8, where Bacon even suggests that all the translations of Aristotle be burnt: “I am certain that it would have been better for the Latins if the wisdom of Aristotle had not been translated.... If I had power over the books of Aristotle, I would cause them to be burned, since it is nothing but a waste of time to study them, and they are the cause of error and the proliferation of ignorance... Because the works of Aristotle are the foundation of all wisdom, no one can estimate how much harm it has done the Latins to receive bad translations of the Philosopher.”

> Certus igitur sum, quod melius esset Latinis, quod sapientia Aristotelis non esset translata.... Si enim haberem potestatem super libros Aristotelis ego facerem omnes cremari, quia non est nisi temporis amissio studere in illis, et causa erroris et multiplicatio ignorantiae, ultra id quod valeat explicari. Et quoniam labores Aristotelis sunt fundamenta totius sapientiae, ideo nemo potest aestimare quantum dispensendum accidit Latinis quia malas translationes repperunt philosophi (ed. Brewer, p. 469).

5 Multi propter hoc verbum Aristotelis sunt decepti, tam rationem grammaticae quam logicae destruentes (*DS* II.2.24; Fredborg 90).

6 Si etiam dicitur illud, VII Metaphysicae, quod singulartia, cum recedant a sensu, non intelliguntur nec manifestantur, ergo nec nominatur nec habebunt nominia, nisi cum sint suntur, nec nominari potuerunt... (*DS* II.2.25; Fredborg 90).
This argument is not merely a textual matter but an evaluation of what sort of cognitive activity counts as “understanding.” We can even see that it involves some sort of background theory about the relationship between the senses and the mind. Bacon answers by stating that the intellective powers should be taken “in a broad sense” (large) to include acts of imagination, opinion, and other acts where the cognized object may be absent. But the fact that Bacon has to deal with such an argument is suggestive. The quarrel over the names of individuals does not involve merely a stray remark of Aristotle’s in Metaphysics book VII, but deeper philosophical considerations about cognition.

The De signis is not the first time we find Bacon citing this argument and responding to it. Some years earlier, in one of his own commentaries on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Bacon alludes to the same argument—“A particular is not cognized when it withdraws from the senses, except by a universal.” Again, Bacon deals with the argument by appealing to his own cognitive theory (in this case, his belief that universals are cognized prior to particulars), and to what looks like a theory of definite descriptions (or what Bacon calls “circumlocutions”). Clearly, already in the 1240’s, Bacon found himself in a milieu where people were thinking about the relationship

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7 For an analysis of this argument, see Chapter 3, pp. 81-93.
8 This Metaphysics commentary, which covers Metaphysics books I-II and V-X, has been edited by Robert Steele (1930) as Questions supra libros prime philosophiae Aristotelis (Metaphysica I, II, V-X) in Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi, Fasc. X, Oxford: Clarendon Press (henceforth QMet8). I reference only Steele’s page numbers, since the questions in the commentary are not numbered. Bacon appears to have written four partial commentaries/question-sets on the Metaphysics, the dating for all of which is problematic, though they all seem to originate in his first Parisian period in the 1240’s. The dating discussion has been complicated recently by Silvia Donati’s re-examination of the attribution of several commentaries to Bacon. But the attribution of QMet8 is not currently in doubt, and everyone agrees that it should be dated early in Bacon’s career, sometime in the 1230’s or 1240’s. See Silvia Donati (2013), “Pseudepigrapha in the ‘Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi’? The Commentaries on the Physics and the Metaphysics,” in Verger and Weijers (eds), Les débuts de l’enseignement universitaire à Paris (1200 – 1245 environ), Turnhout: Brepols: 153-203.
9 “To the second [objection], I say that the proposition ‘since a particular recedes from the sense, it is not cognized except through a universal’ can be understood in two ways. The ‘through’ may indicate a precise cause, in which case the proposition is false; or it may indicate a preparatory cause, in which case the proposition is true. For the cognition of a universal is preparatory for the cognition of a particular. And in this way, we are able to specify and impose names according as we are able to know.” Ad alium dico, quod hic est duplicitae; ‘particulare cum recedit a sensu non cognoscitur nisi per universale’, quia li ‘per’ peutest dicere causam precisam et sic est proposition falsa; aut quia dicit causam praebulum, et sic est vera proposition, quia cognitio universalis est praebulum ad cognitionem particularis. Et ita sicut possimus cognoscere ita possimus signum et nomina imponere (Bacon, QMet8, lib. 7; Steele 236.15-22). See Chapter 3, pp. 88-92, for analysis.
10 For a discussion of “circumlocutions,” see Chapter 2, pp. 60-61, and Chapter 3, pp. 88-90. “And in this way, we are able to specify and impose names according as we are able to know. And because a name is more indistinct through circumlocution, we first signify by means of that, and then through a single name when we know more. So to the other [objection] I say that it is Averroes who says that a particular circle does not have one name that has been imposed on it. But it does have a name imposed through circumlocution, and it can have one on the part of the thing itself.” Et ita sicut possimus cognoscere ita possimus signare et nomina imponere, et quia per circumlocutionem est nomen magis confusum, ideo illa prius sic signamus, et deinde per unum nomen quando magis cognoscimus. Ad alium dico, dicit Commentator quod circulus particularis non habet unum nomen impositum, habet tamen nomen impositum per circumlocutionem, et possit habere unum quantum est a parte rei (Bacon, QMet8, lib. 7; Steele 236.21-27).
between naming and cognition, and where some people had already reached the conclusion that particulars could not have names.

Here we face an obvious problem. Who could reasonably reach such a conclusion? It seems evident that we name individuals and use such names every day, and the denial that those individuals have names is completely counter-intuitive. What does it even mean to say that particulars do not have names? Moreover, how seriously should we take arguments like the foregoing as representative instances of standard Aristotelian thirteenth-century philosophy? It would be uncharitable to think that the oddball views of a few second-rate philosophers are sound guides to the thirteenth century’s problèmes du jour. And yet the view that individuals cannot have names already seems to be related to at least one major problem of the day (cognitive theory) and at least one major philosopher of the day (the inimitable Roger Bacon).

These are difficult questions to address, and the next three chapters are devoted to the details of a long answer. For the present chapter, I wish to tackle two relatively straightforward and historical questions: (1) who were the philosophers who thought that particulars could not have names, and (2) what did Aristotle’s Metaphysics have to do with this peculiar view? I will answer these two questions in sections 1 and 2, respectively. As it turns out, it is fairly easy to verify there were indeed several, if not “many,” philosophers in the middle decades of the thirteenth century who held some form of a view that particulars did not have proper names. Moreover, even where we cannot identify particular proponents of this view, we find references to their arguments in the texts of other philosophers besides Bacon who disagreed with them. Many of the philosophers in the discussion seem to have been influenced by, or seem to respond explicitly to, a certain translation of a claim from Metaphysics book VII, just as Bacon’s remarks indicate. But it also seems to be the case that the translation on its own was not the sole cause of trouble, but rather a whole complex of metaphysical and epistemological issues which Metaphysics book VII involved. I will discuss these issues in relation to the Metaphysics below. But first I want to set the stage historically by identifying those philosophers whom we know to have affirmed or seriously discussed the possibility that particulars might not have proper names, and by briefly sketching their relationships to one another and to certain important texts.
1. The “Many Deceived”: Who Thought Particulars Did Not Have Names?

The first identifiable person we know of to claim that an individual does not have a *nomen proprium*—“name of its own” or “proper name”—was the arts master Richard Rufus of Cornwall in the 1230’s. Rufus is perhaps best known as the target of Bacon’s attacks on a wide range of issues, and it is tempting to think that Bacon also might have had Rufus in mind in his remarks on proper names in the *De signis*. We do indeed find a discussion of proper names in two treatises ascribed to Rufus. But Rufus’s remarks on proper names do not involve the argument that Bacon critiques in the *De signis*. Instead we find Rufus adopting quite different arguments. For instance, he states in the *De ideis* that we cannot name individuals because we do not have the ability to truly distinguish them from one another in this life. The argument concerns the metaphysical constituents that make one individual distinct from another, and Rufus argues that our ignorance of these constituents is the cause of our inability to impose names. Meanwhile, in an early *Metaphysics* commentary that has been attributed to Rufus and which could be dated as early as 1235, we find arguments that concern matter and form in

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11 See Karger (1998), p. 67 n. 59, and Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), p. 57. Bacon’s vitriol against Rufus is well-known. In his *Compendium studii theologiae*, he remarks on a separate issue that “I knew well the worst and most foolish [author] of these errors, who was called Richard of Cornwall, a very famous one among the foolish multitude. But to those who knew, he was insane and [had been] reproved at Paris for the errors which he had invented [and] promulgated when lecturing solemnly on the Sentences there” (*Compendium studii theologiae* II, ch. 4; ed. and trans. Maloney [1988], Roger Bacon: *Compendium of the Study of Theology*, Leiden: Brill, p. 87).

12 See Chapter 4, pp. 147-154, for discussion of this argument. The *De ideis* appears in two manuscripts: Erfurt, Bibl. univ., Amproniana, Q.312, f.81va-85ra (henceforth “E”); and Prague, Archiv Prazekeho Hradu, Ms. 80, fol. 33ra-36vb (henceforth “PR”). Rega Wood has generously provided me with a draft of an edition of the text, from which all my citations from the *De ideis* are taken. The relevant material occurs in chapter 16 (*responsio ad q. 1*), where it is part of an argument concerning our ability to know an infinite number of individual constituents: “For I say that if things are like that, namely that the proper constituents of each individual cannot be known unless the proper constituents of all the other infinite individuals are known—while an infinite number cannot be known by our intellect—it remains that the constituents of no individual will be known by us. And that is why they are also not signifiable with a name by us.” Cum, inquam, sic sit, scilicet quod non possint sciri vel intelligi propria constituentia hoc individuum quin et sint scita propria constituentia alia individua omnia infinita—sed a nostro intellectu non sunt scita infinita—relinquitor quod nullus individui constituentia a nobis sint scita; quare nec a nobis nomine signifiabilia (Rufus, *De ideis* 16, ad q. 1, E84va / PR35rb-36va).

individuation. This early commentary already presents several arguments and counter-arguments in scholastic style, suggesting that some positions were already under consideration by other scholars. But in any case, the arguments do not look similar to the one in Bacon’s *De signis*.

Rufus is significant because, between the *De ideis* and the early *Metaphysics* commentary, he is our first point of contact for the “proper name” debate in the thirteenth century. We have no certain record of any debate on proper names prior to the 1230’s. But Rufus is by no means our only witness for the view in the 30’s and 40’s that particulars do not have their own names. Robert Kilwardby, who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1270’s, was philosophically active in the 1230’s as an arts master at the University of Paris. Between the late 30’s and early 40’s he composed commentaries on Aristotle’s *Categories* and Porphyry’s *Isagoge* in which he suggests that, in at least some sense, particulars do not have names. The *Categories* commentary puts the case mildly, suggesting that such utterances as “Plato” and “Socrates” do not name primary substances as accurately as utterances like “this man.” But the commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* puts the case more strongly. An individual composite substance “does not have a name which names its substance in an individual way; for such a name would be common... A particular is neither named nor predicat.” Kilwardby explicitly associates the unnameability of particulars with impredicability, suggesting that the worries over proper names concern logic and the metaphysics behind theories of predication. But if this is the case,

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14 The discussion of proper names occurs in Rufus’ *Metaphysics* book VII, q. 13. “Consequently, we ask whether an individual might have a name. And it seems not, because an individual does not have a proper form, and the imposition of a name is from the form...” *Quaeritur consequenter utrum individuum habeat nomen. Et videtur quod non, per hoc quod individuum non habet formam propriam, et impositio nominis est a forma...* (Rufus, *Metaphysics* VII, q. 13; E49ra).


18 See Chapter 4, pp. 135-138.
Kilwardby is referencing worries about proper names that are quite different from the worries that Bacon reports in the *De signis*. So here again, we find arguments that diverge from those of Bacon or Rufus.

The middle decades of the thirteenth century bring us more voices in the proper-name discussion. Writing perhaps as early as the 1240’s (though also perhaps as late as the 1270’s), Adam of Buckfield was a contemporary of both Richard Rufus and Robert Kilwardby; and, like Rufus, he authored a commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Adam’s commentary engages briefly with the question whether particulars have names, and Adam’s judgment is that particulars can have names insofar as we grasp them by the aid of imagination in addition to intellect. We find a similar judgment in a *Metaphysics* commentary by Geoffrey of Aspall, who may have been one of Adam’s students. Geoffrey’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam* (1254-1257) is invaluable to us as a record of the various arguments in play in the proper-name debate by the mid-century. Geoffrey lists six arguments against particulars having proper names, seven arguments for them, and finally two “expositions” and a nuanced critique, all presumably drawn from the immediate scholastic milieu. The list of objections against proper names demonstrates both sophistication and breadth: metaphysical, cognitive, and semantic concerns are all represented. Moreover, Adam of Buckfield and Geoffrey of Aspall are of additional interest as they both seem to be related to or influenced by Rufus on other matters. There are

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19 Adam of Buckfield’s *Sententia super Metaphysicam* is preserved in Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, 567 (589), fol. 217rb-217va. The question has not been edited, though a transcription of one paragraph appears in Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), p. 67. The range of dates that scholars have assigned for Adam’s commentary is expansive. Steenberghen believes that Adam’s Aristotelian commentaries originated while he was an arts master in the 1240’s; but Thomson argues for dating them after 1250 and possibly as late as 1275. With a timespan like this, it is impossible to say whether Adam influenced or rather was influenced by the other participants in the debate. See Noone (1989), pp. 79-80; Fernand Van Steenberghen (1970), *Aristotle in the West: The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism*, trans. L. Johnston, Louvain: Nauwelaerts, pp. 140-43; and S. H. Thomson (1944), “A Note on the Works of Magister Adam de Bocfeld (Bochermefort),” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 2, p. 81.


21 An edition of Geoffrey’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43—where Geoffrey discusses “whether particulars have a true proper name”—appears in Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), p. 100ff. For the dating of Geoffrey’s commentary, see Brumberg-Chaumont’s discussion on pp. 47-48.

22 In the manuscript heading to Geoffrey of Aspall’s question on proper names, the problematic position that “particulars do not have proper names” is actually attributed to Averroes and not to Aristotle—*Dubitatur de propositione Commentatoris, quod principia [= particularia] non habent nomen*. See Albert Zimmermann (1971), *Verzeichnis ungedruckter Kommentare zur Metaphysik und Physik des Aristoteles*, Leiden: Brill, p. 74. Brumberg-Chaumont corrects Zimmermann’s reading of *principia* to *particularia*; see Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), p. 49. The attribution to Averroes is particularly puzzling in light of the fact that Averroes’s actual commentary on 1035b1-3 presents us with no hint of doubt about proper names as such. Perhaps this attribution should be taken as further evidence that the thirteenth-century commentators were reading both Aristotle’s and Averroes’s remarks on *propria nonina* very much in light of their other remarks on matter, form, and knowability.
strong parallels between Adam of Buckfield’s and Rufus’s *Metaphysics* commentaries, though we are not sure which way the lines of influence went;\(^{23}\) and Geoffrey, in turn, seems to have been influenced by Rufus in his physical theories, especially regarding the instant of change.\(^{24}\)

Besides these major participants in the proper-name discussion, we also find a few minor indications of trouble with proper names in other works. An anonymous commentary on *Priscianus maior*\(^ {25}\) engages briefly with an argument stating that not just *anything* can be named, because particulars cannot be named due to the fact that they are not intelligible.\(^ {26}\) This argument raises the question of the relationship between intelligibility and sensibility. Can’t a higher cognitive power succeed in naming what is grasped by a lower cognitive power?\(^ {27}\) Meanwhile, still on the topic of intellect, we find no less a philosopher than Siger of Brabant making reference to the connection between the unintelligibility of particulars and their unnameability.\(^ {28}\) Siger argues extensively in his *De anima* commentary that the intellect does not


\(^ {24}\) Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), pp. 48-50 and pp. 66-67. Brumberg-Chaumont compares Adam of Buckfield and Geoffrey of Aspall particularly in their responses to the cognitive arguments against proper names. For further discussion of these two figures, see Chapter 3, pp. 112-119 below. For the possible influence of Rufus on Geoffrey, see Plevano (1993).

\(^ {25}\) The author of this commentary was once thought to be Robert Kilwardby but now is standardly referred to as Pseudo-Kilwardby. The commentary has been edited by Fredborg, Green-Pedersen, Nielsen, and Pinborg (1975) as “The Commentary on *Priscianus Maior*” Ascribed to Robert Kilwardby,” *Cahiers de l’Institut du Moyen-Âge Grec et Latin* 15, pp. 1-143 (hereafter *CPM*). Jan Pinborg dates the commentary between 1230 and 1270 (see his introduction to the edition, p. 5+). For discussion of this commentary, see Chapter 3, pp. 108-112.

\(^ {26}\) “It is asked whether an utterance can be instituted to signify any kind of being. And it seems not, since utterance

\(^ {27}\) “To the first objection, [I say] that the individual is cognized by sense alone, as Boethius says: ‘[it is] individual when sensed, universal when understood.’ Therefore nothing is signified through an utterance by institution except the universal.” *Vom quertur utrum posit voc institui ad significandum quoddlibet genus entis. Videtur quad non,quia voce sunt notae sive signa ex institutione passionum quae sunt in anima. Sed nihil est in anima per modum cognoscibilis nisi universale; singularia enim cognoscantur sensu tantum, ut dicit Boethius: singularare est dum sentitur, universale dum intelligitur. Ergo nihil significabilitur per vocem ex institutione nisi universale*, (Pseudo-Kilwardby, *CPM* 2.1.8, obj. 1; Fredborg 60).

know one particular from another. His main concern is with the manner in which the intellect understands particulars (i.e., in a “universalizing” way), but he includes a brief reference to their unnameability when he remarks that, according to Aristotle, a particular “does not have a proper name, or a proper form, or a proper cognition.”

Our last identifiable witness to the proper-name discussion is Richard of Clive, who penned his _Quaestiones metaphysicae_ possibly as early as 1272, but also perhaps as late as the 1290’s. Richard explicitly takes the view that particulars do not have genuine proper names. He appeals to both logical and metaphysical considerations, and the way he parses the relationship between logical names and grammatical names is illuminating for the entire debate. After Richard, however, I have not been able to find further representatives of the claim that particulars do not have names.

Admittedly, there are many scholastics in the middle decades of the thirteenth century who take the names of particulars for granted. Thomas Aquinas speaks unproblematically in his _Metaphysics_ commentary about the naming of individual circles and individual humans.

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29 “Rather, I say that because the universal is identical with its particular, the particular is cognized through the cognition of the universal—not in a proper form, but only in the universal. For this universal form truly is [the form of the] particular according to its being. For the particular does not have any form apart from the universal [form]. That is why Aristotle says that a particular does not have a proper name, or a proper form, or a proper cognition.” *Immo dico quod universale, [cum] idem sit cum suo particulari, per cognitionem universalis cognoscitur particulare, sed non [ut] est in forma propria, sed solum in universali, quia haec forma universalis ver est particularis secundum suum esse. Particulare enim aliam formam ab universalis non habet. Unde dicit Aristotle quod particulare non habet proprium nomen, nec propriam formam, nec propriam cognitionem* (Siger, _Q. in tertium De anima_ q. 18, solutio; Bazán 67.70-76). For discussion of this argument, see Chapter 3, pp. 99-101.

30 Richard of Clive, _Quaestiones metaphysicae_, VII.49; W 149vb: _Utrum singularia habeant nomina_. This question has not been edited, and I am indebted to Timothy Noone for a provisional transcription. The question itself appears in only one of the two extant manuscripts of Richard’s _Quaestiones metaphysicae_. Worcester, Cathedral and Chapter Library, MS Q. 13, f. 149vb (henceforth “W”). The question is not recorded in the other copy of Richard’s _Quaestiones_ which appears in Cambridge, Peterhouse 152, f. 1ra-49vb, and which Zimmermann (1971) reports on pp. 98-106. The date of 1272-73 is an estimate hazarded by P. Osmund Lewry in his brief edition of selected questions from Richard of Clive’s _Quaestiones_, see Lewry (1983), “Oxford Logic 1250-1275: Nicholas and Peter of Cornwall,” in Lewry (ed), _The Rise of British Logic_, Toronto: PIMS, pp. 30 and 57-59. Robert Andrews and Timothy Noone agree that the likely dating of the _Quaestiones_ falls around 1275, although it could have been written as late as 1295. See Andrews and Noone (1994), “A Newly Identified Redaction of Richard Clive’s _Quaestiones Metaphysicae_ with edition of three questions on relation,” _Manuscripta_ 38.1, pp. 23-24.

31 Aquinas’s comments on the controversial 1035b1-3 are entirely straightforward and commonsensical: “Just as Callias is a man who is conceptualized with individual matter, in the same way a circle (whose parts are segments), is a certain particular circle that is conceptualized with individual matter. But these are different because individual humans have proper names. Thus, the name of the [human] species is not equivocated with the individuals. But the name of a circle is said equivocally of that which is absolutely a circle (that is, universally), and of each particular circle. And this is because there are no names posited for those particular circles; though there are names posited for individual humans.” *Sicut enim Callias est aliquis homo qui concipitur cum materia individuali, ita circularis, eius sunt partes istae incisiones, est aliquis circularis particularis, qui concipitur cum individuali materia. Hoc tamen differt quia singulares bonum habent nomen proprium. Unde nomen speciei non aequivoce ad individua: sed nomen circuli aequivoce dicitur de circulo qui*
works of the so-called modists as well (philosophical grammarians active from 1270 onwards), we do not find even a hint of a doubt about the validity of proper names as such.\textsuperscript{32} Also from about 1270 onwards, we find a quite different debate over proper names taking shape: the debate whether proper names cease to be names of individuals when their individuals cease to exist. This debate assumes unproblematically that proper names do function as genuine signs for individuals, at least initially; what is at question is the circumstances under which they cease to function as signs.\textsuperscript{33} But in spite of the fact that many philosophers took the namehood of proper names for granted, we can nevertheless clearly identify other philosophers who either claimed that particulars do not have names, or who took such claims seriously enough to craft rebuttals. There was at least some prolonged discussion or debate over the status of proper names as such throughout most of the thirteenth century.

Moreover, the voices we can identify in this discussion seem to be only a part of what must have been a larger whole. We can infer this by comparing the arguments advanced by Rufus, Kilwardby, and Richard of Clive with those recorded and responded to by Bacon and Geoffroy. There has been some suspicion that the anti-proper-name position Bacon attacks in the \textit{De signis} belongs to Rufus.\textsuperscript{34} But as we saw earlier, this cannot be the case. At the most, we know of only two arguments that Rufus advanced against the nameability of particulars during his career, and neither of them matches the argument about the absence of particulars that

\textsuperscript{32} Quite the contrary, modistic authors seem to have assumed that proper names were a matter of course. “I ask you,” writes Michael of Marbais, “given that sometimes a name is imposed under the appellative quality, whether ‘Socrates’ is a name or not. And everyone agrees that it is, which you are not able to deny.” \textit{Quaero enim a te, dato quod numquam aliquod nomen fuerit impositum sub qualitate appellativa, utrum ‘Socrates’ sit nomen vel non. Et constat quod sic; quod negare non putes} (\textit{Summa de modis significandi}, ed. Kelly [1995], \textit{Grammatica Speculativa} 5, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, p. 30: 9-11). For standard discussions of proper names in modist treatises, see Martin of Dacia’s \textit{ Modi Significandi}, cap. 16 (ed. Heinrich Roos [1961], \textit{Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi} Vol. 2, Copenhagen: Gad, p. 22); Boethius of Dacia, \textit{ Modi Significandi}, pp. 42-43 (ed. Jan Pinborg and Heinrich Roos [1969], \textit{Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi} Vol. 4, Copenhagen: Gad, pp.121-123); and John of Dacia, \textit{Summa grammatica} (ed. Alfred Otto [1955], \textit{Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi} Vol. 1, Copenhagen: Gad, p. 333 and 339-340). For recent studies on modism, see Irène Rosier (1983), \textit{La grammaire spéculative des Modistes}, Presses Universitaires; Rosier-Catach (1999); Covington (1984); and Angela Beuerle (2010), \textit{Sprachdenken im Mittelalter}, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

\textsuperscript{33} Roger Bacon held the unique opinion that the names of individuals become equivocal after their deaths. See his \textit{Compendium studii theologiae} II, cc. 4-5; Maloney 87-109. Most philosophers, however, argued that the names of individuals could be preserved univocally like the names of species. See, for instance, the text selections in Sten Ebbesen (1987), “Talking about what is no more,” \textit{Cahiers de l’institut du moyen-âge grec et latin} 55, pp. 135-68; de Libera (1991); and de Libera (2002), \textit{La référence vide}, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

\textsuperscript{34} See Karger (1998), p. 67 n. 59; and Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), p. 57.
Bacon records in the *De signis*.\(^{35}\) Meanwhile, of the six objections that Geoffrey catalogs in his *Metaphysics* commentary, not only does none of them match the *De signis*, but only one of them can be credited to Rufus even in a modified form. Geoffrey, Pseudo-Kilwardby, and Adam of Buckfield all discuss imagination in connection with names functioning as signs, and Adam responds to an argument regarding proper names and imagination in lower animals. But arguments about imagination or the lower animals appear among none of our identifiable sources for the anti-proper-name position. This evidence strongly suggests that discussions about proper names were a widespread phenomenon that went beyond the limited involvement of Rufus, Bacon, and Geoffrey themselves. It is tempting to think that some level of debate over the status of proper names was taking place more generally among arts masters, either at Paris or Oxford or both. In any case, Bacon’s resentful reference to the “many deceived” begins to take shape. It is not an exaggeration; the arguments against proper names, and quite likely the philosophers propounding them, must have been varied and numerous.

What also begins to take shape is a certain view of the textual impetus for the discussion about proper names. It is striking that, of the eight or so passages we possess on the problem of proper names, more than half occur in *Metaphysics* commentaries specifically in the context of book VII. Even among the non-*Metaphysics* commentaries, we find recurring references to *Metaphysics* book VII, as well as quotations of 1035b1-3: *particularia non habent proprium nomen*. Is it the case, as Bacon suggested, that a translation of *Metaphysics* book VII caused the trouble with proper names? Or do the roots of the philosophical issue go deeper?

In the following section I will look at the text of *Metaphysics* book VII in an attempt to answer this question. As I will argue, a blunt Latin translation of the controversial line in 1035b1-3 helped to instigate an explicit discussion of the names of particulars. But as I will also argue, the thirteenth-century scholastics faced considerable difficulty in working out Aristotle’s meaning on several issues in the surrounding context, particularly regarding form, matter, and the definition of substances. Moreover, several remarks by both Aristotle and his commentator Averroes on the relationship between names, form, and the intellect lent themselves to an interpretation in which only universal things or immaterial things were nameable. The debate over proper names was therefore a consequence of how scholastics came to terms with these difficult anterior problems.

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\(^{35}\) Rufus’s arguments concern the unknowability of matter (in the early *Metaphysics* commentary) and our inability to know individual differences (in the *De ideis*). See Chapter 4, pp. 139-154.
2. Aristotle, Averroes, and the Aftermath

When scholastics in the 1230’s read Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* book VII, they were reading newly discovered and translated material from the Aristotelian corpus. The *Metaphysics* in particular was a cornerstone in the new Aristotelian system, and it presented some of the most difficult textual material regarding the notions of substance, matter, and form. To make matters more complicated, the scholastics in the first half of the thirteenth century had access to the *Metaphysics* primarily through a Latin translation based on an Arabic translation, most often without recourse to the Greek itself. It was Michael Scot who translated the Arabic *Metaphysics* into Latin in the 1220’s, along with an Arabic commentary by Averroes (his “Long Commentary”) to aid in the general interpretation of the Aristotelian material. And it is with Scot’s translation of *Metaphysics* book VII that the trouble with proper names seems to begin.\(^{36}\) By “begin” I mean that our earliest witnesses to the controversy specifically cite or comment on *Metaphysics* 1035b1-3 in Scot’s translation, and we do not have any record of a denial of proper names prior to Scot.

But how controversial was the Latin-Arabic *Metaphysics* 1035b1-3 in its own right? I will argue, contrary to Bacon, that the actual wording of the passage in Scot’s translation could not have provoked a debate on its own. As the defenders of proper names themselves pointed out, the sentence *particularia non habent proprium nomen* had a number of innocuous interpretations in its immediate context. But I will proceed to argue that, if the bluntly-worded line at 1035b1-3 was taken in the broader context of Aristotle’s aims in *Metaphysics* book VII, and in conjunction with specific claims concerning the intelligibility of particulars, the text took on a quite different importance for the status of proper names.

Lines 1035b1-3 of *Metaphysics* book VII occur in the middle of a discussion about metaphysical parts. Aristotle starts off the passage by telling us that things decompose into

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\(^{36}\) There were three other translations of (parts of) the *Metaphysics* in the first half of the thirteenth century, all made from the Greek; but they did not circulate widely. The oldest known translation was the “Vetustissima,” done by James of Venice in the twelfth century; and only books I-IV.4 survive. Sometime before the end of the twelfth century, another translation (the “Anonymous” or “Media”) was made of almost the entire *Metaphysics*. However, we do not have evidence for this translation circulating widely before the mid-thirteenth century. Meanwhile, a third translation known as the “Composite” or *Vetus* was probably completed sometime between 1220 and 1237. It consists of revisions of the *Vetustissima*, put together with some of James’s original translation, and it breaks off at the same point that James’s text breaks off. The fourth translation, and the one to become quite popular, was made by Michael Scot in 1220-1224. Scot’s translation was particularly important because for the first half of the thirteenth century it constituted the bulk of the standard version of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. For concise overviews of the translations of the *Metaphysics*, see Jozef Bráms (2003), *La riscoperta di Aristotele in Occidente*, Milano: Jaca; and Marta Borgo (2014), “Latin Medieval Translations of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” in Amerini and Galluzzo (eds), *A Companion to the Latin Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics**, Leiden: Brill, pp. 19-57.
various kinds of constituents: an earthen image corrupts into earth, a bronze sphere corrupts into bronze, Callias corrupts into flesh and bones, and a circle likewise corrupts into its segments. The general lesson we are supposed to draw is that material things decompose into their matter. But here Aristotle encounters a small difficulty. When we speak of a “circle” decomposing into its parts, we could mean an ideal geometrical circle (in which case its “parts” would presumably be ideal geometrical arcs), or we could mean a particular circle made of bronze, in which case its parts would just be material bronze segments. Aristotle explains this ambiguity by saying that “circle” equivocates between an absolute thing and a particular thing. The ambiguity arises from the fact that there is no distinct term for the individual circles as opposed to the absolute circle. In Scot’s Latin translation, the passage comes across as follows:

Thus an earthen image decomposes into earth, and a sphere into bronze, and Callias into flesh and bones, and even a circle into parts, and so also whatever is put together with matter. “Circle” taken absolutely and “circle” said of a particular thing are equivocal. For [the] particulars do not have their own name.  

Despite my highlighting, the concluding line *particularia non habent proprium nomen* does not entirely stand out in the context. Aristotle’s topic of interest is not proper names or semantics but material decomposition; and he seems to bring up the equivocation on “circle” only as a side-point. As a side-point it is somewhat ambiguous. What are some reasonable ways of interpreting the claim *particularia non habent nomen*?

A viable, very literal reading could easily be “particulars do not have proper names.” This reading would take *particularia* to encompass all particulars, not merely some class of circles that have not yet been christened. But since Latin is a language without articles, *particularia* could equally well be construed with an implied qualification: “The particulars [i.e., the very bronze circles under discussion in the context] do not have a name peculiar to them.” On the latter reading, Aristotle could feasibly be pointing out the fact that people do not generally give proper

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37 *Et ideo corruptitur idolum terrestre in terram, et sphaera in cuprum, et Callias in carnes et ossa, et etiam circulus in partes, quoniamque igitur congregatur cum materia. Et dicitur sequentia circulus qui dicitur modo simplici, et ille qui dicitur particularis. Particularia enim non habent proprium nomen* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII.10, 1035b1-3; Iunctas VII.12, f. 184C). There is no modern edition of Scot’s translation of either Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* or Averroes’s “Long Commentary” on the *Metaphysics*. The best text we have is the early printed Iunctas edition of 1562-1574, which contains Scot’s translation of the “Long Commentary” interspersed with two translations of the *Metaphysics*, one of which is also Scot’s. See *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, Vol. VIII, Venice: Iunctas, 1562-1574 (reprint: Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1962). For those consulting the edition, two oddities should be noted. First, Scot’s translation is the one appearing in italics. Second, the 1562 text divides the chapters of the *Metaphysics* differently from modern editions. What modern editions number as chapters 10-15 in book VII is chapters 11-17 in the 1562 text. My citations of Scot’s *Metaphysics* give both the modern chapter numbering and the Iunctas chapter, folio number, and column. Thus, the citation above is taken from what is chapter 10 of book VII in modern editions, and from what is chapter 12, folio 184C, in the Iunctas edition. All English translations of Scot’s material here are my own.
names to individual circles, and that we tend to refer to them by the name of their species. Equally feasibly, Aristotle could be pointing out the fact that Greek does not have a term for “bronze circle” as a kind of circle different from other kinds, such as stone circles or abstract mathematical circles. If this is the case, nomen proprium would not be functioning as “proper name” in the usual sense but rather as “common name appropriate to a sub-class of things.” On both readings, it would be a stretch to say that Aristotle denies that particulars have proper names per se.

When we turn to Averroes’s commentary, we find that the Arabic philosopher is quite prepared to read 1035b1-3 in an innocuous way. His compressed remarks suggest that he does not interpret Aristotle to deny proper names to all particulars. Rather, Averroes interprets the “particulars” in question to be only the subclass of particular bronze circles that are useful for Aristotle’s example of equivocation:

This name “circle” is said equivocally when it is said of circle absolutely and when it is said of a circle more “proper” than that, i.e. the circle which is particular as it were in respect to [the first], because it is bronze or earthen. For many things of this kind do not have their own name, because there is no name proper to signifying a bronze circle or a stone one.

The remark that “bronze circle” is particular in respect to “abstract formal circle” lends itself to the reading that “bronze circle” is simply a specific sub-category under “circle.” On this reading, proprium nomen should not be interpreted as “proper name” but “common name given to a sub-group of things.” On the other hand, the concluding comment that “many things of this kind do not have their own name” could be read as the observation that, in fact, most individual bronze circles do not have names like “Fred” or “Joe.” This last reading is somewhat corroborated by a comment Averroes makes later in the commentary: he speaks of some particulars not having names “in the way that Socrates and Plato have them.”

38 I am following Brumberg-Chaumont’s distinction between possible readings of this text. In her analysis of Averroes’, Bacon’s, and Adam of Buckfield’s interpretations of 1036b1-3, Brumberg-Chaumont argues that these three authors read nomen proprium in one of the two latter ways, not in such a way as to turn Aristotle’s statement into a critique of proper names as such. See Brumberg-Chaumont (2005), pp. 62-63.

39 Hoc nomen circulus, quando dicitur de circulo simpliciter, et quando dicitur de circulo, qui magis est proprius isto, et quasi particularis in respectu ipsius, quia est ex capro, aut ex terra, hoc nomen circulus dicitur aequivoce. Plura enim, quae sunt huiusmodi, non habent proprium nomen, sed igitur quoniam non est nomen proprium, quod significet circulum cupreum aut lapideum (Averroes, “Long Commentary” on the Metaphysics; Iunctas VII.12, f. 185D).

40 “Man as something demonstrated, and horse as something demonstrated, and everything which consists of particulars and is not one in any way, is not predicated of more than one particular. Rather, the demonstrated whole is constituted out of demonstrated form and demonstrated matter, and it is in its lowest species: just as Socrates is in the species of man, and similarly other particulars in their species. And he [Aristotle] means this even though they do not have names, as Socrates and Plato have them. And he meant that the species name is said of
Regardless of how precisely we should read *nomen proprium* in Averroes or Aristotle, it seems clear that neither of them so far denies that particulars have proper names *tout court*. At least two of the thirteenth-century defenders of proper names—Adam of Buckfield and Roger Bacon—were quick to point this out. Adam uses Averroes’s comments to argue that Aristotle, unconcerned about individuals at all, means to point out that “bronze circles” as a subclass do not have a distinct name from “circle” taken as a species. Adam therefore seems to interpret *nomen proprium* in the context as a class name. Meanwhile, Bacon emphasizes that the observation about individual circles not having proper names is a practical fact about Greek (and Latin). Bacon’s interpretation is that individual circles *could* have proper names but happen not to have proper names, and that this is all Aristotle wished to point out:

What [Aristotle] is calling a “particular” is the bronze circle or the stone circle and such like. His intention is not to talk about particulars or singulars like Socrates and Plato (which is what we’re discussing now), but the aforementioned things. And we should understand that neither here nor elsewhere does he deny that [particulars] can have proper names, or that proper names can very well be imposed on them. But he wants to say that those particulars he was talking about were designated in his language by circumlocutions, and they did not have “a name” but a plurality of utterances through circumlocution, just as it is in Latin. Therefore he says that they do not have a name... and nevertheless they can receive a name at pleasure, if we wish.

What this brief survey of commentaries on 1035b1-3 shows is that the line *particularia non habent proprium nomen* should not have been remarkable if it was read in its immediate context. Common sense would have allowed a reader to infer that certain particulars do not have proper names, but not that *no* particulars have proper names. The cause for the proper-name debate, and for the fact that 1035b1-3 became so important for it, must be sought further afield.

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41 “According to the Commentator, by ‘particular’ [Aristotle] does not intend the designated singular thing, but the common form which is as it were particular in respect of the even more common form. For example: the circle made particular through some kind of matter, such as bronze or gold.”

42 “Particulare autem vocat circulum cupreum vel lapideum et huiusmodi, nec est intension sua de particulari vel de singulari cuiusmodi est Socrates vel Plato de quibus loquimur nunc, sed de dictis. Et adhuc intelligendum est quod non negat haec nec illa haber posse nomen proprium et quin bene possunt nominia propria ei imponi. Sed solum quod per circumlocutionem dictam illa particularia de quibus loquitur fuerunt in sua lingua designata nec habuerunt unum nomen sed plures voces per circumlocutionem, sicut etiam in lingua Latina. Ideo dicit quod non habent nomen... et tamen possunt ad placitum recipere nominia si volumus (Bacon, DS II.23-24; Fredborg 89-90).
The field in which we have to search is the unfolding of Aristotle’s thoughts about particular substances in *Metaphysics* book VII. *Metaphysics* book VII is notoriously difficult even from a basic hermeneutical perspective, but our purposes require us to focus mostly on chapters 10-15. The overall aim of the book is to establish which sorts of things should be considered “substances” in a primary sense. Being a substance includes the criterion of being definable *per se*, meaning that a substance must have an essence that can be expressed in the right kind of formula. It is this criterion which ultimately leads Aristotle to discuss the definability of material composites in *Metaphysics* book VII, chapters 10-12, and of particulars *qua* particulars in chapter 15.

In chapters 10-12 (the chapters surrounding the controversial remark in 1035b1-3) Aristotle focuses on composites of matter and form. His stated goal is to determine whether the material parts of these composites figure in their definitions. The answer seems to be yes and no, and throughout the chapters Aristotle maintains a distinction between “substance” taken *per se* or essentially, and “substance” taken for the individual concrete thing. We have seen an instance of this distinction already in 1035b1-3, i.e. the ideal geometrical circle versus the individual bronze circle. The distinction is important for chapters 10-12 as a whole because, on certain readings, it is possible to interpret Aristotle as making the following claim: Substances taken “essentially” have purely formal definitions in which their matter plays no role, whereas concrete substances have formulas that include their matter. This is not the only interpretation

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44 In modern editions, see *inter alia* VII.4, 1029b13-25, 1030b5; and VII.5, 1031a1. See VII.4, 1030a15, for the claim that whatever has a name has a “formula” of some kind, but not necessarily a definition or an essence. Galluzzo’s study provides a wealth of information not only about Aristotle’s aims in *Metaphysics* VII but about the various scholarly interpretations after him; see pp. 101-116 for the project of defining substances.

45 For more on this interpretation, see Galluzzo (2013), pp. 101-116. It is by no means the only interpretation current for chapters 10-12, but for my purposes it suffices that the interpretation is at least viable. One supporting text is *Metaphysics* VII.11, 1037a25, which Scot translates as follows: “We have said what the essence is and in what way it exists essentially and *per se*, because it is universal over all. And in certain things the formula is the essence and contains defined parts, but in others not. And parts which are material are not in the definition of a substance. For the [essential] substance does not have parts, but parts are of the concrete substance. And in one way the essence has a definition, and in another it does not. Because when it is taken with matter, it will not have one, since it is not defined through a first substance. (The formula of the soul of a man is like this.) For the substance is the indwelling form. And on account of it, the concrete material thing is also called a substance.” *Dictum est igitur, quid est esse per essentiam et quomodo est per essentiam, et quomodo est per se, quoniam est universale de omni.* *Et quare in quibusdam rebus sermo, qui est quid est per essentiam, et in eo sunt partes definiti, et in quibusdam non. Et quod partes, quae sunt per materia, non sunt in definitione substanti.* *Quoniam illa substantia non habet partes, sed partes sunt substantiae congruentes.* *Et ista essentia habet quoquo modo definitionem, et non habet etiam.* *Quoniam, cum fuerit cum materia, non habebit: quia non est definitum per*
one could hold of chapters 10-12, but everyone agrees about the following points of interpretation: (1) the formula of the concrete substance does include a reference to its particular matter, and (2) its formula cannot be a real definition.⁴⁶ In fact, concrete substances do not have genuine definitions at all, as Aristotle states frequently in chapters 10-12, and as he argues extensively in chapter 15.

Before we look at chapter 15 of *Metaphysics* book VII, we should take stock of how a thirteenth-century reader might follow the claims in chapters 10-12. A material substance such as a bronze circle is definable just insofar as one considers its “circularity,” which just is its formal component. If one considers the bronze or other matter involved in the circle, one will not get a definition properly speaking but a “formula” (*sermo*) including a reference to the matter. Matter, meanwhile, is not directly intelligible or analyzable in itself.⁴⁷ So the formula that expresses what a material particular is *qua* particular would presumably contain components not directly intelligible in themselves. Thus, the logic might go, particulars themselves must not be directly intelligible, and this is evidenced in the fact that they cannot have proper definitions.

The unintelligibility of particulars receives further confirmation in chapter 12, where we find the example of the bronze circle turning up again. Aristotle explicitly claims that particulars are undefinable because they are not cognizable in the relevant way. The relevant way seems to involve some manner of intellectual abstraction from sensation. Aristotle contrasts the “mathematical” circle with the “sensible” one in order to emphasize that particulars are “sensed” but are not universally “understood”:

The whole concrete thing, for example this circle, is something particular, whether sensible or intelligible. And by “intelligible” I mean mathematical, and by “sensible,” brazen or wooden. Those [particulars] do not have a definition but are cognized by a “cognition” or by sense; and when they withdraw from the intellect, it is not clear whether they exist or not. And one is not spoken of or cognized with a universal definition. Indeed, matter is not cognized in itself.⁴⁸
When Averroes comments on this passage, he re-emphasizes the connection between the senses, matter, and indefinability. The claim is that matter makes something sensible but not intelligible; so if one wishes to define a thing, one must do it not through matter but through the form:

What is numerically one is not wholly cognized through a definition, but by the senses. And therefore it does not have a definition. For matter is not cognized through itself, but through a form.\(^49\)

The picture of the particular that emerges from these texts is increasingly prejudiced against the particular being understood as such. Not only metaphysical considerations are involved (the absence of matter from formal definitions) but epistemological considerations also play a role in the difference between “intellection” and “sensation.” These are precisely the sort of considerations that might raise worries in a thirteenth-century mind concerning the nameability of particulars. We name things insofar as we understand them (as Averroes had said); we do not name what we do not know.\(^50\) If those principles are true, it follows that we cannot name directly what we do not know directly, or that we cannot name at all the things which we cannot understand per se. What we cannot know per se also looks like what we cannot define per se. So if individuals turn out to be indefinable, on what grounds will they be knowable or nameable?

Considerations about the knowability of particulars build up to a capstone in chapter 15 of *Metaphysics* book VII. Here Aristotle gives us two crucial arguments against the definability of particulars, one focusing on the corruptibility of concrete material substances, and the other on the indefinability of any particular qua particular in general. The argument about the corruptibility of particular substances begins with the premise that having knowledge of something means having a definition or a scientific demonstration of it. Definitions and demonstrations, however, must be of necessary and unchanging things. Now, particular substances are corruptible and liable to go out of existence without our knowledge. Particulars are clearly not necessary and unchanging things; therefore, we have no scientific knowledge of particulars and cannot give them definitions as such. Aristotle fills out this skeleton with claims about matter and about cognition. The underlying reason for the corruptibility of particulars is precisely the involvement of matter. Matter makes particular things corruptible for the reason that it is what particular things are generated out of and corrupt into (we recall Aristotle’s earlier claim that bronze circles corrupt into their segments, while Callias and Socrates corrupt into

\(^{49}\) *V num numero non cognoscitur omnino per definitionem, sed cognoscitur sensu. Et ideo non habet definitionem. Materia autem per se non cognoscitur, sed cognoscitur per formam* (Averroes, “Long Commentary” on the *Metaphysics*; Iunctas VII.12, f. 188I).

their flesh and bones). Cognitively speaking, it is possible for us not to know when a particular has been corrupted, because we can only know particulars through sensation. The intelligible definition of an essence or form remains with us always; but we cease to perceive a sensible individual when it withdraws from our sensation. That is why we cannot know facts about its existence or non-existence apart from sensation, and why it is therefore an object of our opinion rather than of our knowledge.\textsuperscript{51}

This argument should look familiar to us. It is in fact the background to the very argument in the \textit{De signis} that Bacon claims was being used by the “many” to argue that particulars do not have proper names. As it appears in the \textit{De signis}, the argument emphasizes that sensible things “withdraw from the senses” and that we cannot have knowledge about their existence but only “opinion.” The conclusion in the \textit{De signis} is that we therefore cannot name corruptible particulars.\textsuperscript{52} This is curious for the reason that Aristotle says nothing about names in 1039b20-1040a6. The indefinability of particulars is what he has in view, and his only stated conclusion is that particulars cannot have definitions, not that they cannot have proper names. The whole discussion comes five full chapters after the notorious \textit{particularia non habent proprium nomen} in chapter 10 of \textit{Metaphysics} book VII. But that is not to say that the thirteenth-century mind would not have made the connection. If naming or signifying a thing depends on understanding it, and if particulars cannot be “understood”—because they are indefinable, or because they are not always sensed—then perhaps they cannot be named or signified for the same reason. In any event, as we see from Bacon, some thirteenth-century commentator(s) clearly saw a relation between Aristotle’s conclusions about indefinability and the conclusion that particulars cannot have names.

\textsuperscript{51} In modern editions, this argument appears in \textit{Metaphysics} VII.15, 1039b20-1040a6. For a discussion of this argument in Aristotle and in Averroes’s commentary, see Galluzzo (2013), pp. 130-133. Scot’s translation runs as follows: \textit{Et cum substantia tot aliis et definitio aliud et aliud, sicut quaedam substantiae sunt hoc modo, quod definitio congregat materiam, et quaedam est unitas definitions. Omnia igitur, quae dicuntur secundum hoc, habent generationem, et corruptionem etiam. Definitio autem, quae est hoc modo, non habet corruptionem, quoniam non possibile est generari. Essentia enim domus non generatur, sed generatur essentia, cuius est domus, et ista igitur sunt, et non sunt sine generatione et corruptione. Et declaratum est, quod ista neque generant, neque aliud faciens. Et ideo neque definitio, neque demonstratio est substantiarum sensibilium particularium, babent enim materiam quae quidem habet naturam quae potest esse et non esse. Et ideo corrupuntur omnia particularia. Et, si demonstratio est ex rebus necessariis, et definitio est vera, quemadmodum est impossibile scire aut ignorare illud, quod potest non esse tali, sed est secundum existimationem, ita non erit demonstratio, nec definitio eius quod potest esse ali modo, sed est existimationem. Manifestum est igitur, quod non habent definitionem, nec demonstrationem. Quae enim corrupuntur, non sunt manifesta apud habentes cognitionem, quando recedunt a sensu, et erit sermo conservatus in anima (Iunctas VII.13, f. 193G-193B).}

\textsuperscript{52} For a closer analysis of the \textit{De signis} argument, see Chapter 3, pp. 81-88.
Nor was this the only argument to be hijacked into the proper-name discussion. In chapter 15 of *Metaphysics* book VII, 1040a7-23, Aristotle gives a second crucial argument against the definability of particulars as such, this time in virtue of the nature of definition itself. This second argument is pressed into the service of the proper-name discussion in Robert Kilwardby’s commentary on the *Isagoge* and in two arguments in Geoffrey of Aspall’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam*. The original Aristotelian train of thought runs as follows: All definitions must be given in common terms, because to tell “what a thing is” is to tell what kind or class it belongs to. Thus, predicates purporting to tell what something is are automatically predicatable of more than one particular thing. Moreover, it is a mistake to think that by heaping enough predicates together (“lean, pale animal,” for example) one can arrive at a formula which uniquely defines one particular thing. The reason this fails is that each of the predicates taken separately is repeatable, and therefore the conjunction of all of them together must also be repeatable (at least in principle).

In the case of this argument, Scot’s translation comes across strikingly. Rather than using *verba, termini, or praedicata* to describe the sorts of words that appear in definitions, Scot uses *nomina*. Definitions consist “of names,” and whoever cannot give a definition “does not impose names”:

And it is necessary that a formula consist in names. And whoever does not define does not impose a name, since it [the thing?] would not be known if he did. But imposed

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53 “For [an individual] does not have a name that names its substance individually; for every such name would be a common name, because every naming of this kind is from a form, and every form is common.” *Non enim habet nomen quod nominet suam substantiam individualiter; tale enim nomen esset commune nomen, cum omnis huiusmodi nominatio sit a forma, et quaelibet forma sit communis* (Kilwardby, *Notulae super librum Porphyrii*, lectio 6; Conti [2013], p. 89 n. 63).

Kilwardby’s commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* appears in several manuscripts from which a provisional edition has been made by Alessandro Conti; selections from the edition appear in Conti (2013), and I am also indebted to Conti for providing me with his edition of the entire work. For a detailed discussion of this passage, see Chapter 4, pp. 131-139. See also Geoffrey of Aspall’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*: “What a name signifies is that through which it is explained. But a proper name is explained only through something common. Therefore, something common is what is signified through a proper name, and thus a particular thing is not signified through a particular or proper name, and in this way a particular thing does not have a name. The minor premise is clear through the explanation of these names, *Iohannes* and *Petrus*. For *Iohannes* is explained by ‘grace of God,’ and *Petrus* ‘firm in faith.’ And Robert, ‘bearer of a thing’…” *Item illud per quod nomen exponitur illud per nomen significatur, sed nomen proprium exponitur per commune, ergo commune per nomen proprium significatur, quare res particularis non significatur per nomen particularis vel proprium, et ita particularis non habet nomen. Minor patet per expositionem huiusmodi nominum Iohannes, Petrus. Iohannes exponitur in gratia dei et Petrus firmus in fide. Robertus quia res ferens…* (Geoffrey, *Qq. super Metaphysicam*, VII q. 43, obj. 5). See also the objection immediately following this passage in Geoffrey’s commentary: “Every name primarily signifies a form and secondarily signifies an aggregate. But every form considered in itself is common; therefore, every name primarily signifies something common. In this way a particular name primarily signifies something common, and that is why particulars do not have names.” *Item omne nomen primo significat formam secundo aggregatum, sed omnis forma per se considerata est communis, ergo omne nomen primo significat commune, et ita nomen particularis primo significat commune quare particularia non habent nomina* (Geoffrey of Aspall, *Qq. super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43 obj. 6; ed. Brumberg-Chaumont, p. 101).
names are common to all things... And if someone were to define something, he would say that it is “an animal,” or “lean,” or something which [can belong to] something else. And if someone were to say that nothing prevents all those separate [predicates] which exist in many things from being in one thing all together, then even there first of all there will still be two things, as “two-footed animal” [belongs to] “animal” and “two-footed.”

In Scot’s translation, Aristotle’s point—filtered as it is through both Arabic and Latin—sounds like the claim that all definitions have to be composed of common names. Whatever is explained in terms of common names, however, is repeatable; and whatever can’t be explained in terms of common names is simply not defined. This interpretation is reinforced by Scot’s version of Averroes’s commentary on the passage. Averroes makes the relationship between definitions and nomina even more explicit: names are imposed on what we know, and if we cannot define something, we do not know it and do not impose a name on it.

Therefore it is necessary that definitions be composed of names. And whoever does not know a thing does not impose a name on it. For no one imposes a name on something of which he is ignorant. That is why [Aristotle] says “imposed names are [common],” etc., for the names used in definitions are names common to all the things defined.

An obvious conclusion begs to be drawn from these texts. If particulars cannot have definitions as such, then particulars cannot be known as such. If what cannot be known cannot be named, then particulars cannot be named as such. All the premises are in place: the only thing lacking is the explicit conclusion, particularia non habent proprium nomen.

This is where Metaphysics book VII, 1035b1-3, finally becomes important. It is the sole place in the discussion of concrete substances, from chapter 10 to chapter 15, where Aristotle seems to express exactly the conclusion that should follow if the wording of his views in chapter 15 is correct. Metaphysics 1035b1-3 is a premonitory statement of what must be the case if

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54 Et necesse est ut sermo sit ex nominibus. Et qui non definit, non ponit nomen, quoniam non erit notum si fecerit. Nomina autem posita sunt communia omnibus rebus. Ergo necesse est ut hoc sit aliquid. Et, si aliquis definerit aliquid, dicit ipsum esse animal, aut macrum, aut aliquid quod est alterius etiam. Et, si aliquis dicuerit, quod nihil prohibet ut omnia ista sint separata in rebus multibus, et ut sint in insimul istius solius, tum primo vero erit dubius, ut animal bipes, animali, et bipedi (Aristotle, Metaphysics VII.15, 1040a10-17; Iunctas VII.17, f. 202K - 202A). The sense of Scot’s translation from the Arabic text differs significantly from modern translations of this passage from the Greek. For instance, W. D. Ross translates the foregoing passage as “its definition would have to consist of words, but new-coined words would not be understood, while old ones are common to all things of a class” (Ross [1924, repr. 1997], Aristotle’s Metaphysics: a revised text, Vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 214). Terence Irwin and Gail Fine translate: “Accounts must be composed of names, and the definer will not make a <new> name (since it would be unknown); yet each of the established names is common to all <the particulars of a given kind>, and so they must also belong to something else <as well as to a given particular>” (Irwin and Fine [1995], Aristotle: Selections, Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett, p. 310).

1040a6-24 in particular is true. This seems to be the reason that both the detractors and defenders of proper names seized on it as the *locus classicus* for the view that particulars cannot have proper names.

But the philosophical issues at stake in the interpretation of chapters 10-15 are legion. I have been presenting these arguments with an eye to very particular interpretations; but nearly all of the premises we have looked at are contestable and were contested in the thirteenth century. What does it mean to say that matter makes a particular unknowable? Don’t particulars have their own forms, and aren’t forms knowable? Don’t the essences of material things include a reference to their matter and still manage to be intelligible? And why should the *indefinability* of particulars mean that they are *unnameable*? All these questions demanded answers, and it was around these sorts of questions that both the opponents and defenders of proper names structured their arguments.

We will look at some of these arguments in the coming chapters. For the moment, however, we have reached an important insight into the origins of the proper-name discussion. What Scot’s translation did was to neatly tie the discussion of intelligibility to the discussion of naming. For those who were already inclined to read Aristotle’s arguments prejudicially against particulars, the tidy statement *particularia non habent proprium nomen* galvanized the suspicions about definitions and about matter, and it gave license to what seemed an obvious conclusion. How exactly matter helped to make particulars unintelligible, and why particulars could not be named on the basis of their forms, still needed to be worked out. But the philosophers who denied the genuineness of proper names thought they saw in the *Metaphysics* a consistent groundwork for working out a more detailed critique.

**3. Trouble Ahead**

In the preceding discussion, we have established two facts that are foundational to the present study: (1) there was a long-lived debate in the thirteenth century on whether particulars could have proper names, and (2) this debate arose when some philosophers took certain metaphysical and epistemological arguments in *Metaphysics* book VII to (what seemed) their logical conclusion. We will shortly proceed to look at the epistemology and metaphysics more deeply, especially the role of matter and form in naming and in definition.

But before we proceed to these philosophical issues, there is an obvious objection that must be faced. It simply seems wrong, even granted the arguments in *Metaphysics* book VII, to
reach the conclusion that particulars do not have proper names. Of all conclusions, *that one should have been the least plausible, even to the thirteenth-century mind. Why did Richard Rufus, Robert Kilwardby, and Richard of Clive not reason in the opposite direction? Granted that we can name particulars, particulars must be intelligible and definable?*

This question is, in a way, the key to understanding the entire problem with proper names from the point of view of those who denied that particulars could have them. To address this question, we must step back for a moment from the metaphysics and look instead to the medieval traditions in logic and grammar. As I will argue, there was logical space in the language arts for identifying some nouns as genuine names while denying such a status to other nouns. The textual material on the noun/name relationship is both suggestive and subtle, and students at grammar schools or in arts faculties would have been exposed to at least some of it. The central issue is what counts as a word’s ability to “signify.” I will therefore use the next chapter to analyze a few of the grammatical and logical texts that discuss the signification of nouns, and why it was important for medieval scholars to distinguish between nouns that were genuine names, and nouns that weren’t.
Chapter 2
The Varieties of Nomina:
Traditional Grammar, Logic, and the Thirteenth Century

When philosophers in the thirteenth century deny that particulars have proper names, we almost always find them inserting a caveat. There are different kinds of “names.” Richard Rufus of Cornwall, perhaps our earliest witness to the proper-name discussion, is a case in point. In his discussion of matter and form in his Metaphysics commentary, Rufus argues that particulars are constituted by matter, that matter is both unintelligible and unnameable as such, and that particulars are therefore unnameable as well. But in the middle of this argumentation, we find Rufus acknowledging that we do in fact call Socrates “Socrates.” How is this possible? Rufus’s response is that the proper name is a “verbal name,” not a “real name”:

Understand that there are verbal names and real names. A real name is a proper quality of a supposit, and it is the principle of understanding a thing. ... Since an individual is perfected through matter, and matter does not have a name, therefore the individual does not properly have a name. Nor is this contradicted by the fact that someone is called “Socrates” or “Plato.” For such names are verbal names and not names of the thing; for they do not bring into consideration the nature of imposition through the nature of thing, but are by chance.¹

Rufus is not alone in drawing a distinction between names and names. At the other end of the century, perhaps as late as 1290, we find Richard of Clive making the same move. Richard, like Rufus, also engages in a metaphysical discussion to explain why particulars cannot have proper names. In Richard’s case, the argument turns on the fact that a proper name would have to signify too many distinct material and formal entities. But Richard too interrupts himself to explain that proper names can be given to particulars “accidentally,” in a sense. That is because proper names are “grammarians’ names,” not “logicians’ names”:

The grammarian calls any utterance a nomen if it signifies in any way, since he primarily considers the utterance. But the logician and metaphysician consider both the utterance and the thing, and principally the thing. And when one thing has one name, they grant that it is [a name], but not otherwise.... [But] a proper name is not a name, but names.²

¹ Est intellige quod est nomen vocis et nomen rei: nomen rei est propria qualitas suppositi, et istud est principium intelligendi rem.... Cum individuum perficiatur per materiam, et materia nomen non habet, ideo individuum nomen proprie non habet. Nec est contra [hoc] quod iste vocatur Socrates vel Plato, quia talia sunt nomina vocis et non rei; non enim considerant naturam impositionis per naturam rei sed a casu (Rufus, Metaphysics VII, q. 13 corpus; E49ra). For an analysis of the foregoing passage, see pp. 63-69 below.

² Est grammaticus vocat nomen quamlibet vocem, quae aliquo modo significat, quia vocem principaliiter considerat. Logicus vero et metaphysicus rem et vocem considerat, rem tamen principaliiter. Unde quando res una est nomen unum esse dicunt et non aliter....
A name can be had accidentally or can be in act in the way that a bronze circle can be called $A$. If a thing gathers together diverse natures in itself, then a name is not essentially suited to it, but rather it is an utterance or a calling.\(^3\)

What is the difference between having a name accidentally and having one essentially, between having a \textit{nomen grammatici} and a \textit{nomen logici}, or between having a \textit{nomen vocis} and a \textit{nomen rei}? At the outset, it is not clear precisely how the translations of these terms should go. “Verbal name” or “name of speech” is fairly straightforward; but \textit{nomen rei} could be translated either “real name” or “name of a thing.” A “grammarians’s \textit{nomen}” could just mean a grammatical noun; but is a “logician’s \textit{nomen}” a logical name? The question of translation is only a superficial manifestation of the deeper questions at stake. Why should we think there are different kinds of \textit{nomina} at all, and what are the criteria by which we should distinguish them?

I would like to tackle this cluster of questions in three stages. First, to understand why Richard and Rufus attempt to draw a distinction between \textit{nomina} at all, we must look to the grammatical and philosophical traditions in the language arts. There was space in the tradition for saying that certain words were \textit{nomina} in a grammatical sense but not genuine \textit{nomina} in a philosophical sense. In particular, the texts of Boethius and the late Latin grammarian Priscian were crucial for this point. The first stage of our investigation is therefore to clarify what \textit{nomina} were for Boethius and Priscian, and what criteria could be used to determine whether a word was a genuine \textit{nomen} or not. In answering this question, our investigation will naturally transform into a more difficult question: why might someone think that proper names fail to meet the specified criteria for being a \textit{nomen}? At the second stage of our investigation, we will turn to the thirteenth-century texts on proper names themselves. Richard of Clive and Richard Rufus of Cornwall are the philosophers who distinguish most clearly between various kinds of \textit{nomina}, but other philosophers who denied that particulars could have proper names also supply some clues as to the criteria at stake. Our ultimate goal is to understand precisely which criteria for being a \textit{nomen} were in play in the proper-name debate, and on precisely which grounds each player thought that a proper name was not a “real,” “genuine,” or “philosophical” name.

\footnote{\textit{Nomen proprium non est nomen sed nomina} (Richard of Clive, \textit{Qq. metaphysicae} VII, qq. 49-50, ad obj. 2; W150rb). All citations from this question are taken from a transcription generously provided to me by Timothy Noone. \textit{Nomen accidentaliter potest habere vel actu sit ut circulus aeneus potest vocari} $A$ (ibid, corpus). \textit{Si vero res aggregat in se diversas naturas, competet ei vocem sive vocationem et non nomen essentialiter} (ad obj. 1). See pp. 58-60 below for a discussion of this quotation in the context of Richard’s views on proper names.}
1. Names That Aren’t Names (and Non-Names That Are)

The philosopher in the Latin tradition most responsible for distinguishing grammatical nomina from logical nomina was Boethius. In his second commentary on Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*, Boethius remarks on several occasions that grammarians and philosophers differ regarding what counts as a nomen. In particular, Boethius identifies three kinds of words which non-philosophers call nomina but which cannot be nomina in a philosophical or logical sense: (1) nonsense words, (2) inflected nouns, and (3) so-called infinite nouns (such as “non-man”). We will look briefly at the first two cases before focusing in more detail on the third.

According to Boethius’ report, grammarians acknowledge that made-up words such as garalus are nomina. Garalus is a nonsense word but has the standard form of a second-declension Latin noun; the –us nominative ending marks its nominal status somewhat more obviously than nonsense words in English generally are marked (“brillig,” “borogrove” and “rath” are not obviously nouns as opposed to adjectives or verbs). Latin grammarians may thus safely classify garalus as a nomen in our sense of “noun.” But philosophers attend to the fact that garalus does not mean anything. It has not been instituted as a sign for anything, and it does not bring anything to mind. In short, garalus does not have “signification,” and therefore it is not a genuine nomen in the philosophical sense.  

Verbal utterances that look like nomina can thus fail to be genuine nomina. But we do not have to go as far as nonsense words to find cases of this phenomenon. Boethius notes, following Aristotle, that nouns or names in their inflected forms can fail to be nomina properly speaking. The Latin Catonis, Catoni or English Cato’s are not genuine names but rather “cases of nomina.” At first this looks like an odd thing to say. English does not have many noun inflections, but we are inclined to think that when we talk about our cats, the utterances

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4 “Verbs and nouns are not only vocal utterances, but they have also been imposed in order to signify a certain concept. For a vocal utterance which designates nothing, such as garalus, is not considered in philosophy to be a name (even though the grammarians looking at the [grammatical] form contend that it is), unless it has been imposed to designate some conception of the soul and in the same way can designate something real. For it is necessary that the name of something be a name; but if a given vocal utterance designates nothing, it is the name of nothing.” *Verba et nomina non solum voces sunt, sed positae ad quandam intellectuum significationem. Vox enim quae nihil designat, ut est garalus, licet eam grammatici figuram vocis intuentes nomen esse contendant, tamen eam nomen philosophia non putabit, nisi sit posita ut designare animi aliquam conceptionem et modo rerum aliquid positi. Etenim nomen aliquem nomen esse necesse erit; sed si voc aliquo nihil designat, nullius nomen est.* (In Periherm. II, lib. I, c. 1; Meiser 32.17-23). On the relationship between logic and grammar in Boethius, see Taki Suto (2009), “Logic and Grammar in Boethius,” in Shimizu and Burnett (eds), *The Word in Medieval Logic, Theology, and Psychology*, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 65-80.

5 As Aristotle says (in Boethius’ Latin), “Catonis or Catoni and all such words are not names, but cases of names.” *Catonis autem vel 'Catoni' et quacumque talia sunt non sunt nomina, sed casus nominis* (Aristotle, *De interpretatione* cap. 4, 16a31-16b1; Minio-Paluello 6.16-17).
“Growltiger” and “Growltiger’s” are the same sort of word—both of them instances of a name. But Boethius gives us two reasons for thinking otherwise. First, a genuine *nomen* must be capable of producing an affirmation or negation when joined to “is” or “is not.” “Growltiger” in the affirmation “Growltiger is the Terror of the Thames” can fulfill this criterion, but “Growltiger’s” cannot. Second, technically an inflected name has not been instituted as a sign for anything. Or, to shift the emphasis, the inflected name has not been instituted as a sign for any *thing* (*aliaquid*) as such. Rather, the inflected name indicates “of something” (*alicuius*) or “to something” (*alicui*), and so on. The point seems to be that when we say “Growltiger’s,” we don’t use a word that primarily brings Growltiger himself to mind, but rather the relation that holds between him and something else.

Boethius gives us a story about the original reason for name-giving to clarify this point. In a standard name-giving scenario, a name-giver imposes names like “cat” and “gerbil” on things themselves. This is because the cats and gerbils themselves are the things which the name-giver wants to talk about. The original name-giving thus occurs without reference to the cats’ possessions or the gerbils’ status as objects of action. The nominative form of a name is privileged insofar as it is an utterance instituted to designate things themselves. Only after the original name-giving, when it becomes expedient to talk about the cats’ ferocity or the gerbils’ ingenuity do the other cases evolve. The genitive, dative, accusative, and other cases are

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6 “But it does not pertain only to these kinds of utterances that they cannot be classified as names without qualification. For there are certain other words which have something of a “name” and signify definitely, but because of some other deviation, they cannot be called names without qualification. Such are the inflected cases, as when we say *Catonis, Catoni, Catonem*, and so on. For there is a deviation here from the name, because a name rightly considered makes an affirmation or negation when joined with *is* or *is not*. So if someone says *Socrates is*, this is true or false.” *Sed hoc non solis huic modo vocibus contingit, ut simpliciter sub nomine poni non possit, sed sunt quaedam aliae quae omnia quidem nominis habeant et definitae significant, sed quaedam alia discrepantia nomina simpliciter dici non possint, ut sunt oblique casus cum dicimus *Catonis*, Catonem et ceteros*. *Horum enim discrepantia est a nomine, quod nomen rectum iunctum cum est vel non est affirmationem <vel negationem> facit: ut si quis dicas *Socrates est*, hoc verum est vel falsum* (In Periherm. II, lib. I, c. 2; Meiser 63.17-26). The point here is more obvious in English than in Latin. Because of the laxity in Latin word order, utterances like *Catonis est* can be construed either as “Cato’s is” or “It is Cato’s.” In order to take *Catonis est* as the complete affirmation “It is Cato’s,” we have to read an implied subject. Clearly, Boethius has in mind cases where we do not read an implied subject but take *Catonis* itself as the subject—which does not produce a sentence but an ill-formed phrase.

7 “This is what [Aristotle] says: *Catonis or Catoni* and other such words are not names, but cases of names.” *Atque hoc est quod ait: Catonis autem vel Catoni et quaecumque talia sunt non sunt nominis, sed casus nominis. Unde etiam discrepantia videntur. Hae enim nominis non vocantur. Illa enim rectius dicuntur nominis quae prima positae sunt id est quae aliquid monstrant. Genitivus enim casus non aliquid, sed aliqua et dativus aliqua et ceteri eodem modo. Rectus vero qui est primus rem monstrat, ut si qui dicas Socrates, atque ideo hic nominativus dicitur, quod nominis quodammodo solus teneat vim nominique sit* (In Periherm. II, lib. I, c. 2; Meiser 64.16-26).
therefore derivative, while the true names of the things in question are always found in the nominative.\footnote{\textit{And it is as if the one who originally imposed names on things said: ‘Let this be called \textit{man} and let that be called \textit{stone}.’ By subsequent usage, the name first imposed was turned into other cases. And that is very important: that every case of a name is a case of \textit{something}. Therefore, unless there is a name of which the case is a case, it cannot be rightly called the case of a name.” \textit{Et verisimile est eum qui primus nomina rebus imposuit ita dixisse: vocetur hic homo et tursus vocetur hic lapis. Posteriore vero usu factum est, ut in alios casus primitus positum nomen derivaretur. Illud quoque minus est, quod omnis casus nominis alcinis casus est. Ergo nisi sit nomen, cuius casus sit, casus nominis dici recte non potest} (In Periherm. II, lib. I, c. 2; Meiser 64.26-65.1).}

Judging by these texts, it seems that Boethius has a handful of criteria for what makes a part of speech to be a \textit{nomen}. First, the part of speech must signify something, in a way that nonsense words do not. Second, the part of speech must function as a sign for the thing itself, in a way that an inflected form does not. Third, the part of speech must be able to play the right role in a proposition, producing an affirmation or negation when joined to the be-verb. The second and third criteria seem to be related, not only because Boethius uses them both to rule out inflected nouns, but because the second seems to provide some sort of rationale for the third. Why can’t “Growltiger’s” produce an affirmation when joined to “is”? Because it is a part of speech that does not designate Growltiger himself; it only indicates something else “of Growltiger,” and we need that something-else to function as the primary entity about which we are making an affirmation or denial.

We find a fourth criterion when we turn to Boethius’ discussion of a more difficult class of words that look like \textit{nominia} but aren’t. Those are the so-called “infinite nouns”—\textit{non-man}, \textit{non-cat}, and so on.\footnote{\textit{As Aristotle says in just one sentence: “Non-man indeed is not a name; nor indeed has a name been imposed by which it can be called that—for it is neither a statement or its negation, but an infinite name.” \textit{Non homo vero non est nomen; at vero nec positum est nomen quod illud aportet appellari—necque enim oratio aut negatio est sed sit nomen infinitum} (Aristotle, \textit{De interpretatione} cap. 2, 16a30; Minio-Paluello 6.14-16).} This criterion is the most interesting for our purposes, since it presents us with an insight that becomes very important for the discussion of proper names in the thirteenth century. That criterion is that a name be able to function as a sign “definitely.”

Grammatically, of course, infinite nouns look just like \textit{nominia}. “Non-cat” and “non-gerbil” have no trouble meeting the three criteria that Boethius has already outlined. In the first place, they mean something. They aren’t nonsense words like \textit{garulus}, and it looks as if it should be easy to specify what they are signs of. “Cat,” for instance, functions as a sign for cats; “non” is a sign for negation; so the combination “non-cat” quite plausibly ought to signify everything that is not a cat. Moreover, “non-cat” occurs in the nominative case, and it can even function as a subject in an affirmation. “The non-cat ate the non-gerbil” is a perfectly well-phrased
affirmation. But Boethius argues at length (following Aristotle) that “non-cat” and other infinite nouns are nevertheless not genuine nomina. What Boethius attacks is the claim that “non-cat” does in fact successfully function as a sign.

To be more specific, in one sense “non-cat” functions as a sign, and in another not. In a broad sense, “non-cat” signifies lots of things: dogs and gerbils and horses and stones and cats who once lived but are now dead. But Boethius argues that the staggering breadth of everything “non-cat” signifies ends up defeating its ability to function as a sign in another, more precise sense. For what exactly does the sign “non-cat” bring to mind? Nothing in particular. It makes us think of no one thing (or sort of thing) more than other, as long as the things in question aren’t cats. That means that “non-cat” does not function as a sign for anything definite. Someone might say, “Isn’t an [infinite noun] a name, since any common or proper name signifies something definitively?” But when I say “Cicero,” I name one person and one substance; and when I say “man,” which is a common name, I signify a definite substance. When I say “non-man,” I do indeed signify something, namely what is not a man—but that is infinite.

So Boethius thinks that in order to be a real name, a word must successfully function as a sign for a definite sort of thing.

We need some care in working out what precisely it means that a name must signify something “definite.” It is not clear whether Boethius is pointing out a problem with breadth or with what we might think of as positive content. On the one hand, Boethius indicates that infinite nouns like “non-cat” signify too many things, as if the problem were with the number of entities they are signs of. In the case of “non-cat,” applicable to dogs and gerbils and horses and...
the long-dispersed physical remains of Growltiger, Boethius claims that problem is precisely that “non-cat” signifies an infinite number of things:

[It is] not a name taken simply, because it designates with no limitations, but an infinite name because it signifies many and even infinitely many things.\(^1\)

Boethius therefore clearly indicates that infinite nouns are “infinite” insofar as they manage to signify far too many entities and non-entities. If we take the position that “non-cat” signifies an infinite number of things (or almost infinite, since cats are excluded), then the problem with “non-cat” in Boethius’ view is a breadth problem. It is the opposite of the problem with garalus. Garalus does not signify enough to count as a name: it has not been instituted as a sign for anything. But “non-cat” manages to signify almost everything.

On the other hand, it is possible that this is not the problem Boethius means to identify with “non-cat.” The ability to signify a potentially infinite number of things could also be said of words like “substance” or “thing,” which Boethius presumably regards as nomina.\(^2\) The fact that “non-cat” signifies infinita, as Boethius says, might be better taken to mean that it signifies infinite—“indefinitely,” without a precise content. In this case, the problem with “non-cat” is almost the same problem that Boethius identifies with garalus. Just as garalus was never given to a definite thing and does not signify a definite concept, the utterance “non-cat” (though its parts are signifying parts) also was never given to a definite thing and does not signify anything definite. The issue here is one of positive content. Words like “substance” and “thing” mean something positive; they function as signs for entities that exist in themselves, that underlie accidents, and so on. But “non-cat” has no content of its own—only the negation of the precise content of “cat.” It is the lack of positive precision that renders the infinite noun “indefinite.”\(^3\)

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\(^{13}\) Sed sit nomen infinitum, non simpliciter nomen, quoniam nulla circumscriptione designat, sed infinitum nomen, quoniam plura et ea infinita significat (In Periherm. II, lib. I, c. 2; Meiser 63.11-14). It is not clear that Boethius accurately expresses Aristotle’s claim here. Lambert-Marie de Rijk argues that Aristotle intended to say that infinite names signify indefinitely (infinite), not that they signify an infinite number of things (infinita). See de Rijk (2003), “The Logic of Indefinite Names in Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, and Radulphus Brito,” in Braakhuis et al (eds), Aristotle’s Peri hermeneias in the Latin Middle Ages, Groningen-Haren: Ingenium, pp. 207-233.

\(^{14}\) Boethius indicates in his second commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge that ens is predicatable of everything, though he does not say that it “signifies” everything. The Isagoge commentary has been edited by Samuel Brandt (1907): In Isagogae Porphyrii Commenta, in Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vol. 48, Leipzig: Freytag. See the discussion on ens and unum in In Isagoge II, lib. 3, c. 7; Brandt 220-225.

\(^{15}\) Thirteenth-century commentators on Boethius sometimes explained his “definiteness” requirement in terms of natures. A genuine name was one whose content was a nature rather than the negation of a nature. See e.g. Martin of Dacia, Quaestiones super libros Perihermeneias, q. 22; ed. Heinrich Roos (1961), Corpus Philosophorum Vandalorum Medii Aevi, Vol. 2, Copenhagen: Gad, pp. 260-261. Others explained it in terms of finite concepts; see Simon of Faversham, Quaestiones super libro Perihermeneias, q. 4; ed. Paschale Mazzarella (1957), Magistri Simonis Anglici Opera Omnia, Vol. 1: Opera Logica, Padova: CEDAM, pp. 152-153. For further discussion, see Deborah Black (1991),
The requirement that a name signify “definitely” fits with Boethius’ remarks on signification from earlier in his commentary on Perihermeneias. If the job of a nomen is to bring to mind a concept or a thing, then some degree of specificity seems to be presumed. The presumption of specificity becomes clearer once we start asking how far from each other two groups of things can diverge and still be (unequivocally) named by the same name. A Turkish Angora and a Maine Coon cat may share the name “cat”; cats and gerbils may share the name “animal”; but what about existent gerbils and dead cats? What “name” do they share? If we speak of the deceased Growltiger and say that he is a non-cat, and then assert of a living gerbil that it is a non-cat, can we plausibly be using “non-cat” in the same sense? Infinite nouns stretch to the limit the criterion that a nomen must name something definite.

From the case of infinite nouns, inflected nouns, and nonsense nouns, we can extract both a “lower bound” and an “upper bound” on what counts as a genuine name. At the lower bound, a genuine name must signify at least one thing. At the upper bound, an utterance should not signify too many things, or do so too indefinitely. Both of these bounds become important in the thirteenth century for the discussion of proper names. Boethius himself never uses these criteria against proper names; but, as we shall see in the second half of this chapter, thirteenth-century philosophers could and did argue that proper names violated, in interesting ways, both the lower bound and the upper bound on naming.
Before turning to the problems with proper names, we have one more group of traditional texts to look at for information about *nomina* in general. Boethius, interpreting Aristotle, may have credited grammarians with less-than-philosophical inclusiveness as to what counts as a *nomen*. But grammar could also produce fruitful thought of a philosophical bent on the topic of *nomina*. As far as medieval discussions of *nomina* went, the late Latin grammarian Priscian produced a very important formulation of the unique role of the *nomen* which was influential throughout the Middle Ages. “It is proper to a *nomen* to signify substance with quality,” Priscian said; and specifically in the case of proper names, “a proper [noun] naturally signifies something’s own (*privatam*) substance and quality.” What it means to signify both “substance” and “quality” was a question that generated extensive discussion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But here I will focus on just two aspects of Priscian’s treatment of *nomina*: first, his agreement with Boethius that a word’s status as a *nomen* is a matter of its “signification” rather than its grammatical features, and secondly, Priscian’s discussion of proper names as words that lack a definite signification in some way.

First, Priscian uses the criterion of signification somewhat differently than Boethius. Priscian does not exclude certain categories of nouns from being genuine names, but he includes a group of words that do not, grammatically, look like nouns at all. Consider words like *huiusmodi* (“suchlike”), *quantum* or *tantum* (“how much?”, “so much”), interrogatives like *quis* (“who?”), and relative pronouns like *qui*, *quae*, *qualis* (“who,” “which,” “of which kind,”). Contemporary English grammars classify these words as adverbs, adjectives, or pronouns; and

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19 See note 4 above.

20 *Proprium est nominis substantiam et qualitatem significare*. Priscian’s *Institutiones Grammaticae* have been edited by Martin Hertz (1855-59) in the *Grammatici Latini* series by Heinrich Keil (Keil vols. 2-3), Leipzig: Teubner; repr. (1961), Hildesheim: Olms. See IG lib. II, c. 18; Keil vol. 2: 55.6. Anneli Luhtala (2005) argues that Priscian himself most probably took this formula from Apollonius Dyscolus, who may have been influenced by the Stoics. See her *Grammar and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins, p. 84.

21 “The difference between a proper name and a common name is this: the common name is naturally to many things which are joined into one substance by either a quality, or a general or special quantity.... But a proper [name] naturally signifies something’s own substance and quality, and it is in the individual things which the philosophers call ‘atoms,’ like ‘Socrates’ and ‘Plato.’ For they lack a natural commonality.” *Hoc autem interest inter proprium et appellativum, quod appellativum naturaliter commune est multorum, quos eadem substantia sive qualitas vel quantitas generalis specialisve iungit.... Proprium vero naturaliter uniuscuiusque privatam substantiam et qualitatem significat et in rebus est individuis, quas philosophi atomos vocabant, ut ‘Plato’, ‘Socrates’. Itaque caret communione naturali* (Priscian, IG lib. II, c. 24-25; Keil vol. 2: 58.15-59.05).
Priscian himself indicates that they were traditionally treated as pronouns in Latin. But Priscian argues that these words in fact have the function of nomina, even though they have the grammatical form of Latin pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs. He offers rationales for this conclusion in several passages, but in each case his argument turns on the respective functions assigned to nouns and other parts of speech based on the ways they function as signs. The following are a few instances of how a word’s signification determines its philosophical status as a nomen.

Take *huiusmodi*, *tantidem*, and *quantum*. Priscian observes that these words function as signs of unspecified quantity or quality. When we ask *quantum?* (“how much?”) we are indeed aiming at quantity, and when we say *huiusmodi* and *tantidem* we are expressing a similarity or identity of quality. If this is the case, however, these words cannot be pronouns. It is not the function of pronouns to signify quantities and qualities; that is what nomina do. Therefore these words must be nomina.

Nouns can be combined with pronouns, such as *huiusmodi*, *istiusmodi*, and *huiuscemodi*... And they are all nomina, even though they have a pronoun at one end [of the word]. For since they signify quality, they cannot be pronouns.

*Tantidem*... signifies quality, which is not possible with a pronoun, since [a pronoun] signifies only substance, as we have often remarked.

Alternatively, take interrogatives such as *quis* and *qui*. These words look like pronouns, but Priscian holds the (somewhat peculiar but clearly stated) belief that genuine pronouns are definable as words that replace proper nouns. If the job of a pronoun is just to replace a proper name, then pronouns must signify particular persons or things, and they must do so in a definite manner. But the interrogatives *quis* and *qui* are words which one utters when one does not know what definite person is being specified. These words therefore cannot signify particular persons and do not meet the chief criterion for being pronouns. The criterion they do meet is that of

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22 See his short rant against the practice of categorizing these words as pronouns (*IG* lib. II, c. 18; Keil vol. 2: 55.22-28). See also footnotes 25 and 26 below.

23 *Componuntur nomina cum pronominisbus; ut ‘huiusmodi, istiusmodi, huiuscemodi’, sicut et apud Graecos... et sunt omnia nomina, etiam quae in fine pronom en habuerint: cum enim qualitatem significent, pronomina esse non possunt* (*IG* lib. XII, c. 31; Keil vol. 2: 596.5-9). *‘Tantidem’... quod quamvis videatur pro ‘eiusdem’ poni, tamen significat qualitatem, quae in pronomine esse minime potest, quod substantiam solum, ut saepe diximus, significat* (*IG* lib. XII, c. 30; Keil vol. 2: 595.25-27). For analysis see Luhtala (2005), p. 104ff.

24 Priscian repeats this formulation several times: “It is proper to a pronoun to stand in for a proper name and signify a definite person.” *Proprium est pronominis pro aliquo nomine proprio poni et certas significare personas* (*IG* lib. II, c. 18; Keil vol. 2: 55.13-14). Cf. *IG* lib. XII, c. 1; Keil vol. 2: 577.1-2: *Pronomen est pars orationis, quae pro nomine proprio uniussiusque accepitur personaque finitas recipit*. The examples he gives in context are “I,” “me,” “you,” “yours,” etc.
signifying some kind of (indefinite) substance with some (general and as-yet-unspecified) quality. So Priscian concludes that *quis* and *qui* are actually nouns.

Therefore “who” and “which” and “of this kind” and “so much”... should be called *nomina* much more than *pronomina*. For they cannot be used in the place of proper names, nor do they signify definite persons. But they have substance, however indefinite, and quality, however general—which pertains to *nomina*. And so they should be called *nomina*, even though they have the declension of pronouns.  

The examples of *quis* and *qui*, as well as *huiusmodi* and *tantidem*, clearly indicate that Priscian thinks of a word’s classification as a part of speech as a function of what or how it signifies. Priscian explicitly stresses the difference between a grammatical way of classifying words and a semantic way: “We should not pay attention to declensions,” Priscian tells us, “but to the force and signification of each part [of speech].” It is not a stretch to say that Priscian’s attitude toward the classification of parts of speech is the same as Boethius’, even if his conclusions are different. In the case of both Priscian and Boethius, the status of a word (and particularly a *nomen*) is determined by whether it functions as a sign in the right kind of way.

Priscian’s commitment to “signification” as the primary criterion for sorting *nomina* is important as a background for his comments on proper names. Initially, Priscian’s definition of proper names accords well with his overall analysis of *nomina*: just as common names signify substances with qualities, so proper names signify a thing’s “own (privatam) substance and quality.” He explains briefly that the private substance and quality in question are indivisible and unsharable. But he also seems to think that a proper name enjoys a peculiar relationship

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26 Non enim declinatio, sed vis et significatio uniuscuiusque partis est contemplanda (*IG* lib. II, c. 18; Keil vol. 2: 55.20-21). Priscian indulges in a rant against the practice of categorizing words by grammar instead of signification: “We therefore find many nouns that are declined indiscriminately in the mode of pronouns, and pronouns in the mode of nouns. What would be more foolish than to call all the words that signify numbers nouns, but to call ‘one’ (*unus, unius*) a pronoun on account of its declension? For if declension is the criterion for what part of speech it is, then all possessive pronouns and participles will be included in this, because they follow the declension of nouns, which lacks all reason. Therefore not declension but the property of signification is to be examined.” *Indifferenter enim multa et nomina modo pronominum et pronomina modo nominum inveniuntur declinata. Quid enim stultius quam omnia, quae numeros significant, nomina dicer, unum autem, ‘unus unius’, propter declinationem pronominum appellare? Quod si declinatio facit indicium, quis sit dictio, debent omnia possessiva pronomina, quia nominum declinationem sequuntur, et participia in his computari, quod omnino caret ratione. Ergo non declinatio, sed proprietas est exspectienda significationis* (*IG* lib. II, c. 18; Keil vol. 1: 55.22-28).

27 See note 21.

28 “A proper [name] naturally signifies something’s own substance and quality, and it is in the individual things which the philosophers call ‘atoms,’ like ‘Socrates’ and ‘Plato.’ For they lack a natural commonality.” *Proprium vero*
with the individual it names. As he puts the case in the following passage, a proper name is in the proper quality of the person. The proper-noun-as-proper-quality then becomes what is signified by a pronoun, when a pronoun replaces a proper name in a discourse:

A proper name is understood through a pronoun by expressive force. I am not talking about the name of speech, but what is shown through it, namely the proper quality of the supposit in which the proper names are. Thus pronouns have no use if there is no person who is pointed out or person doing the pointing out.29

The “name of speech” or vocis nomen here is suggestive. It could be the background to Rufus’ distinction between nomina vocis and nomina rei; but if so, it is puzzling. Priscian himself does not distinguish a “name of speech” from a “real name” but rather from the individual’s proper quality. His observation that a proper name is “in” a subject or a proper quality also goes unexplained. Perhaps the view here is that a proper name is a quality somehow proper to the person. This would explain why Priscian says that a proper name is not just a verbal utterance or a “name of speech” (nomen vocis), but something more.30 It would also explain why a pronoun replacing a proper name in a sentence does not bring to mind the verbal utterance itself, but rather the very person being referred to. In any event, Priscian seems to see a very close relation between proper names and the proper qualities of individuals.

On the other hand, Priscian grants that proper names can be equivocal, insofar as more than one person can have the same name. Priscian indicates that the equivocity of proper names is merely a matter of chance or of speech (fortuitu et sola voce) and does not arise because of a confusion of two different individuals’ substances or qualities.31 Priscian also does not (initially) take it to be a serious problem that some varieties of proper names, particularly the Roman cognomen and agnomen, could be bestowed explicitly from incidental or accidental qualities (ab

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29 Vi enim proprium nomen intelligitur per pronomen: non dico vocis nomen, sed quod ex ea ostenditur, id est propria qualitas suppositi, in qua sunt propria nomina. Quanobrem ad nihil utile pertinent pronomina, si carent personis ostendentiis et eius, qui ostenditor (IG lib. XVII, c. 11; Keil vol. 3: 149.8-12). Luhtala (2005) translates propria qualitas suppositi, in qua sunt propria nomina as “peculiar quality of the subject, which is the raison d’être of the proper noun” (126). Luhtala does not provide an analysis of this particular passage but does look in depth at several other Priscianic passages contrasting proper names and pronouns. See Luhtala (2005), 79-128.

30 This is almost undoubtedly the passage that Richard Rufus has in mind when he argues that a proper name is simply a “name of speech” (nomen vocis) and not a nomen rei (note 1 above). But his use of this passage is unclear, not the least because Priscian’s own intention is to say that proper names are names, and that they are somehow “in” the thing. For discussion of Rufus’ possible meaning, see pp. 64-69 below.

31 “When it happens that many [individuals] are called by the same name, this is fortuitous and only according to speech, and it does not usually come about by some understanding of a common substance or quality.” Cum igitur evenit, ut multi eodem nomine proprio nuncupentur, fortuitu et sola voce, non etiam intellectu communis alicuius substantiae vel qualitatis hoc fieri solet (IG lib. II, c. 25; Keil vol. 2: 59.1-4).
His examples are *Africanus* being imposed from a location or *Cicero* from a facial feature. But the role of accidental qualities becomes much more marked in Priscian’s lengthy analysis of pronouns in the 17th book of his *Institutes*, where we begin to discover that the formula “proper names signify private substance with quality” is not so straightforward.

In contrast with the brief and rather cryptic passage above, Priscian’s official analysis of pronouns in *Institutes* 17.10 indicates that the relationship between pronouns and proper names is quite complex, and the use of proper names is actually parasitic on the use of pronouns. In Priscian’s opinion in *Institutes* 17.10, proper names are woefully inadequate for the purposes of picking out individual people even in everyday contexts. The problem with proper names, as he stresses repeatedly, is that they presuppose that the people using the names are aware of the unique qualities that distinguish the named thing from all other things. But this knowledge is not contained in the proper name itself, and the use of the proper name presupposes an actual “demonstration” or pointing-out of the individual:

The imposition of names was invented to signify common or proper qualities, as in “man” and “Plato.” But [qualities] are innumerable. And since they do not have a demonstration or a relation—by which the persons of pronouns are delimited (*fintiuntur*)—the imposition of names became innumerable.... On account of this there is more than a little uncertainty about the signification of quality, for the person that is understood in a name lacks delimitation (*definitione*). And no wonder, because even proper names, although they are imposed to distinguish a given thing from all others, are nevertheless uncertain, since they cannot point out all of the thing’s qualities which separate it from everyday without the aid of demonstration, which occurs through pronouns.33

In making the claim that persons are not “delimited” through proper names, Priscian uses words related to defining—*fintiuntur* and *definitione*.34 The philosophical and logical

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32 “The *agnomen* is [a name] that is imposed from some eventuality, such as ‘the African’ or ‘the Isaurian.’ We find many cases in which these four kinds of proper names are substituted for each other.... Similarly, in other cases, we find an *agnomen* in the place of a *cognomen*, or vice versa. For instance ‘Cicero,’ who was first named from a feature of his face, took this name as an *agnomen*, but it became a *cognomen* for his family. Similarly with ‘Caesar’ and ‘Scipio.’” *Agnomen est, quod ab aliquo eventu imponitur, ut ‘Africanus’, ‘Isauricus’. Invenimus tamen multa in his quattuor speciebus propriorum nominum invicem pro se posita .... Similiter et in alio loco cognominis aliorum agnomina vel contra, ut ‘Cicero’, qui primus ab habitu faciei nominatus est, agnomen hoc habuit, familiae vero eius cognomen fuit. Similiter ‘Caesar’, ‘Scipio’ (IG lib. II, c. 24; Keil vol. 2: 58.5-13).

33 *Nominum positio inventa est ad significationem qualitatum vel communium vel propriarum, quae sunt innumerabiles, ut ‘homo, Plato’. Et quoniam neque demonstrationem habent ea neque relationem, quibus fintiuntur personae pronominum, innumerabiles in eis, id est nominibus, positio fidebat, ut singulorum figuratio nominum singulis reddat suppositorem suam qualitatem, quare non mediocriter disturbant qualitatis significationem, cum in unam concidunt vocem nominum positiones tam in propriis quam in appellativeris. Inde carnit definitione persona ea, quae in nomine ipsa intelligitur; nec minum, cum propria quoque nomina, quanvis idem ponantur, ut unumqueque ab aliis omniis discernant, incerta sint tamen, cum non possint omnes eius qualities, quae ilium separant ab aliis omnibus, ostendere absque demonstrationis auxilio, quae fit per pronomen (IG lib. XVII, c. 10; Keil vol. 3: 145.16-146.4).

34 Luhtala (2005) in fact translates *fintiuntur* as “defined” (109).
undertones of these terms may not be inappropriate to the passage. Priscian seems to think that, if we are to talk about an individual in such a way that we speak only of *that* individual, our language must capture all the qualities that make that individual unique. An exhaustive list of the qualities that set one individual apart from all others might be something like a definition, and in any case it would sufficiently mark out the individual. But how do we capture all those qualities at once? Priscian seems to think that no mere use of a name will do. Rather, to capture the whole bundle at once, we must engage in an act of pointing. The verbal equivalent of an act of pointing is the use of a pronoun. By using a pronoun, we can *both* direct someone’s attention to a whole person (with all the proper qualities) and stipulate that the very person pointed at is also called by a certain proper name:

Even if we know that Virgil is a poet and the son of Maro, and even if we were (impossibly) to see him, we would fail to known that “Virgil” was his name unless someone pointed him out to us, saying “That is Virgil”.... For through demonstration, pronouns are directed exclusively at a thing’s proper substance and its accidental qualities, which can be seen with the eyes.35

We can note here that perhaps Priscian’s emphasis on this passage is more on name-giving or on the initial learning of a name, not on what or how the name signifies once it is bestowed or learned. But regardless of how we interpret Priscian, an uncomfortable tension surrounding proper names arises. On the one hand, it is both easy and convenient to say that a proper name simply signifies an individual’s proper substance or quality. On the other hand, there may not be such a thing as *a* proper quality, on the basis of which we bestow the name, or which the name signifies or directs our attention to thereafter. Perhaps there are many qualities that we attempt to capture by the use of a proper name, and perhaps—as Priscian states explicitly—that attempt will fail without recourse to some other measure for picking out the individual.36

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35 *Quamvis enim sciamus, quod poëta sit Virgilius et filius Maronis, cernentes eum, si posset fieri, nesciebamus, eius esse hoc nomen, nisi si qui nobis eum demonstrans diceret: ‘hic est Virgilius’.... Pronomina vero ea, quae ad nihil alium aspiciant per demonstrationem nisi ad propriam aliquam substantiam et ad ei accidentes qualitates, quae possunt oculis conspici* (IG lib. XVII, c. 10; Keil vol. 3: 146.4-18).

36 Brumberg-Chaumont (2007) highlights the fact that these tensions were apparent to medieval philosophers as early as the twelfth century: “Les commentateurs médiévaux héritent donc d’une difficulté: ils trouvent chez Priscien un nom propre qui signifie une substance, mais aussi une qualité particulière composée d’accidents, (fussent-ils inséparables), qu’ils rapprochent en général de la collection unique de propriétés de l’*Isagoge* de Porphyre, et de la notion de platonité, introduite par Boèce dans son exégèse du *De l’interprétation*” (141). For the ways in which twelfth-century philosophers handled the signification of proper names, see Brumberg-Chaumont’s full discussion in “Sémantiques du nom propre: sources anciennes et discussions médiévales à l’époque d’Abélard,” *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 29.1: 137–166.
And this brings us to a more fundamental worry. If a proper name on its own is insufficient to “delimit” (definire) the individual it names, then it looks as though proper names will run afoul of one of Boethius’ criteria for genuine nomina. Priscian of course does not engage with Boethius’ criteria in this context. But a thirteenth-century reader, skimming Boethius and Priscian for observations on proper names, might well notice the tension. A proper name that does not bring a thing to mind “definitely” (definite) looks as though it will be unable to function as a sign in the way appropriate for nomina.

It seems that just such a tension was noticed by philosophers working within logic and metaphysics in the thirteenth century. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* had argued unequivocally that individuals could not have definitions, and Michael Scot’s translation of that work indicated that individuals could not have *propria nomina*. When the thirteenth-century scholars encountered proper names in Boethius and Priscian, they found Boethius arguing that names must signify “definitely” and Priscian indicating that individuals could be signified “definitely” only by pronouns rather than proper names. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the thirteenth-century philosophers might have read these claims in a way that went beyond Boethius and Priscian, arguing that proper names did not possess a sufficiently “definite” signification necessary for being genuine nomina.

2. The Varieties of Failure: Why Proper Names Can’t Be Names

Thirteenth-century philosophers who denied the genuineness of proper names had ample room in the language arts tradition for making the denial. The task was simply one of finding a criterion for being a nomen which a proper name failed to meet. Perhaps such a task was too easy, for we find at least three different opinions regarding the criteria which proper names fell short of. Some philosophers thought that proper names signified too many things, some thought they signified too accidentally, and some thought they signified too little. Along with the diversity of criteria, we also find that the philosophers who denied the genuineness of proper names phrased the distinction between genuine nomina and lookalike nomina in different ways. For instance, Richard Rufus says that proper names are “names of speech” (*nomina vocis*) but not “real” names (*nomina rei*) because they are imposed “by chance” (*a casu*).\(^37\) Robert

\(^37\) “Understand that there are verbal names and real names. A real name is a proper quality of a supposit, and it is the principle of understanding a thing... Since an individual is perfected through matter, and matter does not have a name, therefore the individual does not properly have a name. Nor is this contradicted by the fact that someone is called “Socrates” or “Plato.” For such names are verbal names and not names of the thing; for they do not bring
Kilwardby tells us, roughly contemporaneously with Rufus, that particular substances do not have names “from being” (ab esse) but “from happenstance” (ab eventu).\(^{38}\) By the middle of the century, Geoffrey of Aspall records the position that proper names are good for “talking about” something (appellatio), but do not have a significatio beyond their appellatio.\(^{39}\) And perhaps as late as the 1290’s, Richard of Clive tells us that proper names are names in the grammarian’s sense but not in the logician’s (nomina grammatici... nomina logici).\(^{40}\)

It is not clear that these distinctions between real names and “lookalike” names amount to the same distinction. In fact, particularly in the earlier texts, it is very difficult to say what precisely the distinction is, or why proper names fail to be genuine names. I will therefore organize the following investigation under three headings. First (section 2.a) we will look at our two clearest texts in the proper-name discussion: Richard of Clive’s *Quaestiones metaphysicae* and Geoffrey’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam*. These two texts present us with a detailed reason for why proper names fail to be genuine nomina, namely that proper names signify too many things.

The second group of texts we will examine (section 2.b) deal with the closely-related concern that proper names are “accidental.” Richard of Clive, Richard Rufus of Cornwall, and Robert

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\(^{38}\) “And therefore a prime substance is much more named this way in its category, because in this way it is named more through an incorruptible mode than in these terms ‘Socrates’ and ‘Plato.’ Besides, names like ‘Socrates’ and ‘Plato’ are names from what happens to come about (ab eventu), and by them individuals have a naming in a way, but in no way being (esse). Therefore primary substances are not named in this way.” *Et intellige quod est nomen vocis et nomen rei: nomen rei est propria qualitas suppositi, et istud est principium intelligendi rem.... Cum individuum perficiatur per materiam, et materia nomen non habet, ideo individuum nomen proprie non habet. Nec est contra [hoc] quod iste vocatur Socrates vel Plato, quia talia sunt nomina vocis et non rei; non enim considerant naturam impositionis per naturam rei sed a casu (Rufus, Metaphysics VII, q. 13 corpus; E49ra).*

\(^{39}\) “There are accounts against this. One is the following: particulars do not have a name properly speaking. For something has a name in two ways. Either it is imposed from a form through signification, such that its signification is not the same as appellation, and this is to have a name properly speaking and this is the way in which a universal has a name. Or [the name] is imposed through appellation, and this is the kind of name that a particular has, for in it the signification and the appellatum are the same. And thus a particular does not have a name properly speaking.” *Contra hoc sunt expositiones. Una est hec : particularia non habent nomen <proprie. Aliquid enim habet nomen> dualus modis. Aut impositum a forma per significationem in praedicamento, cum sic nominetur magis per medium incorruptibilem quam in his terminis, “Socrates”, “Plato”. Et propter hoc habet nomen, “Socrates”, “Plato”, sunt nomina ab eventu a quibus individua habent nominationem aliquo modo et utro modo esse. Unde non sic nominantur primae substantiae (Robert Kilwardby, Notulae super librum Praedicamentorum, lectio 6; Conti 28.25-27). For analysis, see pp. 64-69 below.*

\(^{40}\) “The grammarian calls any utterance a nomen if it signifies in any way, since he primarily considers the utterance. But the logician and metaphysician consider both the utterance and the thing, and principally the thing. And when one thing has one name, they grant that it is [a name], but not otherwise.... [But] a proper name is not a name, but names.” *Et grammaticus vocat nomen quamlibet vocem, quae aliquo modo significat, quia vocem principaliter considerat. Logicus vero et metaphysicus rem et vocem considerat, rem tamen principaliter. Unde quando res una est nomen unum esse dicit et non aliter.... Nomen proprium non est nomen sed nomina (Richard of Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49, ad obj. 2; W 150rb).*
Kilwardby all indicate that proper names occur “by chance” or “by coincidence,” and I will present a number of ways in which this “accidentality” can be interpreted. Finally (section 2.c), we will examine a third and apparently opposite line of attack: proper names do not genuinely signify at all, or else they do not signify enough. Geoffrey of Aspall records a perplexing argument to this effect in his *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam*, and we will consider some of the developments in eleventh-century logic in order to explain it.

2.a. Proper Names Signify Too Much: Richard of Clive and Geoffrey of Aspall

The argument that proper names signify too many things, and that therefore they are not genuine *nomina*, appears twice: once in Richard of Clive’s *Quaestiones metaphysicae* VII, q. 49, and once in Geoffrey of Aspall’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam*. Richard’s account is the most detailed passage we possess on whether individuals have their own *nomina*, and in the course of the passage Richard gives us a clear distinction between a *nomen* in the grammarians’ sense and a *nomen* in the philosophers’ sense. The criterion Richard uses to distinguish the two is that a genuine *nomen* signifies just one thing. In a manner reminiscent of Boethius, we find Richard telling us that

> The grammarian calls any utterance a *nomen* if it signifies in any way, since he primarily considers the utterance. But the logician and metaphysician consider both the utterance and the thing, and principally the thing. And when one thing has one name, they grant that it is [a name], but not otherwise.... [But] a proper name is not a name, but names.⁴¹

For Richard, the problem with proper names is that they do not signify just one thing, but rather many things. Any (so-called) “proper name” should therefore count as *nomina* (plural) rather than as a single *nomen*. “When I say ‘bronze circle,’” Richard tells us, “I say two things. For one of them is contrary to the notion of the other.... And thus, individuals that are opposed to each other absolutely in this way... do not have a name.”⁴²

In order to understand Richard’s flow of thought here, we need to know something about his metaphysics. As Richard himself informs us in the context, he thinks that individuals, at least those that are material artifacts like bronze circles, are composed of “many things.”⁴³

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⁴¹ *Et grammaticus vocat nomen quamlibet vocem, quae aliquo modo significat, quia vocem principaliter considerat. Logicus vero et metaphysicus rem et vocem considerat, rem tamen principaliter. Unde quando res una est nomen unum esse dicunt et non aliter.... Nomen proprium non est nomen sed nomina* (Richard of Clive, *Qq. metaphysicæ* VII, q. 49, ad obj. 2; W 150rb).

⁴² *Cum dico ‘circulus aeneus’ duo dico. Quorum unum est contra rationem alterius; cum dico ‘circulus’ excludo materiam; cum dico ‘aeneus’ intelligo materiam. Et sic opposita simpliciter singularia... non habent nomen* (ibid, q. 49 corpus; W 150ra).

⁴³ Richard is commenting specifically on *Metaphysic* 1035b1-3, the controversial statement that “particulars do not have proper names” (see Chapter 1, p. 30). Notably, he restricts his examples to bronze circles, borrowing them
They are accidental unions of various accidental properties. In particular, Richard seems to think they are accidental unions of an individual’s material elements and its formal elements. In Chapter 4 we will examine what this claim means and why we might think it is true. For now, however, we should take the claim for granted and ask what the consequences are for how names can function as signs. Say that a bronze statue of Growltiger is erected in his memory in Greenwich Park, overlooking the Thames. Richard’s claim is that the statue combines within itself two different “things”—the bronze from which the statue is made, and the Growltiger form (or cat form, or some sort of form, depending on how abstract the statue is). Richard also claims that the characters or “natures” of these things are opposed to each other. The “form” abstracts from matter; but the bronze is specifically material. Because they are two distinct things, they must be named by two distinct names.

The point is perhaps easier to see with Richard’s own example of bronze circle. A circle considered as a plane figure in only two dimensions, in which every peripheral point is equidistant from the center, is the sort of ideal abstraction which simply cannot be found in the material world. More to the point, it is the sort of thing whose ideal existence seems opposed to the involvement of matter: once we try to instantiate a circle in bronze, we will in a sense sacrifice the circularity, because the resulting imperfect bronze object will not have a perimeter in which all the points are exactly equidistant from the center. Richard seems to think that this means that the notion of a circle is opposed to the notion of any matter in which we try to instantiate it. So if indeed a hunk of bronze and a circle shape are two mutually-exclusive “things,” united with each other only accidentally or imperfectly, then it looks as if each of them

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44 Richard’s argument is complicated by the fact that he thinks names must be given “from forms.” I discuss what it means to name something “from” its form at the beginning of Chapter 4, pp. 121-125. Unde Aristoteles non intelligit ibi per ‘nomen’ aliquod aliud nisi signum rei ipsi rei impositum ab aliqua forma una; quae forma secundum se sit intelligibilis. Si acceptetur aliquod signum rei et non imponitur uni formae vel ab una forma, tunc non erit nomen unum sed nomina. Tali est omnis res quae in sua natura accident includit ut significacione illi rei non potest unum nomen imponi, nec habet nomen; nec cum res aggreget in se res diversorum generum, nec est res una nisi secundum accidens, ester nomen aequivocum, ut vult Boethius aequivocum quoddam a casu, quoddam vero a consilio. Unde circulus aeneus non habet nomen unum sed plura.... Unde non erit nomen unum, quamvis vox sit una, quia nomen est vox significativa et signum rei (Richard of Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49 corpus; W 150ra).

45 Solet dici et bene quod Aristoteles intelligit de singulari mathematico ut cum dico ‘circulus aeneus’ duo dico. Quorum unum est contra rationem alterius; cum dico ‘circulus’ excludo materiam; cum dico ‘aeneus’ intelligo materia. Et sic opposita simpliciter singularia per determinationem datum non habent nomen (ibid, W 149vb). A paragraph later, Richard states again, Singulairia mathematica tamen sunt duo, ut hic circulus vel cum materia naturali, vel circulus aeneus. Et utroque modo aggregatur res diverse quia circulus abstribit, aeneus vero materiam concernit. Unde non erit nomen unum, quamvis vox sit una... (ibid, W 149vb).
needs its own distinct name. We will not be able to give a genuine, unified proper name to the total composite of bronze-plus-shape.

Presumably this argument will hold for any instance in which the shape given to a material medium is “opposed” to that medium. For instance, we might think that the cat-form of Growltiger is incompatible with instantiation in bronze, insofar as the cat-form is the form of a living thing. Existence in flesh and blood is compatible with such a form, but not existence in bronze. So we might conclude that the bronze statue of Growltiger in Greenwich Park is not “one thing” but several things: bronze accidentally or imperfectly unified with a cat-form that is not really suited to it. If this is so, we cannot give a single proper name to the accidental compound, but rather many “names.”

We might think, if this is an accurate representation of Richard’s view, that it rather misses the point. We generally invent proper names, not for cat-statues and bronze circles, but for individual natural substances. What about Growltiger himself? Where is the contradiction between his cat-form and his cat-matter? These are issues of a metaphysical nature that I will waive until Chapter 4. For the moment, I will insist on Richard’s own example. He consistently says that bronze circles do not have proper names. Perhaps Richard is simply borrowing the bronze circle as the textual example from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, but Richard may also intend his remarks to apply exclusively to a subset of individuals: those whose forms really are opposed to their matter, in the way that an ideal circle is opposed to bronze. In this case, Richard is making a much more limited claim than other philosophers in the proper-name debate. He is saying that some individuals cannot have proper names, and his arguments set forth the conditions under which certain ones fail to have them. I will address this possibility, and give more details about Richard’s understanding of individuals as accidental composites, in Chapter 4.46

For the meantime, it is sufficient to recognize that Richard’s argument turns on the claim that an accidental individual like a bronze circle is in fact constituted by two different “things” (*res*). This metaphysical complexity is a complexity accurately mirrored in our speech. The way we actually speak of bronze circles and bronze statues is precisely like that—we say “the bronze circle” or “the cat statue.” Each of these phrases posits two opposed things simultaneously: a formal notion and a strictly material notion. As phrases, of course, “bronze circle” and “cat statue” contain nothing especially problematic in their juxtaposition of two things. They accurately describe objects that are composed of a formal element and a distinct material

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46 See pp. 125-130.
element. But Richard claims that it would be impossible for us to fabricate a single name that would capture both contradictory elements of “bronze circle” or “cat statue” at once. Any name that attempted to include both the formal reference and the material reference would actually name two different things. Such a name would be like the utterance “roundsquare” or “lightdark,” and would therefore be “names” in the plural instead of a single name.

We find almost exactly the same argument, in a very compressed form, in Geoffrey of Aspall’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam*. Geoffrey ascribes the spirit of the argument to Averroes, though Averroes’s commentary on the *Metaphysics* does not contain an argument against proper names as such. In Geoffrey’s version of the argument, an individual object constituted of matter and form cannot have a “simple” name but only a name “through circumlocution”:

> There is an explanation which agrees better with the Commentator, and it is the following. Particulars do not have a name, because something made particular through express matter does not have a simple name but only a name through circumlocution. Things made particular in this way include a bronze circle or a silver circle, since silver or bronze is the matter of the circle. And this is what the Commentator says about the claim that there is no single name signifying a silver circle and a stone circle.47

Geoffrey’s reference to a name *per circumlocutionem* is noteworthy. Even philosophers who did not question the genuineness of proper names sometimes spoke of using “circumlocutions” to name individuals. Roger Bacon, for instance, mentions circumlocutions in relation to individuals in his treatise *De Signis*48 and in one of his commentaries on the *Metaphysics*.49 Bacon indicates that we use these periphrastic modes of speaking when we do not understand an individual well enough to give it a single name. “We are able to signify and impose names according as we are able to know,” Bacon tells us, “and because a name is more indistinct (*confusum*) through circumlocution, we first signify by means of that, and then through a single name when we know more.”50

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47 *Alia est expositio que magis concordat Commentatori et est talis: particularia non habent nomen, hoc est particularata[m] per materiam expressam non habebunt nomen simplex sed solum per circumlocutionem cuinmodi particularata sunt circulus cupreus, circulus argenteus, quia argyrum est materia circuli et similiter cuprum. Et hoc est quod dicit Commentator supra illam propositionem quod non est unum nomen significans circulum argenteum et circulum lapideum* (Geoffrey of Aspall, *Qq. super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43, arg 3-2; Brumberg-Chaumont 102).

48 See note 52 below.

49 See Bacon, *QMet*8 lib. 7, Steele 236.1-27. “Circumlocutions” in these contexts seem to include phrases like “the bronze circle” or (as Bacon also puts it) “a demonstrative pronoun with its universal”: *illa [particularia] debemus propriè nominam per pronomen demonstrativum, cum suo universali* (*QMet*8, lib. 7; Steele 236.1-3). See Chapter 3, pp. 90-91 for further discussion of “circumlocutions.”

50 *Et ita sicut possumus cogitare ita possumus signare et nominare imponere, et quia per circumlocutionem est nomen magis confusum, ideo illa præius sic signamus, et deinde per unum nomen quando magis cognoscimus* (*QMet*8, lib. 7; Steele 236.20-24).
What is valuable about Bacon’s comments regarding *circumlocutiones* is the fact that even he, with his insistence that individuals can have proper names, grants that a circumlocution is not itself a genuine single name or an adequate substitute for one.51 A phrase like “bronze circle” is only a step on the road to being able to use a proper name, and a proper name cannot therefore be considered as merely an abbreviation for the circumlocution. In fact, Bacon is somewhat defensive about this. In both texts where Bacon mentions *circumlocutiones* in reference to individuals, he immediately claims that individuals can also receive a “single name” or “true name” (*nomen simplex*, *verum nomen*, or *unum nomen*) if we wish.52 He grants that circumlocutions themselves are not genuine proper names, but he insists that we can move beyond circumlocutions to give a single name. This defensiveness suggests that Bacon is perhaps responding to an opposing claim, to the effect that *circumlocutiones* are as far as we can get in naming individuals. Indeed, this interpretation would help us make sense of the sort of strategic move that may be playing out in the argument Geoffrey records. Perhaps the opponents of proper names were arguing that proper names are actually *nothing more* than disguised circumlocutions, or that we are incapable of giving individuals names that do not work out to be circumlocutions. If that is the case, a proper name is not a single name but many “names,” and it does not have the single definite signification that a genuine *nomen* should have.

Geoffrey’s argument about circumlocutions may therefore be read as making the following sort of move. “Cat statue” and “bronze circle” are complex utterances that cannot be replaced by genuinely simple utterances. That is because the complex utterances pick out complex composites of matter and form in the world. Geoffrey does not explain, as Richard does, that these composites are complex insofar as they are accidental or insofar as their forms are opposed to their matter. But Geoffrey does agree that, provided that there is no way of

51 But [Aristotle] wants to say that those particulars he was talking about were designated in his language by circumlocutions, and they did not have a name but a plurality of utterances through circumlocution, just as it is in Latin. Therefore he says that they do not have a name—true, single, and simple, like the abstracted things.” *Sed [Aristoteles] vult quod per circumlocutionem dictum [i.e., circulum cupreum] illa particularia de quibus loquitur fuerunt in sua lingua designata nec habuerunt unum nomen sed plures voces per circumlocutionem, sicut etiam est in lingua Latina. Ideo dicit quod non habent nomen, verum et unum simplex sicut sua abstracta* (Di I.2.24; Fredborg 90). In the last phrase, *verum et unum simplex*, I read *et* for *est* in the edition.

52 See *Di* I.2.24: “[Aristotle] says that they do not have a name—true, single, and simple, like the abstracted things. And nevertheless they can receive a name at pleasure, if we wish.... For particulars have true names.” *Aristoteles* dicit quod non habent nomen, verum et unum simplex sicut sua abstracta. *Et tamen possunt ad plaeitum recipere nomina, si volunt....* Habent enim particularia vera nomina. (My punctuation differs from the edition, to separate Bacon’s claims more clearly from his summary of Aristotle.) Cf. *QMed*, lib. 7: “It is Averroes who says that a particular circle does not have one name that has been imposed on it. But it does have a name imposed through circumlocution, and it *can* have one on the part of the thing itself.” *Dicit Commentator quod circulus particularis non habet unum nomen impositionem, habet tamen nomen impositionem per circumlocutionem, et possit habere unum quantum est a parte rei* (Steele 236.24-27).
signifying in a simple way what is complex in reality, a bronze circle cannot in principle receive a single proper name. So it seems that both Richard and Geoffrey agree, out of semantic considerations for the unity of naming, that a sufficiently complex or accidental individual cannot receive a genuine proper name.

There is an obvious objection to Richard’s and Geoffrey’s reasoning. All of us, while sitting in a geometry class at one time or another, have watched an instructor label a given circle \( ABC \). The circle in this case is usually chalk, but it is no less a complex entity than a bronze circle, and is certainly an aggregate of a formal element and a material element. If Richard’s or Geoffrey’s argument is correct, how do we succeed in naming circles \( ABC \), generate proofs about them, and generally talk about them?

It is noteworthy from a purely practical point of view that Richard does acknowledge that we are capable of assigning labels to individuals. “A bronze circle can be called \( A \),” he says, but “although \( A \) is imposed as if on a subject, as just one proprium, it is not imposed from a form but from a quiddity-plus-accidents.”

Richard grants that \( A \) is a proper name in some sense, but his explanation of how it can be a proper name without really being a name is puzzling. When he says that \( A \) is not imposed from a form alone, perhaps we can read into this the fact that \( A \) is impose from form plus matter, and therefore is a substitute for a circumlocution. But that is not exactly what Richard himself says. Instead, Richard shifts the analysis from a concern with matter and form to a concern with accidents in relation to a quiddity. The result is that Richard thinks the name \( A \) is only a proper name “accidentally”: “A name can be had, or can be in act, accidentally—as when a bronze circle can be called \( A \).”

What does Richard mean by invoking the language of accidents? Richard is not the only philosopher to follow up a denial that individuals have proper names with a concession that in some sense a proper name can be given “by accident.” Other philosophers weasel out of the same difficulty in the same manner. For instance, Robert Kilwardby says that proper names are imposed \textit{ab eventu} (“by happenstance”), and Richard Rufus of Cornwall says proper names are \textit{a casu} (“by chance”). An analysis of what these philosophers mean leads us into an independent inquiry about why proper names are not genuine \textit{nomina}. Rather than focusing on matter and form, this inquiry focuses on the relationship between a substance and its accidental qualities. Moreover, the problem with naming an individual shifts from the claim that proper names

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53 \textit{Nomen accidentaliter potest habere vel actu sit ut circulus aeneus potest vocari \( A \). A unum tantum cum imponitur proprium ut subiecto, non imponitur a forma sed a quidditate et accidentibus} (Richard of Clive, \textit{Qq. metaphysicae} VII, q. 49; W 149vb)

54 See notes 56 and 58.
signify “too many” things, to the claim that they name an individual accidentally, contingently, or otherwise problematically.

2.b. Proper Names as Accidental: Richard of Clive, Robert Kilwardby, Richard Rufus

We have four passages in the proper name debate arguing that proper names are not real names because they are had “accidentally” or “by chance.” One passage is by Richard of Clive, two by Robert Kilwardby, and one by Richard Rufus of Cornwall. For ease of reference, I will list them here:

(RC) There will not be a single name, however much the utterance is single, since a name is a significative sound and a sign of a thing. But a name can be had accidentally or can be in act in the way that a bronze circle can be called $A$. For although $A$ is imposed as if on a subject, as just one proprium, it is not imposed from a form but from a quiddity-plus-accidents.... If a thing gathers together diverse natures in itself, then a name is not essentially suited to it, but rather it is an utterance or a calling.\(^{55}\)

(RK1) Names like ‘Socrates’ and ‘Plato’ are names from what happens to come about ($ab$ $eventu$), and by them individuals have a naming in a way, but in no way being ($esse$). Therefore primary substances are not named in this way.\(^{56}\)

(RK2) If we are talking about the individual insofar as matter is an individuating principle... it does not have a name, and its individual essence is something different from any predicable essence. But if we are talking about the factors accompanying individuation, such as the seven accidents that Boethius describes, then [the individual] has a name from which it has a nomination but not being.\(^{57}\)

(RR) Understand that there are verbal names and real names. A real name is a proper quality of a supposit, and it is the principle of understanding a thing.... Such names [proper names] are verbal names and not real names; for they do not

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\(55\) Unde non erit nomen unum, quamvis vox sit una, quia nomen est vox significativa et signum rei. Nomen accidentaliter potest habere vel actu sit ut circulus aeneus potest vocari $A$. A unum tantum cum imponitur proprium ut subjecto, non imponitur a forma sed a quidditate et accidentibus.... Si vero res aggregat in se diversas naturas, competit ei vox sine vocatio et non nomen essentialiter (Richard of Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49; W 149vb).


\(57\) Si loquamur de individuo quantum ad hoc quod materia est principio individuans... sic enim non habet nomen, et est eius essentia et essentiae simul et praedicabilis alia et alia, ut in VII Metaphysics; si autem loquamur quantum ad complitutu individuationem, ut sive VII accidentia de quibus loquitur Boethius, sic habet nomen, a quo nominationem habet, videtur, et non esse, et sic aliqno modo praedicatur, et hoc vulg Porphyrius (Kilwardby, Notulae super librum Porphyrii, lectio 6; M 5vb, P 37rb-va). This transcription is cited from Alessandro Conti (2003), “Semantics and Ontology in Robert Kilwardby’s Commentaries on the Logica Vetus” in Lagerlund and Thom (eds), A Companion to the Philosophy of Robert Kilwardby, Leiden-Boston: Brill, p. 89 n. 63.
bring into consideration the nature of imposition through the nature of the thing, but are by chance.\textsuperscript{58}

It is obvious that these references are rather spartan, and it is not initially clear what the various authors mean by saying proper names are had *accidentaliter* or *ab eventu* or *a casu*. As we evaluate the passages, however, there are three interpretations I would like to suggest. I will not go into great detail to justify any one of these interpretations, since all of them can plausibly explain why proper names might be regarded as “accidental.” But the variety of interpretations should bring into focus the variety of metaphysical problems surrounding the relationship between an individual’s name and an individual’s accidents.

The first interpretation of the claim that proper names are “accidental” is that there is no deep account or essential reason for why an individual should have a given proper name and not another. Thus, a proper name is accidental insofar as it is genuinely arbitrary. This is a somewhat infelicitous way of putting the point, as all medieval scholars thought all names and all linguistic signs were arbitrary or *ad placitum*. But proper names exemplify an arbitrariness that goes beyond that of common names. Consider how common names are applied to individuals. Once “circle” has been coined as a word, it is not a matter of chance whether it can be applied permissibly to this or that geometrical figure. Similarly with “bronze”: granted that it is already part of our language, we are not free to use this word of any object we like, but only of those with a certain metallic composition. But what about proper names, like “Quaxo” or the label $A$? There is no semantic rule or deep reason specifying that $A$ should be the name for a particular circle. We do not call something $A$ because it is an $A$-sort-of-thing, or “Quaxo” because it exemplifies a Quaxo-sort-of-quality. There is only our arbitrary choice.

This may very well be the train of thought that Richard Rufus of Cornwall has in mind when he tells us that proper names “do not bring into consideration the nature of imposition through the nature of thing, but are by chance (*a casu*)” (RR).\textsuperscript{59} Similarly, we find Robert

\textsuperscript{58} Et intellige quod est nomen vocis et nomen rei: nomen rei est propria qualitas suppositi, et istud est principium intelligendi rem....

Cum individualum perfactur per materiam, et materia nomen non habet, ideo individuum nomen proprie non habet. Nec est contra [hoc] quod iste vocatur Socrates vel Plato, quia tali sunt nomina vocis et non rei; non enim considerant naturam impositionis per naturam rei sed *a casu* (Rufus, Metaphysics VII, q. 13 corpus; E49ra).

\textsuperscript{59} It is worth noting that *casus* here may not mean “chance” but “grammatical case.” We recall that Boethius made the point that words like *garalus* have the grammatical form of nouns but are not *nomina* in the philosophical sense. If Rufus is using *casus* for “case,” he could be making the point that proper nouns fall into the same category as nonsense nouns like *garalus*. However, I am inclined to think that *casus* means “chance” in the context, because Rufus is explicitly contrasting *casus* with the nature of the thing. He says proper names are not imposed “from the nature” or “from a form,” but are *a casu*. It would make sense to say that a proper name is given “from chance” or
Kilwardby saying that “Names like ‘Socrates’ and ‘Plato’ are names from what happens to come about (ab eventu), and by them individuals have a naming in a way, but in no way being (esse)” (RK1). The being of a thing, in the sense of its essence or nature, is what receives a common name. But proper names come about in a chance or incidental fashion, and there is no deep reason that they should be imposed the way they are.

The problem with this first interpretation is that it explains the “accidental” language only at a superficial level. A second interpretation may go deeper. On my second interpretation, the claim that proper names are given “accidentally” or “by chance” is the claim that they are given on the basis of the accidental features of the thing named, not on the basis of essential features. Take, for instance, Growltiger and his (in)famous accomplices Grumbuskin, Tumblebrutus, and Lady Griddlebone. They are all cats, so they all share the essential features of cathood. But they have different qualities, and those qualities function as the basis not only of our ability to distinguish them, but also of our ability to call them different names. One cat has the name “Growltiger” from his tiger-like stripes; another has “Tumblebrutus” from his method of going down stairs; one has “Griddlebone” from her culinary habits, and so on. In the Latin grammatical tradition, Priscian gives us a striking example of this phenomenon when he mentions that the name Cicero was imposed from the fact that someone had a mole shaped like a chickpea. Not all instances of naming “from an accident” need incorporate the accident so directly into the name, however. Richard of Clive tells us much more generally that we can impose the name $A$ on a bronze circle insofar as the name is imposed from a “quiddity-plus-

“from an accident,” but it would not make much sense to say that a proper name is given “from a grammatical case.”

60 This view was not unknown in twelfth-century logic. See the Glosulae in Priscianum, edited by de Rijk (1967) in his Logica Modernorum, Vol. II.1, Assen: van Gorcum, pp. 522-523: “Proper names were invented and imposed in order to signify a certain person that was distinct from others through certain properties. They weren’t invented because of the difference of substances, but only for distinguishing the properties existing in substances. We can see this in ‘Socrates.’ For ‘Socrates’ signifies a certain person who is distinct from others not in his substantial being, but through the properties of being Sophronicus’ son or a poet and so on. Because the same substance is in all individuals of the human species, and since every man and mortal rational animal differ only in qualities, proper names were invented to signify the substances insofar as they are distinct in their properties. Similarly, appellative nouns were invented to signify substances similar to others in some quality. So ‘man’ for instance signifies many things with a common property.” Propria enim nomina sic sunt inventa et imposita ut semper significent aliquam certam personam discretam ab aliis per aliquas certas proprietates. Non enim sunt inventa propter differentiationem substantiarum, sed tantum ad discernendas proprietates in substantiis existentes. Ut potest videri in ‘Socrate’. ‘Socrates’ enim significat certam personam et discretam ab aliis non in substantiali esse, sed per has proprietates quod Sophronici filius, quod poeta et alia huiusmodi. Cunm enim eadem substantia sit in omnibus hominis individuis, quia omnis homo et animal rationale mortale et non differatur nisi in qualitatibus, inventa sunt propria nominis ad significandas substantias, in hoc quod sunt discrete in suis proprietatibus. Similiter appellativa sunt inventa ad significandas substantias similis aliis in aliqua qualitate. Ut ‘homo’ significat plures cum una communi proprietate.

61 See note 32.
accidents, as if from a whole thing with its seven accidents, as discussed by Porphyry.”62 The giving of the name \( A \) implicates a series of accidents in a way that the giving of the name circle does not.

Note that this interpretation would accord just as well with the quotations from Robert Kilwardby (RK1) and Richard Rufus (RR) above. When Rufus claims that a proper name does not take account of the “nature of the thing” but is instead is “by chance,” or “from the case” (a case), he could very well mean that proper names do not give us information about a thing’s nature, but instead come from some chance feature (or from no particular feature or for no special reason at all). Similarly with Kilwardby’s reference to eventu as opposed to esse. We find Kilwardby contrasting essence and accident in his commentary on the Isagoge as well: an individual does not have a name in regard to its “individual essence,” but in regard to the “factors accompanying individuation, such as the seven accidents that Boethius describes” (RK2). The contrast in all these cases is consistently between the quiddity or essential “being” of a thing, and some feature or “happenstance” that accrues to it. The distinction between proper names and common names is cast in terms of whether the name pertains to the essence or not.

There is a third interpretation of the claim that a proper name is had accidentally. It is that a proper name is an accident of one kind or another. Richard of Clive seems to indicate this in his remarks on the circle labeled \( A \):

Although \( A \) is imposed as if on a subject, as just one proprium, it is not imposed from a form but from a quiddity-plus-accidents. [And it is imposed] as if from a whole thing with its seven accidents, as discussed by Porphyry.63 (RC)

Richard makes the peculiar move of calling a proper name a proprium. What does it mean to call \( A \) a proprium? A proprium itself is a quality, unique to an individual or unique to the species to which the individual belongs. It is odd to think of a proper name as a quality, but one need only rephrase the claim into the more contemporary-sounding assertion that any object can have the property of “being-called-\( A \).”64 If a proper name is a quality in this sense, it is certainly an accidental quality. There is no special reason that the circle should be called \( A \) instead of

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62 A unum tantum cum imponitur proprium ut subiecto, non imponitur a forma sed a quidditate et accidentibus ut rei totalis cum septem proprietatibus in Porphyrio dictis (Richard of Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49 corpus; W 150ra).
63 A unum tantum cum imponitur proprium ut subiecto, non imponitur a forma sed a quidditate et accidentibus ut rei totalis cum septem proprietatibus in Porphyrio dictis (Richard of Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49 corpus; W 150ra).
64 Perhaps the view that proper names are “predicates,” argued for instance by Tyler Burge in 1973, is not so far off from this view. See Burge (1973), “Reference and proper names,” Journal of Philosophy 70.14, pp. 425–39.
something else. So it is possible that when Richard speaks of a proper name being had “accidentally,” he means that in a sense the name itself is an accidental quality, more or less unique to the individual and very helpful in picking that individual out.

We find Kilwardby going a bit farther. Kilwardby speaks of proper names as if they were involved with a particular set of accidents—the seven accidents from Porphyry, which Richard of Clive also mentions above. Kilwardby tells us that “if we are talking about the factors accompanying individuation, such as the seven accidents that Boethius describes [when commenting on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*], then [the individual] has a name from which it has a designation but not being.”

Kilwardby also says that an individual has a proper name specifically insofar as it has the seven accidents of “homeland, parentage, form, figure, place, time, and proper designation”—which are the seven accidents discussed by Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and Boethius’ commentary on it. It seems as though Kilwardby is thinking of a proper name as one of the seven accidental qualities that perform the function of helping to identify an individual—the seven “properties” that Porphyry discusses in the *Isagoge*.

To understand the claim that a proper name is an accident in this sense, we must understand what use Robert Kilwardby (and possibly Richard of Clive) makes of the *Isagoge*. The “seven accidents” which they refer to were proverbial among medieval writers, but they did not occur as an explicit list in Boethius’ or Porphyry’s texts. Rather, the list of homeland, parentage, form, figure, place, time, and proper name appears to have been cobbled together from the two main passages in which Porphyry and Boethius discuss the unique characteristics of individuals. The first passage is early in the *Isagoge*, where Porphyry identifies three chief factors that enter into an individual’s generation: the person’s father (*pater*), location (*locus*), and

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65 Si loquamur de individuo quantum ad hoc quod materia est principium individuans... sic enim non habet nomen, et est eius essentia et essentia cuiuslibet praedicabiliis alia et alia, ut in VII Metaphysice; si autem loquamur quantum ad complentia individuationem, ut sint VII accidentia de quibus loquitur Boethius, sic habet nomen, a quo nominationem habet, videtur, et non esse, et sic aliquo modo praedicatur, et hoc vulg Porphyrius (Kilwardby, Notulæ super librum Porphyrii, lectio 6; Conti [2003] 89 n. 63).

66 Sed consequuntur septem accidentia, secundum Boethium: patria, parentela, forma, figura, locus tempus et propria nominatio.... Et sic habet individuum nomen, scilicet nomen proprium, a quo nominationem habet, et non esse. Non enim habet nomen quod nominet suam substantiam individualiter... (Kilwardby, Notulæ super librum Porphyrii, lectio 6; ibid). It is worth noting that Kilwardby does not seem to be consistent here with his use of the term nominatio. He lists *propria nominatio* with the other six accidents, suggesting that the phrase should simply be translated “proper name,” but he also seems to use nominatio to stand for designation or reference itself, as when he says that an individual has nominationem from its nomen proprium (i.e., it has “designation” or is “referred to” on account of its proper name).

Boethius, commenting on the passage, adds the role of time (tempus). The second main passage occurs when Porphyry famously says that an individual is unpredictable and that it unites into one several properties that do not appear in an identical collection anywhere else. Porphyry himself speaks only vaguely of “properties,” but Boethius spells out several particular qualities that play an important role in the individual: parentage and proper name (parentibus and nomine proprio), and form and figure (formam figuramque), such as Socrates’ being bald, snub-nosed, and pot-bellied.

From these passages, it is clear that some quick eye noticed that the accidents specifically discussed in relation to individuals were parentage, homeland, location, time, form, figure, and proper name. These accidents were conveniently numerable at seven, and their common characteristic was that they either accounted for the individuality of the individual, or else accounted for an observer’s ability to pick out the individual. Unlike other accidents such as hair length or suntans, these accidents seemed to be “proper” in some sense to the individual they constituted or identified. But at the same time, they were still accidents—not essential for human nature, and capable of having been otherwise.

It is within this context that we should understand Robert Kilwardby, and possibly Richard of Clive, when they claim that a name like A or Growltiger is imposed “accidentally.”

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68 Dicitur autem et aliter rursus genus quod est uniuscuiusque generationis principium vel ab eo qui genuit vel a loco in quo quis genus est. Sic enim Oresten quidem dicimus a Tantalo habere genus... et rursus Pindarum quidem Thebanum esse genera, Platonem vero Atheniensem; et enim patria principium est uniuscuiusque generationis, quernadmodum pater (Porphyry, Isagoge 2.1-2.5; trans. Boethius, ed. Minio-Paluello and Dod [1966], Aristoteles Latinus I.6-7, Bruges-Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, p. 6, lines 8-14).

69 Duae uero sunt quae per accidents uniuscuiusque dicuntur esse principia, locus scilicet ac tempus. Quoniam enim omne quod nascitur vel fit, in loco ac tempore est, quicquid loco vel tempore natum factumue fuerit, eum locum vel id tempus accidenter dicitur habere principium (Boethius, In Isag. II, lib. 2, c. 3; Brandt 174.18-175.4).

70 Individua ergo dicitur huicmodi, quoniam ex proprietatibus consistit unusquodque eorum quorum collectio numquam in alio eadem erit (Porphyry, Isagoge 7.22; Minio-Paluello 13.24-14.02). Cf. Isagoge 7.19-21, which also contains a reference to parentage: Individuum autem [dicitur] de uno solo particulari (individuum autem dicitur Socrates et hoc-album et bis-revisiens, ut Sophronisci filius, si solus ei sit Socrates filius) (Minio-Paluello 13.21-23).

71 Si quis Socratem significatione uelit ostendere, non dicat ‘Socrates’, ne sit alius qui forte hoc nomine nuncupetur, sed dicat ‘Sophronisci filius’, si unicus Sophronisco fuit. Individua maxime ostendi quendam, si vel tacito nomine sensui ipsi oculorum digito tactum monstratur, vel ex aliquo accidenti signification vel nomine proprio, si solus illud adeptus est nomen, vel ex parentibus, si illorum est unicus filius, vel ex qualibet aliis accidenti singularitas demonstratur... (In Isag. II, lib. III, c. 10; Brandt 234.3-11).

72 Socratis enim proprietias, si fuit caluus, simus, propenso allo célerisque corporis lineamentis aut morum institutione aut forma nocis, non convenirebant in alterum; haec enim proprietates quae ex accidentibus ei obsequantur eique figuramque componerant, in nullo aliun convenirebant (Boethius, In Isagoge II, lib. 3, c. 11; Brandt 235.12-16).

73 It is not clear which of these characterizations are intended by Boethius and Porphyry. Some passages suggest that these seven accidents cause the metaphysical individuality of individuals, while others suggest that they are the epistemological means by which we distinguish individuals. Jorge Gracia suggests that Porphyry and Boethius may not have distinguished the two claims. For a deeper analysis of the problem of individuation in these two authors, see Gracia (1984), Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages, München: Philosophia Verlag, pp. 65-111.
The claim may be that the name itself is an accident, one among the Boethian/Porphyrian cluster of seven, which are bound up with an individual very early in its development and through which the individual can (in the right circumstances) be identified. A proper name is a quality that can be used, much like the quality of being “the Terror of the Thames” or the quality of being from a certain place, to help identify the individual under discussion. Because it is a special sort of quality, it can indeed succeed in giving the individual a sort of “proper designation.” But it cannot succeed in naming the individual itself qua individual substance, as presumably a word would have to do if it were both genuinely a nomen and genuinely proper to the individual as such.

These three interpretations of what it means for a proper name to be “accidental” all share a common feature. They preserve an account of a proper name’s usefulness, while nevertheless providing a rationale for why a proper name is not essentially or really a genuine name. The contrast is not between form and matter, but between an essence and its accidents. It also seems that these three interpretations provide varying levels of detail. Proper names are given arbitrarily, with no deep grounding; they are given on the basis of accidents rather than essences; and they themselves are instances of accidents. With each interpretation, we arrive at a deeper understanding of why proper names might be considered “accidental.”

At the other end of the spectrum, however, there is at least one argument in the proper-name debate that does not appear to view proper names as accidental in any sense. This argument is unlike any other we have seen so far, and seems to derive from intuitions that run in the opposite direction from Richard of Clive’s and Robert Kilwardby’s. Rather than arguing that proper names are accidental, or that they signify too many things, this final argument proposes that proper names are too minimal: they do not signify enough. We will conclude our investigation into the varieties of nomina by looking at this outlying argument.

2.c. Proper Names Don’t Signify Enough: Geoffrey of Aspall

One of our most valuable sources for arguments against particulars having proper names is Geoffrey of Aspall’s Metaphysics commentary, book VII, q. 43. This commentary records a wide range of arguments for and against the view that particulars can have names. We have seen

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74 See note 66 for Kilwardby’s apparent use of nominatio both for the proper name itself and for the phenomenon of designation or reference that is connected with the proper name.

75 Non enim habet nomen quod nominet suam substantiam individualiter (Kilwardby, Notulae super librum Porphyrii, lectio 6; Conti [2003] 89 n. 63).
one of these arguments above, in corroborative of Richard of Clive’s view that proper names signify too many things. Geoffrey’s own opinion on the issue of proper names is not clear, but he records a certain “exposition” or “clarification” of the question that is very valuable. The “exposition” presents two ways in which a thing can receive a name, and these two ways do not seem to involve any discussion of accidents, essences, or the claim that form and matter are different things.

Geoffrey’s exposition claims that the first way a thing can receive a name is through “signification,” and the second through “appellation.” Proper names are given through appellation, but in such a way that what they “appellate” just is what they “signify.” Because their *appellatum* is the same as their *significatum*, proper names are not properly names.

Particulars do not have a name properly speaking. For something has a name in two ways. Either it is imposed from a form through signification, such that its signification is not the same as appellation, and this is to have a name properly speaking and this is the way in which a universal has a name. Or [the name] is imposed through appellation, and this is the kind of name that a particular has, for in it the significatum and the appellatum are the same. And thus a particular does not have a name properly speaking.76

The problem for us in analyzing this text is to understand two things. (1) What does it mean that proper names are imposed through “appellation,” such that their *significatum* and *appellatum* are the same, and (2) why does this mean that proper names are not really names?

The answer to the (1) implies an answer to (2), but at first it is very difficult to see what the meaning of “appellation” is. *Appellatio* is a technical term in medieval philosophy of language with at least three different usages. The oldest and most straightforward use of *appellatio* is as a description for what common nouns do. The late Latin grammarians Priscian and Donatus call common nouns *appellative* nouns and use *appellatio* as a term for their grammatical job of signifying many things.77 It seems clear that we can rule out this usage as an interpretation of the

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76 *Contra hoc sunt expositiones. Una est hec: particularia non habent nomen *proprie.* Aliquid enim habet nomen* duabus modis. Aut impositum a forma per significationem ita quod non sit idem significatio cum appellazione, et hoc est *proprie* habere nomen et sic habet universale nomen, aut impositum per appellacionem et tale nomen habet particular; in ipso enim est idem significatum et appellatum et ita particular non habet nomen proprie* (Geoffrey, *Qq. super Metaphysicam*, VII q. 43, arg. 3-1; Brumberg-Chaumont 102).

77 “A name is a part of speech with a case, signifying a thing either properly or commonly... A ‘name’ is used of one man, an ‘appellation’ of many, and a ‘word’ of things.” *Nomen est pars orationis cum casu corpus aut rem proprie communiterve significans... Nomen unius hominis, appellatio multorum, vocabulum rerum est* (Donatus, *Ars grammatica*, Keil vol. 4: 373.2-5). “This is the difference between a proper noun and an appellative noun: the appellative is common to many, which are united by the same substance or quality or quantity, whether generic or special.” *Hoc autem interest inter proprium et appellativum, quod appellativum naturaliter commune est multorum, quos eadem substantia sine qualitate vel quantitatias generalis specialisve unigit* (Priscian, *IG* lib. II, c. 24; Keil vol. 2: 58).
argument in Geoffrey, since Donatus’ and Priscian’s use of appellativa as a designation for common nouns cannot possibly be used in any sense of proper nouns.

That leaves us with two other possible usages. We find a second usage of appellatio in the eleventh century in the writings of Anselm of Canterbury. In Anselm’s De grammatico, the word appellatio appears in contradistinction to significatio as a term for what happens when a signifying word is applied to an entity not included in its signification. For example, the word “white” signifies a color. It does not signify any sort of cat, gerbil, or horse, but it can be used to “appellate” any of those animals, as when I instruct you to “saddle the white [one],” when a white horse is in the vicinity. Anselm's distinction between significatio and appellatio is often described as a sense-reference distinction. But in the development of medieval philosophy of language, it was only an initial rudimentary distinction that was to develop, via the proliferation of many more distinctions, into the twelfth-century analysis of language now known as “supposition theory.”

In supposition theory, appellatio had a third usage entirely different from either the grammarians’ or Anselm’s. In supposition theory, a noun’s appellatio was its ability to refer to entities specifically in the present, as opposed to the past or future. The appellation of

78 “Teacher: ‘What if you see a white horse standing across from you, as well as a black one? And someone says to you “strike it,” without showing any sign of which one he is talking about. Would you know which horse he was speaking of?’ Student: ‘No.’ Teacher: ‘If you ask him (unknowing and ignorant), “Which one?” and he replies, “the white [one],” would you know which one he was talking about?’ Student: ‘I would understand the horse through the name ‘white’... But I know the name ‘horse’ before knowing that it was white, for it signifies the substance of the horse to me through itself and not through something else. But the name ‘white’ does not signify the substance through itself, but through something else, namely through the fact that I know the horse to be white.”' Magister: ‘Quid si vides stantes iuxta se invicem album equum et nigrum bovum, et dicit tibi alium equum et alium bovum? Respuesta: album, intelligis de quo dicit? D: Equum intelligo per nomini illum, non monstrans aliquo signo de quo dicit: an seis quod de equo dicit? D: Equum intelligo per nomen alibi... Nomen vero alibi substantiam significat non per se, sed per alio, id est per hoc quia scio equum esse album (Anselm, De grammatico; Henry 4.422-4.4232).


81 The twelfth century however kept the distinction between a name’s job of “signifying” and other jobs (for instance, its “naming” or its “function/force” [officium/vis]). See, e.g., Irène Rosier-Cataf (2005), “The Glosulae in Priscianum and its Tradition,” in McLelland and Lind (eds), Flores Grammaticae, Münster: Nodus Publikationen, pp. 81-99. See also H. A. G. Braakhuis’ discussion of the Ars Melitana, which draws a distinction between a proper name’s appellatio and significatio, taking appellatio to be more fundamental: Braakhuis (1987), “Signification, Appellation and Predication in the Ars Melitana,” in Jolivet and de Libera (eds), Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains, Naples: Bibliopolis, pp. 107-120. There was even some discussion of whether a clause functioning as a subject could have appellatio and therefore be given a proper name (i.e., whether “That Socrates is smart” in the sentence “That Socrates is smart is true,” can be replaced with P such that the sentence becomes “P is true,” with P functioning as a genuine proper name). See C. H. Kneepkens (1997), “Please Don’t Call Me Peter: I am an enuntiable, not a thing,” in Marmo (ed), Vestigia, Imagines, Verba, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 83-98.
“man” in the sentence “Every man runs,” for example, includes only present men and not Socrates or the Antichrist.\textsuperscript{81}

On which of these two usages of \textit{appellatio} does it make sense to say that a proper name’s \textit{appellatum} is its \textit{significatum}? It seems to me that we can rule out the third usage. If \textit{appellatio} is the ability of a \textit{common} noun to refer only to presently existing things, then a proper noun should not have \textit{appellatio} at all. Granted, we could stretch the meaning of \textit{appellatio} to include the ability of a proper noun to refer to its presently-existing bearer, such that (for instance) “Grumbuskin” appellates Grumbuskin as long as he is alive. In that case the proper name’s appellation and signification will be the same as long as Grumbuskin is still in existence. But it is not at all clear why this should problematize the proper name \textit{while Grumbuskin exists}. One could imagine, of course, that his proper name might lose its appellation when he dies. But the argument in Geoffrey says nothing about the bearer of a name going out of existence. Rather, the claim seems to be that, because a proper name’s \textit{appellatum} is simply the same as its \textit{significatum} (whether the bearer exists or not), the proper name is not a genuine name.

That leaves us with the distinction between signification and appellation in Anselm’s treatise \textit{De grammatico}. When Anselm introduces the distinction, he highlights the fact that we can use words to talk about things that they in no way signify. His clearest example of this phenomenon is when we use “the white [one]” to talk about a horse: “white” does not signify a horse, but it can be used to talk about a horse.\textsuperscript{82} Similarly with the Latin adjective \textit{grammaticus} “the literate [one].” \textit{Grammaticus} does not signify humanity or any given human, but it can “appellate” humans insofar as we use \textit{grammaticus} to talk about humans. In Anselm’s own words:

“The literate” does not signify both the man and the literate as one thing, but it signifies the literate essentially and the man secondarily. And this noun, although it appellates the man, is not used to signify the man properly speaking. Likewise, although “the literate” is able to signify the literate, it does not appellate the literate. For I say a name is “appellative” of something when through it the thing itself is called out in the use of speech. For we don’t say, in common usage, that “literacy is the literate” or “the literate [one] is literacy,” but rather “the man is literate,” and “the literate man.”\textsuperscript{83}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item My examples here are drawn from Peter of Spain, who defines appellation as “the acceptance of a common term for an existing thing” (\textit{acceptio termini communis pro re existente}). See his \textit{Tractatus} X.1; de Rijk 197. Definitions of appellation varied in their commitment to the existence of the entities appellated, but they almost always specified that the verb be in the present tense. See Ebbesen (1981) and de Libera (1982), “The Oxford and Paris Traditions in Logic,” in Kretzmann \textit{et al} (eds), \textit{The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy}, Cambridge: CUP, pp. 174-187.
\item See the text in note 78 above.
\item Grammaticus vero non significat hominem et grammaticum ut unum, sed grammaticam per se et hominem per aliud significat. Et hoc nomen quamvis sit appellativum hominis, non tamen proprius dictur eius significativum; et licet sit significativum grammaticae, non tamen est eius appellativum. \textit{Appellativum autem nomen cuiuslibet rei nunc dico, quo rei ipsa usi loquendi appellatur. Nullo enim usu...}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The distinction Anselm sees between signification and appellation in these passages is one of strict meaning versus the *usus loquendi* or “use of speech.” We use certain nouns to talk about things even when those things do not fall under the scope of what the noun actually is a sign of. We might say that the basic distinction is between what a noun “means” on its own, versus what it can be used to refer to.

Anselm himself does not discuss proper names in the *De grammatico*. But it is not hard to construct a plausible way in which a thirteenth-century mind could use this basic distinction to discover an interesting feature of proper names. For it seems that proper names present a case where the distinction breaks down. If we start with the assumption that a proper name is used to talk about just one thing, and then assume that a proper name signifies just one thing, then it looks as if the proper name’s *appellatio* will be just the same as its *significatio*. If “Grumbuskin” puts us in mind of Grumbuskin and no one else, and if we use “Grumbuskin” to talk about Grumbuskin and no one else, then it looks as if the signifying function is no different from the appellating function of the word. Or to cast it differently: there’s nothing to “Grumbuskin” more than Grumbuskin himself or Grumbuskin content. This is different from the words “cat” or “pirate” or “Growltiger’s trusty accomplice in evil,” which put us in mind of things beyond Grumbuskin himself, however much we may also use them to talk about Grumbuskin.

But this raises the question, why draw a distinction between the name’s appellation and signification at all? In the case of “the literate” or “the white,” it is clear that the signification of the word in question involves a rich content over and above any particular appellation. But in the case of the proper name, it looks as if there is nothing over and above the appellation; there is no rich content. The proper name’s signification is thus nothing more than its appellation. If this is the case, then we are left with the problem of why we should distinguish signification from appellation in the case of proper names in the first place. There are no features internal to the name or its use in virtue of which we could make the distinction. If this is the thought behind the argument in Geoffrey, then we should read the claim that a proper noun’s *significatum* is its *appellatum* as a reductive claim. The name’s signification has collapsed into the appellation, and the proper name in question gives us nothing more than an ability to talk about a certain individual. The proper name might “call out” (*appellare*) the individual, but it presents no further information. The exposition in Geoffrey’s passage should therefore be read in the following

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way. Since a proper noun’s *significatum* is just the same as its *appellatum*, there is not a genuine sense in which it has any signification distinct from its appellation. But that is tantamount to saying that it does not genuinely have “signification.” Therefore, since the proper name does not really have signification, it is not a genuine *nomen*.84

I have been speaking of “signification” as if it involved having a rich content over and above its use of appelling this or that particular. The medievals did not speak of “rich content,” but they did consistently describe names as being imposed “from forms.” In Geoffrey’s own exposition, we read that common names “are imposed from a form through signification,” whereas proper names are merely imposed “through appellation.” The contrast between the formal element in signification, and the lack of a formal element in appellation, seems instructive. Bestowing a name “from a form” may very well involve encoding a rich content, perhaps information about the nature or qualities that help to constitute the thing. It is precisely this question that we must address in the following chapters. For the moment, however, one thing seems clear. The exposition in Geoffrey highlights yet again the fact that a proper name may fail to meet one of the classical criteria for being a *nomen*—in this case, because it is only good for talking about one thing and has no further signification beyond it.

3. Remarks

The preceding investigation has uncovered three important facts about the treatment of proper names in the language arts traditions and in the thirteenth century. First, the traditions in both grammar and philosophy made room for the claim that some grammatical nouns were not

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84 The distinction Geoffrey makes between signification and appellation, at least as I am interpreting it here, may not be so different from J. S. Mill’s distinction between common and proper names six hundred years later. With Mill, common names convey information about what a thing is, while the proper names function only like chalk-marks to help us distinguish individuals. “Proper names are not connotative,” writes J. S. Mill: “they denote the individuals who are called by them; but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to those individuals. When we name a child by the name Paul, or a dog by the name Caesar, these names are simply marks used to enable those individuals to be made subjects of discourse.... The only names of objects which connote nothing are proper names; and these have, strictly speaking, no signification. If, like the robber in the *Arabian Nights*, we make a mark with chalk on a house to enable us to know it again, the mark has a purpose, but it has not properly any meaning. The chalk does not declare anything about the house; it does not mean, This is such a person’s house, or This is a house which contains booty. The object of making the mark is merely distinction.... When we impose a proper name, we perform an operation in some degree analogous to what the robber intended in chalking the house. We put a mark, not indeed upon the object itself, but, so to speak, upon the idea of the object. A proper name is but an unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object. Not being attached to the thing itself, it does not, like the chalk, enable us to distinguish the object when we see it; but it enables us to distinguish it when it is spoken of, either in the records of our own experience, or in the discourse of others” (*A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, Book I; ed. J. M. Robson [2006] in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 7, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, pp. 33-35).
genuine names and did not have genuine signification. Second, the most important grammarian and one of the most important philosophers for the Middle Ages, Priscian and Boethius respectively, discussed *nomina* in such a way that the signification of proper names was unclear. Third, certain philosophers in the thirteenth century interpreted the previous two facts as indications that proper names lacked the genuine sort of signification required to be *nomina*. Proper names could be distinguished from real names for one or more of the following reasons: (a) proper names signified too many diverse entities, (b) they signified accidentally, or (c) they did not really “signify.” When confronted with the practical reality of proper names in daily use, these philosophers could consistently say that the use was “verbal” or “accidental” or “appellative,” but in no way “essential” or “significative” or “real.”

This last point is worth emphasizing. Daily life, not to mention this chapter itself, is riddled with proper names. Not only do we say or write “Aristotle” and “Richard Rufus of Cornwall,” but we multiply proper names beyond necessity by speaking of imaginary individuals—“Growltiger” and “Bombalurina,” not to mention “Jenneyanydots,” “Macavity,” and “Bustopher Jones,” who are still to appear. But the daily use of proper names for individuals (real or unreal) is not what is at stake for our thirteenth-century philosophers. There is no doubt even for them that we do succeed in giving labels to individuals. What is under examination is the nature of those labels. Our philosophers’ claim is that the labels we give to individuals are not really name-like. They are noun-like, but they are held accidentally, and they work at the surface level of speech and daily convenience, not at the deep level of essence and rich content.

But what does it mean to speak of “essence” and “rich content”? It is clear from all the arguments we have seen thus far that philosophers assumed that true *nomina* must function as signs of definite things. But we have not examined what psychological and metaphysical baggage this claim brings with it. When Boethius, Priscian, and the thirteenth-century philosophers claim that genuine names function as signs, it seems that at the very least, they mean that names must bring something to mind or cause a thought of something. But it also seems that true *nomina* do more than just this. Several of the arguments we have looked at seem to presuppose that what names bring to mind is something robustly intellectual, something with a content including a grasp of an essence. These are matters that demand deeper investigation. In order to understand the claim that the genuine *nomina* are only those that have signification, we must go beyond the language arts traditions to take a closer look at thirteenth-century cognitive theory and metaphysics.
As we saw in the previous chapter, genuine names must function as signs. A name signifies something insofar as it is capable of bringing something to mind or causing some sort of thought. “Causing a thought” is shorthand for further criteria: a name must convey information (unlike the nonsense word *garalus*), and that information must be definite or well-delimited (unlike infinite nouns such as “non-cat”). With these basic requirements in place, we can see that a name’s ability to function as a sign depends generally on the involvement of the mind and especially on how well an intellect is able to grasp what the name is supposed to be a name of.

But what if our minds are not capable of having certain thoughts? Specifically, what if our minds are not capable of having thoughts of individuals-as-such? This is not an idle question in the context of thirteenth-century epistemology. Our ability to think about individuals—to grasp them with our intellects—was contested on at least two grounds. In the first place, it seemed to certain thirteenth-century philosophers that we cannot have adequate or well-delimited thoughts of perishable entities when they are absent. In the second place, it seemed to most philosophers that, even with individuals present, the human mind was not set up in such a way as to conceptualize them.

In this chapter we will look at a cluster of arguments that involve these worries about individual knowledge. As these arguments state, we cannot have the right sorts of thoughts about individuals-as-such. Because we cannot have the right thoughts, we cannot constitute any names or signs that will properly “bring to mind” the individuals themselves. That means that there can be no such thing as a proper name. This mode of arguing may seem somewhat peculiar, or even simply wrong; so before we turn to the arguments, I want to voice a few caveats and then motivate the central epistemological worry in perhaps a more compelling way.

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The first caveat is the following. The fact that there were grounds in the thirteenth century for doubting the mind’s ability to know individuals does not mean that thirteenth-century philosophers in general thought that we simply cannot know individuals at all. On the contrary, philosophers then believed as firmly as philosophers today that individuals are the objects of our acquaintance in the world. But that acquaintance was generally thought to be a sensory acquaintance and not an intellectual one. Philosophers agreed, for example, that the five senses could capture individual features such as colors or sounds; and similarly, they agreed that internal sense faculties like the imagination could cognize individual objects as wholes. But almost all philosophers doubted that the intellectual faculty could cognize individuals through thoughts or concepts that uniquely captured the individual as such.2

The reason for this doubt was that thirteenth-century cognitive theories specified a peculiar role for the intellect. The intellect worked by abstracting from the idiosyncratic features of individuals, resulting in concepts that were not individual but universal. To ask how the intellect could cognize individuals was therefore like asking how an X-ray machine could image freckles. It seemed to the early- and mid-thirteenth-century mind that that was the sort of thing the intellect was not at all set up to do.3

This fact produced a problem when it intersected with the commitment to intellectual involvement in naming. Bestowing or using a name required a mind that could entertain concepts of the thing being named. That was not a problem if the thing being named were a universal or a nature like “cat” or “stone.” But what about individuals like Quaxo and

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2 The still-classic study of the intellectual cognition of particulars in the thirteenth century is that of Camille Bérubé (1964), *La connaissance de l'individuel au moyen âge*, Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal (see especially pp. 13-14 and 92-94). Bérubé divides the development of late medieval cognitive theories into three stages. In the early thirteenth century up to c. 1260, philosophers seem to have universally regarded an intellectual grasp of individuals as impossible. Only with the second stage, epitomized by Aquinas' synthesis around 1260 and his language about the intellect “turning to the phantasms,” did it become popular to argue that the intellect could cognize individuals “indirectly.” The third stage commenced with philosophers in the 1280's who responded to Aquinas' views by attempting to work out ways in which the intellect could cognize individuals directly. The period of this chapter falls within the first and second stages of Bérubé's division. As we will see, philosophers who were critics of proper names also regarded the intellectual cognition of individuals as impossible, while philosophers who thought the intellect could cognize individuals indirectly also defended the intellect's ability to impose proper names on those individuals.

Jellylorum? If the intellect could not entertain concepts of these individuals as such, then how could the names of these individuals work appropriately as signs of them?

For these reasons, some philosophers began to doubt that we can signify individuals by the use of proper names. Philosophers who were deeply committed to maintaining the strictly universal nature of intellectual cognition adopted the stance that we cannot know individuals adequately enough to name them, either because we cannot know perishable absent entities, or because we cannot know individuals-as-such. On the other hand, there were other philosophers who thought the intellect might be capable of cognizing individuals indirectly, or that a mediating faculty like the imagination might cognize individuals with the help of the intellect. These philosophers were not necessarily committed to the view that an intellect could form individual concepts, but they did argue that sufficient cognitive resources were available for us both to know and to name individuals.

The second caveat I need to address is the following. When we discuss the intellect’s ability to cognize individuals as such, one sense of “individual” is primarily in focus while others are not. For instance, the participants in the proper-name discussions seem to take for granted that the intellect can know what it means for the term “individual” to be a predicate.\(^4\) They also seem to grant that the intellect knows the difference between what it is to be an individual and what it is to be a universal.\(^5\) The authors from our period even seem to think—as we will see in

\(^4\) The term “individual” is of course a universal term and can therefore function as a predicate or as a subject applying to more than one entity. Analyses of “individual” in this sense were mediated to the Middle Ages by Boethius’ translation of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. As Porphyry notes, “Individual” is [predicated or said] of one single particular. For Socrates is called an individual, as is this white thing or this approaching thing, for example the son of Sophroniscus, if Socrates is his only son.” *Individuum autem [predicatur] de uno solo particulari* (*individuum autem dicitur Socrates et hoc album et hoc veniens, ut Sophronisci filius, si solus ei sit Socrates filius*). (Porphyry, *Isagoge* 7.19-21; Minio-Paluello 13.21-23). Geoffrey of Aspall records an argument that turns on this understanding of “individual” as a common term: “If particulars did not have a name of this kind [i.e., a proper name], then it could only be because the individual is not apprehended by the intellect. But the proof that [the intellect] does understand [particulars] is clear according to its formulation of this proposition: ‘The particular is not the universal.’ For the intellect would first have to comprehend the extremes [in order to make the proposition].” *Item si particularia non haberent nomen buismodi, non esset alia causa nisi quia singulare non apprehenditur ab intellectu. Sed probatio quod sic: intelligit secundum compositionem istam propositionem « singulare non est universale » quia prius comprehendebat extrema* (Geoffrey, *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam VII*, q. 43, *sed contra* 2-2; Brumberg-Chaumont 101). The argument is clearly specious, insofar as it takes the intellect’s understanding of the meaning of “individual” to be evidence that the intellect therefore apprehends this or that individual as such. (The hypothetical arguer seems to be aware of this problem, for the next line in the argument grants that “particular” is being used as a common term [*si dicetur quod hoc nomen ‘singulare’ est nominatio communis...*, whereupon the objector follows up with a different argument.)

\(^5\) Several *sed contra* arguments in Geoffrey’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam VII*, q. 43, invoke our ability to distinguish individuals from universals. See arguments 2-2 through 2-5 (Brumberg-Chaumont 101). Argument 3-5 is especially succinct: “A power which is able to distinguish between things is able to apprehend those things. But the intellect distinguishes between the universal and particular in this way; therefore it apprehends each of them, both the particular and the universal, according their own characters.” *Item virtus que est aliquidus distinctivus est orundem et apprehensiva, sed intellectus distinguat inter universale et particulare secundum quod buismodi, ergo apprehendit utrunque scilicet tam...*
the following chapter—that intellectual speculation can uncover the metaphysical constituents that make individuals to be individuals *qua* members of a certain species. Problems with “cognizing the individual” in the present chapter do not concern these ways of understanding individuality. Rather, what is at issue is whether the intellect can know a given individual as *this* individual, distinct from that one, in such a way as to know which individual it is. Everyone may grant that the intellect is able to tell when an instantiation of cathood is present; but the question is whether the intellect can distinguish this cat as Grumbuskin from that cat as Tumblebrutus. This kind of individual cognition has recently been dubbed by Peter King as *de re* cognition.

To motivate the problem, consider the following scenario. Jennyanydots is a respectable Gumbie cat. She has adopted the socially conscious program of improving the lives of the rodents of her acquaintance, and she teaches them music, crocheting, and tatting in the evenings. On this particular evening she is waiting for three new students. They are all gerbils, and she knows from previous experience that they are sufficiently similar to each other that she cannot tell them apart. Curious as it may seem, owing to ancient gerbil custom they also lack proper names. Jennyanydots is attempting to draw up a class list to keep attendance, and she faces a question of paramount importance: can she designate her new gerbil students with genuine proper names?

The question is not absurd. Try as hard as she can, Jennyanydots does not seem to be able to think about any of the three gerbils in such a way that she can be sure she is not thinking of one of the other two. Moreover, the harder she thinks about it, the more she realizes that there are many individuals in her acquaintance like this. Pennies and teacups and dining forks and blades of grass—in fact, most of the individuals she has encountered seem to have sufficiently similar doppelgängers from which she cannot always distinguish them. Jennyanydots notices at the same time that she does not give proper names to any of these individuals. So is she, or is she not, capable of thinking about these individuals *qua* individuals, and giving them proper names?

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*singularum quam universale et hoc secundum proprias rationes* (Geoffrey, *Qq. super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43, *sed contra* 2-2; Brumberg-Chaumont 101). Geoffrey himself does not endorse these arguments in his “expositions” at the conclusion of the question. The likely cause is that these arguments only show that the intellect distinguishes universals from particulars, without showing that the intellect has *de re* cognitions or distinguishes particulars from each another.

6 For matter as an individuating principle, see Chapter 4, pp. 139-147; for individual differences, see pp. 147-154.
7 See King (2015), p. 104.
The philosophers and arguments we will examine in this chapter present four answers to Jennyanydots’ conundrum. In section one, we will look at two answers that have to do with whether Jennyanydots is capable of naming impermanent or perishable entities. In section two we will look at an answer involving Jennyanydots’ lack of intellectual knowledge about the gerbils. And in section three, we will look at an answer which affirms that Jennyanydots can in fact name the gerbils, if she has a functioning imagination in cooperation with an intellect.

1. Knowledge as Completion: Proper Names and Scientific Knowledge

Can Jennyanydots name the three gerbils she cannot distinguish? Stated in a nutshell, the first answer is “no.” She cannot name them, not because they are indistinguishable, but because at the moment when she is considering how to name them, she does not have the right kind of knowledge about their existence or non-existence.

Explaining this answer will be somewhat difficult. But before explaining it, I want to show that it actually was a live option in the thirteenth-century debate over proper names, and that it involved conclusions about de re cognitions taken from Aristotle’s Metaphysics, book VII. We find the first reference to this argument in one of Roger Bacon’s commentaries on the Metaphysics. Bacon alludes to the same argument in more detail in his De signis, and I will focus on the De signis since it offers somewhat more information. One fact to beware of while evaluating this argument is that our only explicit source for its use against proper names is Bacon, and Bacon dismisses it rather quickly as far as proper names are concerned. However, as Bacon himself acknowledges, the argument’s main premise derives directly from Aristotle’s Metaphysics VII; and we will see that it contains a number of interesting insights about the cognition of individuals, even if its conclusions regarding proper names are less intuitive.

The argument as Bacon records it goes as follows:

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8 “To the second [objection] I say that the proposition ‘since a particular recedes from the sense, it is not cognized except through a universal’ can be understood in two ways. The ‘through’ may indicate a precise cause, in which case the proposition is false; or it may indicate a preparatory cause, in which case the proposition is true. For the cognition of a universal is preparatory for the cognition of a particular.” Ad alid dico, quod hic est dupliciter; ‘particulare cum recedit a sensu non cognoscitur nisi per universale’, quia li ‘per’ potest dicere causam precisam et sic est proposition falsa; aut quia dicit causam praebulam, et sic est vera proposition, quia cognitio universalis est praebula ad cognitionem particularis (Bacon, QMet8, lib. 7; Steele 236.15-20). For a note on the dating of this text, see Chapter 1, note 8.
It is said in *Metaphysics* VII that, because individuals recede from the senses, they are not understood or manifested. And therefore they are not named, nor will they have names, nor could they be named, except while they are sensed.\(^9\)

Taken on its own, without the backdrop of *Metaphysics* VII, this argument is not clear. Bacon does not provide us with explicit information to link the first claim (individuals are not always sensed) with the second claim (they are not understood), nor these two claims with the conclusion that individuals cannot be named. We might be tempted to think that the issue is that of presence versus absence: we can impose names on present entities but not absent ones. However, Bacon’s critique of this argument implies a more specific interpretation of it. Bacon takes the argument to be about the existence of individuals in contexts where their existence cannot be verified. The problem is that the only cognitive means we have for verifying the existence of sensible individuals is by actually sensing them. When individuals “recede” from the senses, the traces of the individuals that remain in the imagination provide no information about the actual existence of the individuals they represent. Jennyanydots’ memories and internal images of the three gerbils, for instance, tell her nothing about whether there still are three gerbils in contexts where she doesn’t sense them. This is a problem, at least according to Bacon, because the purest and highest act of the intellect involves a “true insight into things,” which insight presupposes a correct judgment about existence and non-existence:

When Aristotle says that we do not understand individuals when they recede from the senses, we should understand this to be about the pure and principal intellective act, which is supposed to be the third one (namely after opinion), and which is a true insight into things by which the intellect ascertains whether they exist. That cannot happen when an individual recedes from the senses. Even though a *species* remains in the intellect, the intellect does not know whether the subject from before has been destroyed and is a non-being. Thus all day long we retain *species* of things which we thought existed as long as we sensed them, though they have now been destroyed.\(^10\)

To Bacon, then, the anti-proper-name argument at stake is an argument about the transient nature of *de re* cognition. The claim is not that the intellect simply cannot grasp individuals *per se*, but rather that the intellect’s grasp of individuals is impermanent. It grasps them only as long as they are present through sensation, and it has no way of judging their existence once they

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\(\textit{Singularia, cum recedunt a sensu, non intelliguntur nec manifestantur, ergo nec nominantur nec habeunt nomina, nisi cum sentiuntur, nec nominari potuerunt} \) (Bacon, *DS* II.2.25; Fredborg 90).

\(\textit{Quod ergo dicit Aristoteles quod non intelligimus singularia cum recedunt a sensu, hoc est intelligendum de actu puro intellectivo et principali, qui simpliciter possebatur tertius (videlicet post opinionem) qui est verus intuitus rerum apud intellectum quo saltem fit certus de se ipso an sit. Quod fieri non potest quando singularum recedit a sensu. Quamvis enim species eius remaneat apud intellectum, tamen nescit intellectus utrum subjectum sit corruptum et non ens quod prius, et sic tuta die retinemus species rerum in aestimatione nostra de singularibus quae putavimus esse sicut quando sentiebamus ea, cum tamen iam corrupta sint} \) (*DS* II.2.25; Fredborg 90).
withdraw from the senses. Whatever knowledge remains after the individuals have left is merely a matter of imagination or opinion. So Jennyanydots can indeed name the three gerbils while she senses them, but she cannot name them beforehand or afterwards, when she merely opines or imagines their existence.

Even with Bacon’s help in interpretation, however, the connection between the impermanence of sensation on the one hand, and the unnameability of individuals on the other, remains opaque. It is not obvious that impermanence and absence should render an individual unnameable. Quite the contrary, the absence or even the non-existence of objects could more intuitively be viewed as one of the causes for the use of names and of language in the first place. Jennyanydots invents or uses words like “gerbil” and “teacup” precisely because teacups and gerbils are not always present and she cannot always point at them. To understand the argument Bacon reports, therefore, we need to look more closely at its origins in Metaphysics book VII.

The immediate source for this argument is likely chapter 10, 1036a1-8, not too long after the controversial remark that “particulars do not have a proper name” (1035b1-3). Aristotle observes briefly that material individuals cannot be defined because they are known through the senses, and when they withdraw from the senses their existence cannot be verified. This brief observation develops into a full-fledged argument in chapter 15, where Aristotle argues that the impermanent nature of our acquaintance with individuals renders them indefinable and “unknowable” (in the strict sense of having scientific knowledge about them) in principle.

Aristotle’s argument in chapter 15 begins with the assumption that true scientific knowledge

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11 Quamvis enim species eius remaneat apud intellectum, tamen nescit intellectus utrum sit corruptum et non ens quod prius, et sic tota die retinemos species rerum in aestimatione nostra de singularibus quae putavimus esse, sicut quando sentiebamus ea, cum tamen iam corrupta sint. Et habemus imaginationem non de eis consimilem quam <prius> sed iam transit secondum veritatem imaginatio in rem praeteritam et non in rem praesentem sive existentem in rerum natura (Di II.2.25; Fredborg 90).

12 Thomas Aquinas, for instance, explicitly emphasizes the role of speech in making unknown or absent things “present” to us: “Properly speaking, speech is the means by which someone is brought to a cognition of something unknown. For [speech] makes present what would otherwise be absent to him, just as it happens when someone points out to another something which he does not see, and thus makes it present to him in a way through speech.” Locatio igitur proprie est qua aliquis dicitur in cognitionem ignorant, per hos quod fit ei praesens quod alias erat sibi absens; sicut apud nos patet dum unus refert alteri aliquid quod ille non vidit, et sic facit ei quodammodo praesentiam per loqueam (Aquinas, Qq. disputatae de veritate, q. 9, a. 5 corpus; Spiazzi 188).

13 “The whole concrete thing, for example this circle, is something particular, whether sensible or intelligible. And by ‘intelligible’ I mean mathematical, and by ‘sensible,’ brazen or wooden. Those [particulars] do not have a definition but are cognized by a ‘cognition’ or by sense; and when they withdraw from the intellect, it is not clear whether they exist or not. And one is not spoken of or cognized with a universal definition.” Res autem totalis congregata, verbi gratia iste circulus, est aliquod particularium, aut sensibile, aut intelligibile. Et dico intelligibilia et mathematica, et sensibilia vt cuprea et lignea. Ista enim non habent definitionem, sed cognoscuntur cum cognitione aut sensu. Et cum recteunt ab intellectu, non manifestantur utrum sint, aut non sint. Et unus non dicitur, neque cognoscitur sermone universal (Aristotle, Metaphysics VII.10, 1036a1-10; Iunctas VII.12, f. 186C-D).
requires a permanent object that cannot change. Material individuals in the world hardly meet the requirement. Because individuals like gerbils can be corrupted, and because we can fail to know whether they have been corrupted, we fail to have the sort of knowledge that would enable us to give them a definition. Both metaphysical and cognitive claims are involved in this argument. Metaphysically speaking, what makes individuals liable to go out of existence is the fact that they are composed of matter, which renders them corruptible. Cognitively speaking, what makes individuals unknowable to us is the fact that our faculties are set up in such a way that we cannot know the present existence of a material composite without sensing it. Since we can only know particulars through sensation, we cease to perceive a material individual when it withdraws from our senses. That is why Jennyanydots cannot know facts about the absent gerbils’ existence or non-existence as such, and why it is therefore an object of her opinion rather than of her knowledge.

In the context of *Metaphysics* book VII, chapter 15, the issue under discussion is clearly not nameability but definability. We must remember, however, that knowability was a criterion both for defining and for naming a thing. The tight connections between knowability, definability, and nameability manifest in interesting ways in the thirteenth-century recovery of this text. As I noted earlier, it is a curious feature of Michael Scot’s translation that he casts Aristotle’s discussion of definitions in terms of “names.” Thus we find passages like the following: “It is necessary that a formula consist in names, and whoever does not define does not impose a name, since it would not be known if he did.” Scot’s translation seems to present striking claims to the effect that defining implies naming and vice versa. Moreover, Averroes’

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14 “And so there is neither a definition nor a demonstration of the substances of sensible particulars. For they have matter, which has a nature that can either be or not be. And for that reason all particulars are destroyed. And, if demonstration is of necessary things, and if a definition is true, then it is not possible to know and not-know in this way whatever can not-be in such a way, except according to opinion. Thus there will not be a demonstration or definition of what can be in a certain way, except as opinion is concerned. Therefore, it is manifest that [particulars] do not have a definition or a demonstration. For whatever things are destroyed are not manifest to those having cognition when they withdraw from the senses, and a discourse [alone?] will be preserved in the soul.” *Et ideo neque definitio, neque demonstratio est substantiarum sensibilium particularium, habent enim materiam quae quidem habet naturam quae potest esse et non esse. Et ideo corrumpuntur omnia particularia. Et, si demonstratio est ex rebus necessarioribus, et definitio est vera, quemadmodum est impossibile scire aut ignorare illud, quod potest non esse tale, sed est secundum existimationem, ita non erit demonstratio, nec definitio eius quod potest esse alio modo, sed est secundum existimationem. Manifestum est igitur, quod non habent definitionem, nec demonstrationem. Quae enim corrumpuntur, non sunt manifesta apud habentes cognitionem, quando receunt a sensu, et erit sermo conservatus in anima* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII.15, 1039b20-1040a6; Iunctas VII.13, f. 193G-193B).

15 See Chapter 1, p. 39.

16 *Et neesse est ut sermo sit ex nominibus. Et qui non definit, non posuit nomen, quoniam non erit notum si fecerit. Nomina autem posita sunt communia omnibus rebus* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII.15, 1040a10-17; Iunctas VII.17, f. 202K)
own commentary on these passages underscores the same tight link between defining and naming.

It is necessary that definitions be composed of names. And whoever does not know a thing does not impose a name on it. For no one imposes a name on something of which he is ignorant.\(^{17}\)

So the actual train of thought behind the anti-proper-name argument in the *De signis* must have gone something like this. Real knowledge requires a changeless and always-knowable object. But because individuals are impermanent and cannot always be sensed, we cannot have real knowledge of them and cannot define them. Definitions and scientific knowledge, moreover, imply and are implied by the ability to bestow names. So if we fail to have definitive knowledge of individuals, we will also fail to name them.

The requirement that a thing be definable in order to be nameable may seem obviously wrong-headed. But I believe there is a way of explicating this requirement so as to reveal an insight that is both plausible and compelling. Nameability, as we have seen repeatedly in the previous chapters, requires that we be able to use a word as a sign that brings to mind a concept of the thing.\(^{18}\) The concept has to involve information that is in some sense complete in itself: it causes the hearer to “rest,” as Boethius says.\(^{19}\) Moreover, the concept should be neither so broad as to include too many kinds of things (in the way that “non-cat” might include gerbils and dogs and dead cats) nor so narrow as to include nothing (as a concept of *garalus* includes nothing).\(^{20}\) A name then signifies something by bringing to mind a well-delimited concept of the thing. But if that is how a name works, what concept could it possibly bring to mind except one that was definable? A well-delimited concept should be one that can be explicated in terms of genus and species, or that can be differentiated from the concepts of things that belong to other species. In short, it seems that naming involves the same sort of conceptual activity that defining involves. I therefore suggest that the sentiment “knowing implies defining implies naming and vice versa” should be understood to mean that naming requires an intellectual grasp of something that is definable *in principle*, if we were to investigate it further—not that we must have exhaustive definitional knowledge of a thing before we can name it.\(^{21}\) If we take this

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\(^{18}\) See the Introduction, pp. 15-16.

\(^{19}\) See the Introduction, p. 15.

\(^{20}\) See Chapter 2, pp. 44-49.

\(^{21}\) David Charles’s (2000) study of Aristotle’s views of naming and defining has made a similar point in much more detail. Charles has argued that Aristotle should be interpreted as holding a 3-stage view in which the initial stage
interpretation, then saying that a given entity is indefinable in principle amounts to saying that it does not give rise to the right kind of concepts. And if it does not give rise to the right concepts, it will not be nameable either.

The tight connection between definability and nameability helps to explain why it appears so easy for certain thirteenth-century philosophers to slip from definitions to names almost without remark. We find such a slip occurring in one of Roger Bacon’s early Metaphysics commentaries. Bacon asks whether particulars can be defined. But the two objecting arguments Bacon reports, as well as the sed contra argument, all concern whether individuals are named, without a word about definitions. Bacon seems to make the slip automatically and unconsciously, and he presents the argument about individuals “withdrawning from the senses” in Metaphysics VII as if he takes it prima facie to be an objection to individuals’ nameability.

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(knowing what a word signifies) does not require the second stage of knowing a thing’s existence or the third stage of having definitional knowledge of its essence. The first stage does, however, presuppose the possibility of a further investigation into the second and third stages. As Charles puts it, “To grasp an account of what the name signifies is to have sufficient knowledge to go on to establish whether or not the thing exists and what it is—a kind of ‘springboard’ for further investigation.” See Charles (2000), Aristotle on Meaning and Essence, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 49. This is not quite the same interpretation as the one I am suggesting for the thirteenth-century Aristotelians, but the idea of possible stages of investigation which are implicit in name-giving is, I think, helpful for understanding the otherwise obscure claim that naming implies defining and vice versa.

22 See QMet8, lib. 7; Steele 235.22-36. This is the same commentary in which Bacon alludes to the anti-proper name argument based on particulars withdrawing in the senses, which he also discusses in the De signis. See note 8.

23 I have put the terms dealing with defining vs. naming in boldface type: “The question is whether a particular or individual like Socrates and Plato might have a definition. And it seems thus: spoken words are signs of universal passions which are in the soul, but those universal passions are the likenesses of universals, since they are universal (as the second book of De anima says). And because they are signified primarily, a name will pertain to them alone, not to particulars. Again: Particulars are not cognized except through their universals (according to the text); but we signify insofar as we understand, so a particular cannot be signified or named unless through the name of its universal. And this is clear in the Categories, since [Aristotle] always says ‘some man’ or ‘some horse’ in the place of the particular. On the other hand: The imposition of a name occurs on account of the form and from the thing of the particular. But individuals have a true form; therefore, they ought to have a true naming.” QMet8, libr. particulare sive individuum ut Socr. et Plato habebat definitionem. Quod sic <videtur>: voces sunt notae passionum universalium que sunt in anima; set iste passiones universales sunt similitudines universaliun, quia sunt universalia, ut dicit in secundo De anima, quare similitudines sunt solum universalium, quia, cum ille primo signantur, istorum erit solum nomen, non particularium. Item: particularia non cognoscentur nisi per sua universalia, in litera; set sicut intelligimus sic signamus, ergo particularare non potest signari vel nominari, nisi per nomen sui universalium. Est hoc patet in Pracdamentis, quia sepicem loco particularis dicit ‘aliquis homo’, ‘aliquis equus’. Contra: propter formam et a forma rei fit impositione nominis; set individua habent verum formam, ergo debent habere veram nominacionem (Bacon, QMet8, lib. 7; Steele 235.2-36).

24 “To the second objection, I say that the proposition ‘since a particular recedes from the sense, it is not cognized except through a universal’ can be understood in two ways. The ‘through’ may indicate a precise cause, in which case the proposition is false; or it may indicate a preparatory cause, in which case the proposition is true. For the cognition of a universal is preparatory for the cognition of a particular. And in this way, insofar as we are able to know, we are able to signify and impose names.” Ad alium [objection] dico, quod hoc est dupliciter; ‘particulare cum recedit a sensu non cognitionur nisi per universale’, quia li ‘per’ potent dicere causam precisam et sic est propositio falsa; aut quia dicat causam preambulum, et sic est vera propositio, quia cognitioni universalis est preambula ad cognitionem particularis. Et etsi sic dicat possibile cogitare etsi possimus signare et nomina imponere (Bacon, QMet8, lib. 7; Steele 236.15-22).
Nameability, then, implies definability. At least, it implies delimitability of at least some kind. But how strongly should we take the “delimitability” requirement? Suppose there were some way of accurately delimiting or distinguishing thoughts of individuals from each other. This on its own would not turn an individual into a permanent object of scientific inquiry or give it a definition of a scientific kind. But as long as a thought of an individual were adequately distinguishable from other thoughts, it looks as if that would be sufficient in principle for the purposes of proper naming. So why must Jennyanydots go along with the critics of proper names in thinking that the scientific indefinability of her individual gerbils means that they are altogether unnameable?

This is exactly the question that Bacon asks in the De signis. Bacon does not address the problem of scientific definition per se, but he asks the broader question at stake. Why think that the intellectual input we need for naming must be of the strictest and rarest kind? Bacon repeatedly invokes the breadth of our intellectual powers, consistently using the term intellectus and intelligere (“understanding” and “understand”) to describe all sorts of cognitive activities like imagining and opining. For Bacon, intelligere is susceptible of a strict and a loose sense. In the strict sense, an understanding involves a true insight into a thing’s existence. But in the loose sense, intelligere can include beliefs, opinions, and acts “formed from imagination.” In fact, given Bacon’s verbose listing of various acts of understanding, he seems to think that any cognitive act over and above sensation can count as an “act of understanding” in a loose sense:

It can be said that there are many acts of the intellective soul. For one is an act of believing, another of opining, another of understanding, of knowing, and many others; for one is a pure act of the intellective power itself, another is formed from the imagination and fantasy, according to which we speak of the “pure” and “fantastic” understanding. And all those acts and others like them are called acts of understanding (intelligendi) in a broad sense, since the intellect has all the acts.25

By granting that a strict understanding involves insight into a thing’s existence, Bacon preserves Aristotle’s arguments about scientific knowledge in Metaphysics book VII. What Bacon denies is only that such scientific knowledge is relevant for the purposes of naming. If we have belief, opinion, or some imaginative grasp of the individual, we have enough to allow us to name it. And Bacon does not stop short at names: he thinks all sorts of verbal discourses about

25 Potest dici quod animae intellectivae multæ sunt actus: quidam enim actus credendi, quidam opinandi, quidam intelligendi, quidam scienti et multi alii; quidam etiam actus purus ipsius intellectivae, quidam formatur ex imaginatione et fantasia, secundum quod dicitus intellectum purum et fantasticum, et omnes isti actus et consimiles dicitur large actus intelligendi, quia intellectus habet omnes actus (Bacon, DS II.2.25; Fredborg 90).
individuals can be generated from kinds of understanding (*intellectum*) that fall short of an *intellectus* in its purest sense.

And thus either by believing or opining or through the understanding (*intellectum*) formed from imagination and fantasy, we can understand (*intelligere*) individuals after they withdraw from the senses, and we can name them and use names of them under the form of naming, and constitute discourses about them, and say other things of them—even though the most proper and principal intellective act does not fall over those sensible individuals when they withdraw from the senses.  

Bacon thus never denies that intellectual involvement is necessary for naming. *Some sort of* mental grasp of an individual must occur. But we can grasp things in many different ways, and as long as we manage to understand an individual in a way over and above sensation, we will understand it well enough to enable our discourses about it to be significant.

Why is Bacon so secure in his view that all sorts of “understanding” can enable signification? We can partially explicate his liberality on this point by turning to one of his earlier commentaries on *Metaphysics*, book VII. In the *Metaphysics* commentary, Bacon seems to think of our cognitive acts in terms of their degrees of accuracy or completeness. He suggests that we can have more or less accurate access to the nature of things, and that to this access there corresponds more or less accuracy in our giving of names. The semantic principle at work here is that “Just as we can cognize, in the same way we can signify and impose names.” 

Bacon really does mean *just as*, because he spells out the relationship between naming and cognizing as one of isomorphic degree. Our initial knowledge of things may be indistinct, and so our naming is indistinct—so indistinct, in fact, that we signify things not through names in a proper sense but rather through what Bacon calls “circumlocutions.” Then, as we gradually acquire more knowledge, we signify things more precisely by names. That holds true particularly in the case of individuals, where Bacon indicates that we must move from indistinct knowledge to more distinct knowledge in order to move from “circumlocutions” to the application of proper names:

Since a name is more indistinct through circumlocution, therefore we signify first by means of that, and then through a name when we know better. I grant (to the second objection) that the Commentator does say that a particular circle does not have an

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26 *Et sic aut credendo aut opinando aut per intellectum formatum ex imaginatione et aestimatione possumus intelligere singularia, postquam recesserunt a sensu, et nominare ea et uti nominibus eorum et ipsis sub forma nominandi et constitutere sermones de eis et ea de alis enuntiare quamvis actus intellectivus propriissimus et principalissimus non cadit super ipsa singulares sensibilia, quando a sensu recedant* (Bacon, *D3* II.2.25; Fredborg 90).

27 *Et ita sicut possumus cogitare ita possumus signare et nomina imponere* (*QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 236.20-22).
imposed name. But nevertheless, it has a name imposed through circumlocution, and it could have one in regard to the thing itself.28

What precisely does Bacon mean by “circumlocution”? Two answers seem likely. Bacon may mean the use of a demonstrative pronoun with a universal term, or he may mean a descriptive phrase like “the bronze circle.” I am inclined to think that he means the use of a demonstrative pronoun with a universal term (“this gerbil”) because of the immediate context of the passage. Bacon is addressing the question “Whether a particular has a definition?”, and his opening response is to say: “I concede this, but we should name those [particulars] properly through a demonstrative pronoun with their universal.”29 What Bacon actually goes on to argue is that it is possible to name individuals themselves, but doing so is not easy—it requires a knowledge of “the first cause of all things,” which is very difficult to obtain and which perhaps we can only approximate in this life.30 On the way to the attainment of this knowledge, we use circumlocutions. I see no clean way of explicating “circumlocution” within the immediate text except by reference to the initial comment about demonstrative pronouns and universal terms.31 We use phrases like “this gerbil” specifically as we are on our way to figuring out the individual gerbil and its relation to the First Cause. However, it is true that Bacon may have more general descriptive phrases in mind. A few decades later in the *De signis*, Bacon uses the term “circumlocution” to speak about Aristotle’s characterization of “the bronze circle” or “the stone

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28 *Et ita sicut possumus cognoscere ita possumus signare et nomina imporrene, et quia per circumlocationem est nomen magis confusum, ideo illa prius sic signamus, et deinde per unum nomen quando magis cognoscimus. Ad aliud dico, dicit Commentator quod circulus particularis non habet unum nomen impositum, habet tamen nomen impositum per circumlocationem, et posset habere unum quantum est a parte rei* (Bacon, *QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 236.20-27).

29 *Quod concedo, tamen illa [particularia] debemus proprius nominare per pronomen demonstrativum, cum suo universal* (Bacon, *QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 236.1-3).

30 *Set quod sic non intelligi auctor, ideo ad placitum possumus ei imponere nomen, tamen verum nomen et vera quiditas et veritas ipsius non possumus cognoscere nisi cognita prima causa omnium* (*QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 236.3-6). In a previous question, Bacon had remarked that we do not have full and true knowledge of individuals as such in this life, despite the fact that individuals are eminently knowable in themselves. Our intellects are like owls in the daylight. *Set non habemus hanc in hac vita, quia cognitio nostra incipit a confusis et universalibus incipit, ideo se habet intellectus mater ad ea sicut oculus noctue ad lucem. Est hoc quod dicit Commentator, quod non potest cognosciri substantia demonstrata nisi cognoscatur prima causa omnium* (*QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 234.1-6). Bacon’s insistence that we simply do not cognize individuals fully in themselves in this life is perhaps echoed later in the *De signis* when he grants that we cannot cognize individuals with a “pure and principle intellective act.” Nevertheless, in both texts Bacon argues that we can name individuals as such.

31 Notably, other authors early in the 1230’s or 40’s spoke of our ability to signify individuals with the use of a pronoun and universal term. See Richard Rufus of Cornwall: “If Aristotle thought that what is added to the form of the species is nothing but that very substratum of prime matter, which (as I said before) is not signifiable with a name, then what follows except that (as Aristotle himself suggests) an individual cannot have a name but can only be signified by a discourse composed of the name of a species and a pronoun? For by a pronoun even the substratum of matter is signifiable.” *Si autem Aristoteles putavit quod illud additum super formam speciei nihil aliud est quam ipsa substantia materiam praeae, quae ut praedicatix est nomine significabilis non est, quid remanet, nisi quod (ut ipse Aristoteles ponat) individuum nomen haber nomen non posse, sed volam significari oratione composita ex nomine speciei et pronome quo pronominem et ipsa substantia materiae significabilis erat* (Rufus, *De ideis* 16; E84vb / P36va).
circle.” 32 Either way, Bacon clearly thinks that the use of a circumlocution instead of a proper name corresponds to an “indistinct” cognition. Say that Jennyanydots recognizes that an instantiation of gerbilhood is present, but she does not know which gerbil it is. It stands to reason that she will not yet be able to signify the gerbil with a proper name, but only as “this gerbil” or “the gerbil with sandy fur,” at least until she discovers more about the gerbil. 33 Once she has ascertained those characteristics that truly distinguish this gerbil from other gerbils, or that link it to the First Cause, she will be able to bestow a genuinely proper name.

Bacon therefore seems to think that nothing in principle stands in the way of our imposing a proper name if we wish. However, he acknowledges that this view faces an objection in the form of the claim that we can only understand particulars through universals. What if Jennyanydots can really, truly, only, and always understand a gerbil as this gerbil, a universal of gerbilhood that happens to be instantiated before her here and now, without reference to anything genuinely individual about it? In presenting this worry, Bacon mentions briefly the argument from *Metaphysics* VII, that particulars “withdraw from the senses” and therefore cannot be known. The implication seems to be that as soon as the gerbil is gone, it stands to reason that she will not yet be able to signify the gerbil with a proper name, but only as “this gerbil” or “the gerbil with sandy fur,” at least until she discovers more about the gerbil. 33 Once she has ascertained those characteristics that truly distinguish this gerbil from other gerbils, or that link it to the First Cause, she will be able to bestow a genuinely proper name.

32 “Whoever consults either translation will find that what [Aristotle] here calls the ‘universal’ is a form abstracted from determinate matter, such as a circle considered in itself. But what he is calling a ‘particular’ is the bronze circle or the stone circle and such like. His intention is not to talk about particulars or singulars like Socrates and Plato (which is what we’re discussing now), but the aforementioned things. And we should understand that neither here nor elsewhere does he deny that [particulars] can have proper names, or that proper names can very well be imposed on them. But he wants to say that those particulars he was talking about were designated in his language by *circumlocutions*, and they did not have ‘a name’ but a plurality of utterances through circumlocution, just as it is in Latin.”

33 Though Bacon does not mention it in this context, an individual cognized in a general way—such as “some gerbil” or “some cat”—was often discussed in medieval texts as the “vague individual.” Bacon himself frequently speaks of the vague individual in the *De signis*, though not in contexts specifically about proper names. See for instance *DS* III.2.47, where Bacon uses the distinction between vague individuals and determinate ones to solve puzzles about propositions like *Tantum unum est*. Such statements are false when interpreted determinately (“only one cat exists”) but true when applied vaguely (“some cat / any given cat is only one [thing]”). *Sic transmutatur hoc nomen ‘ens’ ad ens aliquod signatum; distinguimus enim particulare vagum et particulare signatum et individuum vagum et signatum, et ita possumus dicere unum vagum et unum signatum. Unum enim in numero et individuum et particulare sunt ideam, et sic patet tota difficilias istius sermonis *Tantum unum est*, quia si sumatur pro uno vagum et communi sic est vera et convertitur cum ente communi, sicut probatur. Si pro uno signato et determinato sic est falsa* (*DS* III.2.47; Fredborg 98-99). It is disappointing that Bacon does not say more about the role of vague individuals in naming. When Jennyanydots refers to a gerbil as “this gerbil,” is she actually naming a vague individual? For more on the vague individual in general, see Deborah Black (2012), “Avicenna’s ‘Vague Individual’ and its Impact on Medieval Latin Philosophy,” in Wisnovsky et al (eds), *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval Textual Culture*, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 259-292; and E. J. Ashworth (2004), “Singular Terms and Singular Concepts: from Buridan to the early sixteenth century,” in Friedman and Ebbesen (eds), *John Buridan and Beyond*, Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, pp. 121-152, esp. 127 and 134-135.
Jennyanydots can in fact only understand it as “that gerbil—the gerbilhood that was just here.” As long as it’s the case that Jennyanydots grasps the gerbil only through its gerbilhood, it looks as if she never grasps the gerbil as the individual it is. As far as names are concerned, then, it looks as if Bacon must be cornered into admitting that proper names are therefore only convenient abbreviations for demonstrative pronouns and their universals.

Bacon uncorners himself on this point by following a tactic similar to his approach in the *De signis*. Bacon partially grants the argument. He acknowledges that we do not have genuine intellectual understanding of individuals when they recede from the senses, and he even grants that it is true (in a sense) to say that particulars must be understood through their universals. But Bacon’s position turns on what cognition “through” a universal means. As it turns out, it does not mean that Jennyanydots really, truly, only, and always understands a gerbil merely as *this gerbil*. Rather, her knowledge of the universal is a prerequisite for her understanding the particular gerbil itself:

The proposition “since a particular recedes from the sense, it is not cognized except through a universal” can be understood in two ways. The “through” may indicate a precise cause, in which case the proposition is false; or it may indicate a preparatory cause, in which case the proposition is true. For the cognition of a universal is preparatory for the cognition of a particular.34

Jennyanydots must begin by first understanding the gerbil as “this gerbil,” but that is only the first step of cognition and naming. The universal is preparatory insofar as it is a stepping stone for more particular access to an individual.

Bacon gives us a brief story about cognitive psychology to explain how this access occurs. On Bacon’s view, we cognize objects through transmitted forms known as *species*, which (for Bacon) convey information that is simultaneously particular and universal.35 This is so because the *species* in question derive from things in which the particular nature is never divorced

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34 *Hec est dupliciter; ‘particulare cum recedit a sensu non cognoscitur nisi per universale,’ quia li ‘per’ potest dicere causam precisam et sic est propositionis falsa; aut quia dicat causam preambulam, et sic est vera propositionis, quia cognitio universalis est preambula ad cognitionem particularis* (Bacon, *QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 236.16-20).

35 “I say that one and the same species, thoroughly undivided, is both particular and universal. For the nature of the particular thing is never separated from the nature of the universal; therefore, similarly, the species which is the likeness of that nature is never separated from the species of the universal [nature]. Thus one and the same species of a thing present to the intellect is universal and particular.” *Ad argumentum dico, quod eadem est species penitus indivisa particularis et universalis, quia natura particularis rei unguam separatur a natura universalis, ideo similiter nec species que est similitudo illius natur unguam separatur a specie universalis, ideo eadem est species rei apud intellectum universalis et particularis* (*QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 236.6-11).
from the universal nature. Because Bacon thinks that the particular and universal nature are always found together, he thinks that the *species* of the particular and the universal remains undivided, even up to the point of our understanding. The sense in which we understand particulars “through” universals has to do with the fact that, in most cases, our knowledge of universals comes more easily and noticeably than our knowledge of particulars. Jennyanydots notices the universal “gerbil” more because the universal comes to her from all the gerbils she encounters. But the particular content of a given gerbil’s *species* comes to her only from that particular gerbil. The priority of the universal in her understanding is not due to a greater intelligibility of gerbильhood, but only its prominence as she encounters multiple gerbils; and there remains always the possibility of understanding the individual gerbil-as-such in the same encounter as well. In fact, Bacon asserts that the particulars in themselves have a “most true cognition” and that they are “most truly substances and most truly beings” (p. 233). If there is a problem, it is only with our cognitive apparatus in this life.

Bacon therefore gives an account of naming in which our ability to name particulars progresses with our ability to understand them. Granted that particular things are intelligible, then at the very least we are able to name them by means of pronouns and universals. As we come come to know them better, we can bestow proper names. This isomorphism helps to

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37 See note 35, where Bacon states quite clearly that “one and the same species of a thing present in the intellect is universal and particular.”

38 *…nichilominus a parte rei verissimam habet cognitionem, quia unumquodque sicut se habet ad esse et cognitionem et <cum> individuum habeat verissimam entitatem et sit verissime substantia et verissime ens, ideo habet verissimam cognitionem* (Bacon, *QMet8*, lib. 7; Steele 233.34-234.1).

39 In a prior section of the commentary, Bacon seems to indicate (problematically) that we cannot have knowledge of an individual as such in this life: “But we do not have this [knowledge] in this life, since our knowledge begins from what is indistinct, and from universals, even though they [the individuals] are most accessible in their nature. And that is why our intellect relates to them like the eye of an owl to the light. And this is what Averroes says: that a designated substance cannot be known unless the first cause of everything is known. So in our present circumstances we know particulars through their universals, but in our ultimate state it will be reversed.” *Set non habemus hanc in hac vita, quia cognitio nostra incipit a confusis et universalibus incipit, ideo quia sunt manifestissima in sua natura, ideo se habet intellectus noster ad ea sicut oculus nocturnus ad lucem. Et hoc est quod dicit Commentator, quod non potest cognosciri substantia demonstrata nisi cognoscatur prima causa omnium. ideo hic cognoscimus particularia per universalia, set in ultima prosperitate etr contrario (QMet8, lib. 7; Steele 234.1-8). This seems to contradict his clearly-stated views a few pages later that we can nevertheless name individuals. However, there may be no genuine contradiction. Perhaps the knowledge that we fail to have of individuals in this life is simply of the “strict” kind that Bacon already thinks is not necessary for naming—what he calls the “pure and most principle intellective act” in *DS* II.2.25 (see note 10). Alternatively, perhaps Bacon thinks that individuals are genuinely nameable in themselves, but we may still struggle to apply proper names correctly in all circumstances. In any case, the overwhelming majority of Bacon’s comments on proper names indicate consistently that he thinks individuals are nameable in themselves and, moreover, that they are nameable by us in the right circumstances.
explain much about Bacon’s attitude toward proper naming in the *De signis*. Naming and knowing are tightly linked; but they are not linked in the sense that naming requires an exhaustive scientific knowledge of a thing. Rather, they are linked in the sense that naming must be isomorphic to the sort of cognitive activity that will become increasingly accurate over time. That explains, at least in part, why Bacon can adopt the view that less-intellectual acts such as imagining and opining can enable us to impose names.

Nevertheless, Bacon’s position in the *De signis* is not without its problems. It still remains unclear what Bacon means by saying that acts of cognition like believing, opining, and imagining are all “acts of understanding.” Traditionally, the imagination and the estimative or cogitative faculties (which were posited to explain beliefs and opinions in higher animals) were regarded as sub-intellectual. What Bacon may have in view is the belief that the intellective soul, as one soul, is a unity of all its faculties, even if the faculties may be diverse. In that case, it would be correct to speak of the intellective soul engaging in acts of opining, imagining, and so on, while “intellect” or “understanding” strictly speaking would refer to the intellective faculty itself. On the other hand, Bacon may have a deeper problem on his hands. The claim that lower cognitive faculties can be considered as “intellectual” sat well with some thirteenth-century philosophers, but not with all of them—particularly not with philosophers who thought that the intellect’s only business was to form common concepts or cognize universally. The relationship between the intellect and the lower faculties, therefore, requires further investigation.

2. **Knowledge as Cooperation: Intellect and Imagination**

We return to the fundamental question at stake in this chapter. Can Jennyanydots give names to the three indistinguishable gerbils? The first answer we encountered was “no”—Jennyanydots does not have the right kind of knowledge required for naming. To this we saw Bacon responding “maybe”: perhaps Jennyanydots cannot give the gerbils their own proper names now, but as she comes to understand them with growing accuracy, she will eventually be able to do so. Even in the meantime, her “acts of understanding” may be taken broadly enough to enable her to successfully give names on the basis of belief or imagination.

In the immediate context of the *De signis*, Bacon does not give us an explicit account of how or why our “understanding” of things should be taken to include sub-intellectual forms of understanding. But Bacon was not alone in making such a claim. At least three other

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40 See note 25.
philosophers roughly contemporaneous with Bacon attempted to argue that particulars could be named in virtue of the intellect cognizing particulars by using sub-intellectual faculties. The problem that had to be addressed was one of demarcation: how could a sub-intellectual faculty like the imagination cooperate with the intellect in such a way that the right “understanding” required for naming could be produced? Moreover, the kind of anti-proper-name arguments that these philosophers encountered differed significantly from that reported by Bacon in the De signis. Rather than focusing on the strict requirements of scientific knowledge, the arguments at stake concerned the universalizing role of the intellect in cognition and the sharp division of labor between intellect and senses. The question was therefore not whether the intellect could know particulars after they withdrew from the senses, but whether the intellect ever knew particulars at all—even with the help of the senses and imagination.

The conviction that a universalizing and immaterializing intellect would be unable to know sensible, material particulars seems to have been far and away the most influential reason in the thirteenth century for thinking that particulars could not have names. The majority of arguments in the sources concern this issue: Geoffrey of Aspall records four anti-proper-name arguments that derive their punch from the sense/intellect divide, Adam of Buckfield and Pseudo-Kilwardby record two more, and we find what looks like the actual adoption of such an argument, albeit allusively, in a commentary by Siger of Brabant. The philosophers wishing to justify our ability to impose proper names, meanwhile, seem to have struggled against this line of attack more than any other. Adam of Buckfield and Pseudo-Kilwardby both acknowledge the force of the counter-arguments and sketch out replies, while Geoffrey of Aspall records two brief responses in sed contra form before offering a lengthy “exposition.”

41 Geoffrey of Aspall, Adam of Buckfield, and the author of the Commentary on Priscianus Maior known as Pseudo-Kilwardby. See pp. 106-119 below. Geoffrey’s way of putting the point is very similar to Bacon’s, though he uses mens instead of intellectus as the broader term for the cognitive faculties of the soul: “I say that ‘mind’ extends to the intellective power and the imaginative and fantastic powers, insofar as the imaginative and fantastic terminate at the intellect. For the imposition of some names is from the intellect and of other [names] from the imaginative or fantastic powers insofar as they terminate at the intellect.” Dico quod ibi extenditur mens ad virtutem intellectivam et imaginativam et fantasticam, secundum quod imaginativa et fantastica terminantur ad intellectum. Quorumdam enim nominum est impositio ab intellectu et quorumdam <ab> imaginativa vel fantastica prout ad intellectum terminantar (Qq. super Metaphysicam VII, q. 43, exp. 3-3; Brumberg-Chaumont 102). For a discussion of what it means for imagination to “terminate” at intellect, see pp. 113-119 below. As far as I can tell, the philosophers in the proper name discussion do not draw a terminological distinction between mens and intellectus. The Augustinian mens is the broad term that encompasses memory, intellect, and will (see De trinitate 10.11.17ff); but our thirteenth-century philosophers—to the extent they use the term mens at all—speak of it as Geoffrey does above, in distinction from the imagination and the senses. Thus, mens seems to function as a synonym for the Aristotelian intellectus. This synonymy is consistent with other uses at the time; Aquinas, for instance, uses mens and intellectus interchangeably in his Summa Theologica. See John O’Callaghan (2007), “Imago Dei: A Test Case for St. Thomas’s Augustinianism,” in Dauphinaise et al (eds), Aquinas the Augustinian, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, pp. 125-127.
Since the cluster of arguments surrounding the intellect is somewhat unwieldy, I will break the following section down into two parts. First we will look at the arguments against proper names on the grounds that the intellect is strictly a universalizing power. These arguments return an answer to Jennyanydots’ question in the negative: she cannot give the gerbils proper names because the intellect cannot cognize particular things as such at all. Second, we will look at the main responses from Geoffrey of Aspall, Adam of Buckfield, and Pseudo-Kilwardby. Their answer to Jennyanydots is that she can name the gerbils if she has an intellect that can cooperate with her sub-intellectual faculties in order to know individuals.

2.a. The Sense/Intellect Divide

The arguments against proper names all invoke a strict division of labor between the senses and the intellect. Once the division is in place, it is easy to claim simply that the intellect cannot know particulars because that is not its job. Philosophers who did not think that particulars could be named seemed to have found this division especially significant. Consider the following instance of such an argument:

The universal is the object of the intellect, and the particular of the sense. But the sense, the object of which is particular, does not apprehend the universal; and in the same way the intellect, the object of which is universal, is not able to apprehend the particular. But the intellect imposes a name only on that which it apprehends.\textsuperscript{42}

It is notable that in this argument, the issue surrounds imposition or name-giving. Proper names cannot be given in the first place—they cannot even get off the ground, so to speak—because of a gap in our cognitive capacities. That gap occurs between intellection and sensation. We are admirably equipped to grasp particulars through sensation, but we are not equipped at all to “understand” them intellectually. Moreover, this argument explicitly takes the intellect to be the faculty that bestows names. Because the intellect is directly responsible for naming, the

\textsuperscript{42} Item universale est obiectum intellectus et singulare sensus. \textit{<Sensus autem> cauis objectum est singulare non apprehendit universale, sic nec intellectus cauis objectum est universale apprehendere poterit particular. Sed intellectus nulli nomen imponit nisi illi quod apprehendit} (Geoffrey of Aspall, \textit{Qq. super Metaphysicam} VII, q. 43, arg. 1-2; Brumberg-Chaumont 100). Pseudo-Kilwardby records a similar argument: “Nothing is in the soul in a cognizable way except the universal. For individuals are cognized by sense alone, as Boethius says: \textit{[it is] individual when sensed, universal when understood.” Sed nihil est in anima per modum cognoscibilis nisi universale; singularia enim cognoscuntur sensu tantum, ut dicit Boethius: singulare est dum sentitur, universale dum intelligitur} (CPM 2.1.8, obj. 1; Fredborg 68). Another version appears in Adam of Buckfield’s \textit{Sententia super Metaphysicam}, briefly transcribed in Brumberg-Chaumont (2005): “It might be asked whether anything singular at all has a name, since only what is intelligible is properly nameable, and only the universal is represented to the intellect (just as the particular is to the sense)...” \textit{Si autem queratur utrum universaliter aliquid singularare habet nomen, cum solum intelligibile sit propriie nominabile et solum universale representetur intellectui, sicut particular sensu...} (\textit{Sententia super Metaphysicam}, Cambridge, Gonville and Caius college, 367 (589), fol. 217va; Brumberg-Chaumont 67).
intellect’s sharp distinction from the senses carries more far-reaching implications than it might otherwise. If the intellect is not capable of giving proper names, no faculty will be capable. And if no proper names are given, there will be no utterances that ever begin to function as signs of individuals qua individuals.

We find this approach to the intellect and senses filled out in varying levels of detail in similar arguments. Sometimes the details are sparse but suggest that the author(s) have in mind substantive views regarding cognitive operations. For example, Geoffrey records an argument that casts the sense/intellect division in terms of concepts:

It seems that [particulars] do not have a name, since every name signifies a concept of the mind and not the particulars. And that is why they do not have a name. The minor premise is clear in the place where Aristotle says that particulars are cognized only through sense.

Notice that this argument has shifted from name-giving to signifying. A name must function as a sign for a concept. This is a substantive assumption about the object of signification, and we can detect in the background the Boethian view that words primarily signify concepts and secondarily signify things. The argument also assumes that all concepts are universal, and that particulars have no individual concepts corresponding to them in the mind. For an explanation of this assumption, the argument directs us to look “in the place where Aristotle says ‘particulars are cognized solely by sense.’” The passage in question is probably Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics, book I, ch. 31 (87b28-39), though we also find critics of proper names using similar statements in Physics, book I, ch. 5 (189a5-6), and in Boethius’ second commentary on the Isagoge. The Posterior Analytics states that

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43 Et videtur quod non habent [particularia] nomen, quia omne nomen significat mentis conceptum, sed particularia non, quare non habent nomen. Minor patet in eodem passu ubi Aristoteles dicit quod particularia solo sensu cognoscuntur (Geoffrey of Aspall, Qq. super Metaphysicam VII, q. 43, arg. 1-3; Brumberg-Chaumont 100). See also a similar argument reported as an objection in Pseudo-Kilwardby’s commentary on Priscian: Videtur quod non, quia voces sunt notae sive signa ex institutione passionum quae sunt in anima. Sed nihil est in anima per modum cognoscibilis nisi universale; singularia enim cognoscuntur sensu tantum, ut dicit Boethius: singulare est dum sentitur, universale dum intelligitur (CPM 2.1.8, obj. 1; Fredborg 60).

44 For an explanation of the Boethian view, see the Introduction, pp. 12-14.

45 See Aristotle’s Physica 1.5, 189a5-6: “The universal is known according to reason, but the singular according to sense; for reason is universal, while sense is particular.” Universale quidem enim secundum rationem notum est, singulare autem secundum sensum; ratio quidem universalis est, sensus autem particularis (Physica: Translatio vetus, Aristoteles Latinus VII.1, ed. Bossier and Brans [1990], Leiden: Brill, p. 26). Boethius’ commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge also contains passages to this effect: “When this similitude [of a genus or species] is in singulars, it becomes sensible; but when in universals, it becomes intelligible.... There is one subject, but in one way it is universal, when it is thought, and in another way singular, when it is sensed in those things in which it has its being.” Hae similitudo cum in singularibus est, fit sensibilis, cum in universaliis, fit intelligibilis.... Unum quidem subiectum est, sed ali o modo universale est, cum cogitatetur, ali singularum, cum sentitur in rebus his in quibus esse suum habet (Boethius, In Isagogen Porphyrii Commenta: editio secunda, lib. I, ch. 11; ed. Samuel Brandt [1906], Leipzig: Freytag, pp. 166-167). See also Boethius’ Philosophiae Consolatione: “For anything which appears to the senses: If you consider it according to reason, it is universal, but if you consider it in itself, it is
Knowing (*scire*) does not come through the senses. For if sensation is such as to be of this one and not of that one, then it requires this thing, here and now. But it is impossible to sense a universal in all things, since it is not here or now; for then it would not be universal, because we say that a universal is everywhere and always.\(^46\)

The claim here is about the capacities of the senses and the intellect in relation to their objects. The object of sensation is a particular in the here and now, a claim which Aristotle indicates we can infer from the fact that the senses do not enable us to experience anything that is the case “always and everywhere.” Jennyanydots’ sensory acquaintance with a particular gerbil does not acquaint her with the features that will always and everywhere make an animal to be a gerbil. But her knowledge of the gerbilhood that the gerbil possesses—knowledge which includes the necessary or essential facts pertaining to what it is to be a gerbil—does give her knowledge of gerbilhood always and everywhere. That is why the object of knowledge or knowing (*scire*) is universal, because Jennyanydots is said to know something about gerbils insofar as she understands something always true of them. So if Boethius is right that names primarily signify concepts, and if the role of concepts is to encapsulate knowledge about the world, and if knowledge is necessarily universal, then concepts must be universal and names must be names of universals.

It is important to note that the diversity of function between the mind and the senses on this account is mandated by the diversity of objects. What is at stake here is not just an arbitrary application of labels, but a division of cognitive labor. On this point we must keep in mind that the philosophers of the thirteenth century were moderate realists of one stripe or another, and they regarded universals as objects of thought that were genuinely distinct from particulars as objects of thought, even though most of these philosophers believed that universals did not exist independently from particulars in reality. If universals are distinct intellectual objects, then the following observations follow more or less naturally. On one hand we find that some of our cognitive powers seem to grasp (only) particulars and their particular features, whether internal or external. We call those powers “senses.” On the other hand, we find that some of our other powers seem to grasp common features or universals. We call those powers “intellectual.” From the nature of the distinction itself, it is clear that a universal power will not be able to

\(^46\) Neque per sensum est *scire*. *Si enim et est sensus talis quidem buiuusmodi et non buiuusmodi albumius, sed tamen sentire necesse est hoc aliquid et ubi et nunc. Universale autem et in omnibus imposibile est sentire; non enim hoc est neque nunc; non enim utique esset universale; quod enim semper et ubique est universale dicimus esse* (Aristotle, trans. James of Venice, *Analytica Posteriora* I, ch. 31, 87b28-88a1; Minio-Paluello, p. 62).
grasp a particular object nor a particular power grasp a universal object. The succinct formula “sensation is of particulars, understanding of universals” expresses the distinction precisely, and that is why the critics of proper names invoked it repeatedly.\textsuperscript{47}

We have now seen two very brief arguments that relate the division of labor between the senses and intellect to the impossibility of proper names. I want to draw out the spirit of these arguments in more detail by looking at two particularly interesting cases. They are found in Siger of Brabant’s commentary on \textit{De anima} and in yet another (this time longer) argument recorded in Geoffrey’s \textit{Metaphysics}. In the case of Siger, we find a well-known philosopher holding the view that the intellect cannot know particulars as such, with a clear allusion to the inference that particulars cannot be named. Siger’s reference to proper names occurs in question 18 of his \textit{Quaestiones in tertium De anima},\textsuperscript{48} where Siger starts the discussion by saying that the intellect does not cognize particulars \textit{per se}. Particulars in and of themselves cannot be objects of the intellect, because the intellect is immaterial and abstract, and it does not know one thing (of a certain kind) more than another (of the same kind).\textsuperscript{49} The only objects suited to be objects of the

\textsuperscript{47} Geoffrey of Aspall records premises to this effect four different times (see objections 1-1 through 1-4 in his \textit{Qq. super Metaphysicam} VII, q. 43). We find Pseudo-Kilwardby also acknowledging the principle and attempting to explain it away (see pp. 108-112 below). Thomas Aquinas himself occasionally mentions the maxim—e.g., \textit{Qq. disputatae de veritate} q. 2, a. 6, on the question whether our intellects know individuals: \textit{sed contra est quod Boetius dicit (super prologum Porphyrii in Praedicabilia): Singulare est dum sentitur, universale dum intelligitur} (q. 2, a. 6; Spiazzi 42).


\textsuperscript{49} “The act of understanding, just like any other act, occurs according to the requirements of the agent’s form. But the form which directs the act of understanding is immaterial, abstract, and one out of many, neither is it of this one such that it is not of another. Therefore, whatever makes the action of a form like this specific should also be immaterial, abstract, and one out of many, nor should it be of this one such that it is not of another.” \textit{Actus enim intelligendi, sicut et quaelibet alia actio, fit secundum exigentiam formae agentis: forma autem quae agit actionem intelligendi est immaterialis, abstractus, una pluriarum, nec buius est ita quod non alterius. Ergo similiter et illud quod specificat actionem buissmodi formae, debet esse immaterialis, abstractum, unum pluriarum, nec debet esse buius ita quod non alterius} (Siger, \textit{Qq. in tertium De anima}, q. 18, soluto; Bazán 65.20-25). The position Siger is adopting is of course influenced by Avicenna’s comments about God knowing particulars only in a “universal way”: see Avicenna, \textit{Liber de philosophia prima sita scientia divina}, lib. 8, c. 6; ed. van Riet (1980), \textit{Avicenna Latinus: Liber de philosophia prima V-X}, Leiden: Brill, pp. 417-422. But note that Siger is arguing for a more radical claim than Avicenna is usually understood to hold, namely that what Avicenna says about God’s knowledge applies to human knowledge as well. No one knows particulars in a particular way. On whether Avicenna himself held this view, see Peter Adamson (2005), “On Knowledge of Particulars,” \textit{Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society} 105.1, pp. 257-278. For the classic study on Avicenna’s views about
intellect in and of themselves are universals.\textsuperscript{50} Thus far Siger says nothing controversial. The surprise comes when Siger rejects the view that the intellect can cognize particulars secondarily. He specifically argues against the view that we can understand particulars \textit{ex consequentia} (“incidentally”) by applying a universal “understanding” (\textit{intellectus}) of something back to the particulars. The view he is critiquing here is probably Thomas Aquinas',\textsuperscript{51} though the language of “applying” an understanding to the particulars is reminiscent of Aristotelian views in general about the intellect turning towards particulars or phantasms in order to form judgments. What Siger rejects is the claim that the intellect, after abstracting a universal, can then apply that universal back to the particular world in order to cognize particulars. For instance, after abstracting the universal “man,” the intellect would then apply “man” to Socrates in order to form the judgment “Socrates is a man.” Siger argues that, if Aquinas were correct, the intellect would already have grasped the particular in such a way that it knew that the being of this particular belonged to it and not to another. Thus, the intellect would already have to grasp Socrates \textit{qua} individual before it could single him out to apply the universal “man” to him.

It is in precisely this context that Siger appeals to the quotation we have seen from Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics} VII. He claims that particulars can be cognized only through cognizing a universal, and he cites this as the explicit reason that they cannot be named \textit{qua} particulars:

I say that because the universal is identical with its particular, the particular is cognized through the cognition of the universal—not in a proper form, but only in the universal. For this universal form truly is [the form of the] particular according to its being. For the particular does not have any form apart from the universal [form]. That is why Aristotle says that a particular does not have a proper name, or a proper form, or a proper cognition.\textsuperscript{52}

Siger’s use of the Aristotle-Scot quotation is clear in its import, but ambiguous in its place in Siger’s argumentative strategy. The claim that “particulars do not have a name” can be justified both in a wider context and in a narrower one. In the narrower context, Siger may be invoking metaphysical concerns. The line directly preceding the Aristotle-Scot quotation states

\textsuperscript{50} “And so it is evident that the intellect understands nothing \textit{per se} except the universal, nor does it cognize particulars insofar as they are particulars.” \textit{Quare manifestum est quod intellectus nihil \textit{per se} intelligit nisi universale, nec particularia cognoscit secundum quod particularia} (Siger, \textit{Qq. in tertium De anima}, q. 18, solutio; Bazán 65.26-28).

\textsuperscript{51} For analysis to this effect, see Da Palma Campania (1958), pp. 62-74.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Immo dico quod universale idem sit cum suo particulari, per cognitionem universalis cognoscit particularis, sed non <ut> est in forma propria, sed solum in universali, quia haec forma universalis vere est particularis secundum suum esse. Particulare enim aliam formam ab universalis non habet. Unde dicit Aristoteles quod particularis non habet proprium nomen, nec proprium formam, nec propriam cognitionem.} (Siger, \textit{Qq. in tertium De anima}, q. 18, solutio; Bazán 67.70-76). Italics added for emphasis. I have omitted the editorial insertion of a \textit{cum} in line 70.

that the universal form of a particular is the same as its particular form. So Siger may be putting forward the Aristotle-Scot quotation to emphasize this point. Because a thing’s particular and universal forms are the same, the intellect does not grasp any particular form distinct from the universal one. Similarly, because the forms are the same, the intellect will not impose any particular name apart from the universal one.

In the wider context, however, the comment comes at the end of Siger’s argument that the only way in which the intellect can understand particulars is a “universalizing” way. What is crucial for Siger here is the notion that an understanding (intellectus) cannot be “of this in such a way that it is not of another.” Nothing about understanding can be particularized to this or that particular thing; the understanding must be universally of what is understood. “Particulars as they are understood (intelliguntur) are one and not distinct from each other,” Siger tells us, and “the intellect cognizing singulars does not know how to distinguish one from another.”

The intellect for Siger is quite literally particular-blind. All it sees when it looks at a particular is a universal form; and the only reason it cognizes the particular at all is that the particular’s form and the universal form are the same. It therefore follows, from Siger’s use of the Aristotle-Scot quotation, that just as the intellect cannot know one particular from another, so naturally the intellect is unable to impose a name on one particular as opposed to another.

So far, we have seen reasons for which a philosopher might think in general that the intellect is incapable of cognizing particulars. But it is possible to press the issue further. Why does Jennyanydots have to analyze her cognitive functions like this, as if the intellect were in fact completely distinct and independent from the lower faculties? It seems as though it would make more sense to focus on Jennyanydots herself as a knowing subject, with multiple faculties she can employ in different ways to reach a knowledge of individuals and name them. As a partial answer to this question, we find at least one longer account of proper names that specifies why the division between sensation and intellection must be so sharp, and why it cannot be

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53 “Rather, particulars are all one insofar as they are understood, and they are not distinct among themselves. So the intellect knowing particulars does not know how to distinguish one from another.” Immo particularia secundum quod intelliguntur, unum sunt, non distincta ad invicem inter se, ita quod intellectus cognoscent singularia nesciat unum ab alio distinguere (ibid; Bazán 67.28-31). “Therefore I believe and say that the intellect, insofar as it is ours, does not understand particulars in a particular way, either primarily or secondarily... Otherwise, there would not be a reason for the fact that it understands only through a common form, such that the intellect does not distinguish particulars. For they all share a form that is common, intelligible, immaterial, and abstract, which is not diverse among diverse things, but is one among many particulars.” Ideo credo et dico quod intellectus, etiam secundum quod noster est, particulare particulariter non intelligit, nec primo nec ex consequenti... Aliter enim non esset cur non intelligat nisi per formam communem, ita quod intellectus singularia non distinguat, cum ipsa omnium communicant in forma communis, intelligibili, immateriali, abstracta, <quae> non est diversa diversorum, sed est una plurium singularium (ibid; Bazán 66.55-64).

54 See note 52.
overcome even for the purposes of imposing names. Geoffrey of Aspall records a lengthy argument that identifies the problem as one of the transmission of information. The cognitive mechanisms that we possess for translating sensory information into intellectual information are not such as to pass on information that is essentially particular in character.

The argument Geoffrey records involves the role of the species of a thing. A “species” in medieval cognitive psychology is the formal representation of a sensible thing, not to be confused with a kind or class (as in “genus or species”). The species operative in cognition can be thought of as a likeness or similitude, but it is not pictorial in nature—it can encode any sensory information such as sounds or smells. It can also encode more universal information about a thing’s nature or kind. The argument recorded in Geoffrey turns on the claim that the senses are incapable of processing the universal information encoded in the species, while the intellect is incapable of processing the particular information.

Say that Jennyanydots perceives a gerbil across a distance of three feet. Between her and the gerbil is a medium of air, and into this medium the gerbil emits species of itself—formal representations of its shape and color, its squeaks, smell, etc. As these species affect Jennyanydots’ eyes and ears and other sense organs, they transmit information about the gerbil which is first of all very particularized. This particular smell and this particular color are what they convey to her sense organs. Moreover, the species affect not only her senses but her memory and imagination: Jennyanydots recalls this gerbil’s fur color, and she can imagine that fur color showing up in a different individual gerbil or an individual cat or some other individual furry mammal. Even in Jennyanydots’ imagination, the information passed on by the species continues to be individual. But what if Jennyanydots doesn’t want to think about this individual color but what it is to be a color in general? Similarly, what if she doesn’t want to think about this gerbil or this cat but “mammal” in general? As the argument in Geoffrey points out, what she must do is to abstract away from all the particular information about particular colors or particular gerbils. She must reach an underlying universal that is not at all individual:

The species of a thing, according as it is in matter, is under particular material conditions. And similarly when it is received in the sense, it is still particular and under those material conditions. And even when it is with the imaginative faculty, it is particular and under particular material conditions. It is not suited to being received by the intellect until it has been stripped of those conditions. And so the species offered to the
imaginative faculty is not apprehended by the intellect until more has been stripped away.\textsuperscript{55} The senses and the imagination do not strip away particular information, since the senses and imagination are what receive this particular information. But the process of understanding is precisely the process in which this particular information must be stripped away. That is how a cognizer arrives at a more general knowledge of a thing—by peeling off the layers of facts that pertain only to this particular instance to arrive at the core of what is true of all instances. As Geoffrey’s recorded argument points out, the particular information encoded in the *species* cannot be grasped by the intellect. The *species* either presents the senses and imagination with the layers of particular facts, or it presents the intellect with the common core that is left over when all the particular facts have been peeled away.\textsuperscript{56}

We can see now more clearly why the critics of proper names drew such a sharp distinction between the intellect and the lower faculties. We can also see why, if there is a cognitive gap between the intellect and particulars, the intellect will not be able to impose names on the particulars. It all depends on what information reaches the intellect. If Jennyanydots’ intellect is not able receive the particular information encoded in the *species* of the gerbils, then her intellect will certainly not know anything particular about the gerbils themselves, and that means that she will not be able to give them names. The argument recorded in Geoffrey underscores this point:

Therefore it is much more the case that the particular thing itself—of which kind the *species* is—is not apprehended by the intellect insofar as it is particular, since the particular thing is not apprehended by the intellect either in itself or through the *species*

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{55} Item *species* rei secundum quod est in materia est sub conditionibus materialibus et particularibus, et similiter cum recipitur in sensu est adhuc particularis et sub his conditionibus materialibus; et (adhibit cum est cum imaginativa est particularis et sub conditionibus materialibus et particularibus et non est nata recipi ab intellectu donec ab illis conditionibus spolietur. Et ita *species* ad imaginativam delata non apprehenditur ab intellectu donec fuerit magis spoliata (Geoffrey of Aspall, *Qq. super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43, arg. 1-4; Brumberg-Chaumont 100).

\textsuperscript{56} The argument that Geoffrey presents does not seem to make any distinction between sensible *species* and intelligible *species*. Of course, the *Metaphysics* commentary is not a psychological text, so it may be that Geoffrey makes the distinction elsewhere. It is also not clear whether the recorded argument is actually Geoffrey’s own view, as he merely lists it as an “exposition” (without a “respondeo” or a “dicendum est”) and does not defend it against objections. So the argument might derive from another source that presents a fuller cognitive psychology. In any case, Geoffrey seems to present the *species* in question as if it remains one and the same, both in the senses and intellect. The view seems to be that the intellect works by stripping away the particular information from the *species*—but not necessarily by abstracting an intelligible *species* from the phantasm in the imagination, which then functions as the means for producing a concept. For a general overview of the fortunes of the intelligible *species* from the early thirteenth century onwards, see Spruit (1994).
\end{footnotesize}
corresponding to it. But that would be required in order for the intellect to impose a name on it.\footnote{Ergo multo fortius ipsa res particularis cuiusmodi est species non apprehenditur ab intellectu, quia res particularis nec per se nec per speciem sibi correspondentem, in quantum particularis, ab intellectu apprehenditur, quod tamen oportaret ad hoc quod intellectus ei nomen imponeret, quare etc. (Geoffrey of Aspall, \textit{Qq. super Metaphysicam} VII, q. 43, arg. 1-4; Brumberg-Chaumont 100).}

The straightforward conclusion is that proper-name-giving is impossible.

At this point we face an obvious question. Why must the \textit{intellect} specifically be the faculty that bestows names? Nearly all the preceding arguments have assumed that the intellect is directly responsible for name-giving. Two of the arguments recorded in Geoffrey have explicitly made this claim, and Siger’s argument seems to presuppose it. Yet it does not seem unreasonable to question such an assumption. Why would it be problematic for a sub-intellectual faculty such as the imagination to be the faculty by whose help we give names?

We find a suggestive answer by returning to the arguments recorded in Geoffrey’s list. One argument in particular attempts to ground the relation between intellection and naming on an empirical observation. Only rational animals use names; other animals do not. What could be the reason? Obviously, the difference must lie in their respective cognitive faculties. Non-rational animals have sensation and imagination, and perhaps other internal senses, but they do not go around giving names to things. Sensation and imagination on their own, therefore—even though they enable the cognition of an individual on a sub-intellectual level—must not be the faculties requisite for the purposes of naming.\footnote{“In every case, the imposition of a name is not from just any power. For it is not from the sensitive or imaginative or fantastical faculties, since then the brutes would be able to impose names on things. Therefore, imposition among humans must be from the intellective faculty. A name is not imposed on what is not apprehended by an intellective power; but a particular is of this kind, so it follows [that a particular is not named].” Universaliter impositio nominis non est a quacumque virtute, quia non est a sensitiva nec imaginativa nec fantastica, quia sic, tunc possent <bruta> imponere nomina rebus. Est igitur impositio hominis ab intellectiva. Quod virtute intellectiva non apprehenditur, illi nomen non imponitur. Sed particularis est buinsmodi, quare etc. (Geoffrey of Aspall, \textit{Qq. super Metaphysicam} VII, q. 43, arg. 1-3; Brumberg-Chaumont 100).}

The premises of this argument are difficult for a medieval scholastic to dispute. Suppose, as we shall shortly see the defenders of proper names claiming, that it were possible to name a particular based on the use of some sub-intellectual faculty like the imagination. If imagination were sufficient to impose names, at least some non-rational animals would be able to do it. They do not do it, however, so it follows that imagination must not be the required faculty.

In the background there may be further theoretical concerns about the relationship between imagination and intellection in naming. The language arts tradition in particular
presented a close connection between imagination and a word’s ability to function as a sign. In his second commentary on Aristotle’s Perihermeneias, Boethius had defined speech as sound with the “imagination of signifying” 59 Aristotle himself had said that speech (vox in the Latin translation) required the presence of a soul with an imaginative faculty. 60 On the other hand Boethius—just a few pages after indicating that speech involves the “imagination of signifying”—indicates that a word’s ability to function as a sign requires not only imagination but something more. Boethius even explicitly argues that signification requires a completeness of understanding that is lacking on the part of imagination and the lower faculties. Imagination and sense, he says, provide only the “rough sketches” of cognition, on the basis of which the intellect proceeds to a more comprehensive understanding of whatever it cognizes. 61 The intellect’s understanding is what enables words to be significant:

When a thing falls under the sense or cogitation, it is necessary that an imagination of it first be produced, and then the intellect will come over it more fully, explicating all the parts which were taken up confusedly in the imagination. For this reason imagination is

59 “This also can be the definition of a spoken word: we say it to be a sound with a certain imagination of signifying.” Illa quoque potest esse definitio vocis, ut dicamus sonum esse cum quaedam imaginacione significandi (Boethius, In Periherm. II, lib. 1, pr.; Meiser 4.26-28). Boethius specifically identifies the “imagination of signifying” as the thing that must be added to an articulate sound (like “cat”) to turn it from a mere sound into an actual word. “But in order for this locution to be capable of signifying, something else must be added, so that there is some imagination of signifying. Whatever is in the sound or location is produced through this, such that it may certainly be said to be thus. For if there is only a striking of the tongue with the breath which we emit through the throat, it is a sound; but if on the contrary there is a striking that results in a sound [capable of being inscribed] in letters, it is a location; and if we add a certain force of imagination as well, a signifying word results. An expression [interpretatio] comes about from these three things: the striking of the tongue, an articulate sound of a word, and the imagination of producing [the word].” Sed ut haec locutio significativa sit, illud quoque addi oportet, ut sit aliquas significandi imaginatio, per quam id quod in voce nel in locatione est proferatur: ut cetera id dicendum sit: si in loco flatu, quem per arterias emittimus, sit linguae sola percussio, vox est; si vero talis percussio sit ut in litteras redigat sonum, locutio; sed ut ipsis quaedam imaginactionis addatur, illa significativa vox redditur. Concurrentibus igitur his tribus: linguae percussione, articulato voce sonitu, imaginatio aliqua proferendi fit interpretatio (ibid; Meiser 5.22-6.3). Note that in the former passage (Meiser 4.26-28), Boethius seems to use vox in the sense of “spoken word,” whereas in the latter, he uses vox merely for the spoken sound, to which imagination must be added as a constitutive ingredient for producing a word.

60 See De anima 2.8, 420b29-31. Averroes’s comments on the passage underscore the point: “We said that, in order for speech to exist, it is necessary that the thing uttering the sound have an imaginative soul, since not every sound made by an animal is speech (like the sound of an involuntary cough or motion of the tongue). But speech is sound made with imagination and will.... The prime mover in speech is an imaginative and appetitive soul.” Dicimus quod necesse est in essendo voce ut percutiatur babeat aniam imaginativa visum non omnis sonus factus ab animali est vox (ut sonus qui fit sine voluntate apud tussum et apud motum lingue), sed vox est sonus qui fit cum imaginacione et voluntate.... Idest, primum enim movens in voce est anima imaginativa et concupiscibilis (Averroes, “Long Commentary” on De anima, lib. 2, c. 90, 420b29-31; Crawford 268.23-33). Michael Scot’s translation of both Aristotle’s De anima and Averroes’s “Long Commentary” are edited in F. Stuart Crawford (1953), Averroes Cordobensis Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros, Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America.

61 “Sense and even imagination are like first sketches, over which the intelligence comes and impresses itself as on a beginning. For just as painters usually designate a body by drawing lines, and they spread out [the area] where they will express someone’s face with colors, so too the sense and imagination are naturally spread out in the perception of the soul.” Sensus enim atque imaginatio quaedam primarum figurarum sunt, supra quas ulterius fundamentum quaedam superniervius intelligientia nitatur. Nam sicunt pictores solent designare lineam corpus atque subterrane ubi coloribus causa libellam experimant nullum, sic sensus atque imaginatio naturaliter in animae perceptione sustentatur (Boethius, In Periherm. II, lib. 1, c. 1; Meiser 28.28-29.6),
something incomplete; but names and verbs do not signify anything abbreviated, but complete things. This is why Aristotle’s opinion is correct: whatever is involved in verbs and names, it does not signify sensations or imaginations, but only the quality of concepts.\textsuperscript{62}

It therefore looks as though imagination is necessary but not sufficient for the formation of words. So it stands to reason that if Jennyanydots has only imagination and not intellection, she will not be able to give names.

Boethius’ remarks on imagination and intellection accord with his discussion, later in the \textit{Perihermeneias} commentary, of the definition of “signification.” Boethius explains (following Aristotle) that a name functions as a sign by “constituting an understanding” and causing a hearer to “rest.”\textsuperscript{63} The hearer is not supposed to be prompted to further questions by the name itself—as the utterance “if...” or a nonsense word like “garalus” might prompt one to wait for more, or to make further inquiry about a speaker’s meaning. The utterances “cat” and “gerbil” seem to convey content that is complete in itself, in at least some sense. As I argued in Chapter 2, it seems most helpful to take this sense as the quality of being “definite” or “well-delimited.”\textsuperscript{64}

Names convey information that is well-delimited, and that seems to be why Boethius thinks that intellectual concepts are required for naming and signifying. Concepts, as opposed to images, are the only way of capturing this well-rounded information about cats and gerbils. In point of fact, this is the gist of every argument we have seen so far against proper names. It is not possible to get well-delimited information about a particular as such; and therefore, it is not possible to name it.

The argument against the imagination’s ability to serve as the (sole) foundation for naming poses a special challenge for the position that proper names are possible. It is precisely

\textsuperscript{62} Nam cum res aliqua sub sensum vel sub cogitationem cadit, priosa eius quaedam necesse est imaginatio nascatur, post vero plenior supernumet intellectus cunctas eius explicans partes quae confuse fuerant imaginazione praeosumptae. Quocirca imperfectum quidem est imaginatio, nomina vero et verba non curta quaedam sed perfecta significant. Quare recta Aristotelis sententia est: quaecumque in verbis nominibusque versantur, ea neque sensus neque imaginationes sed solam significare intellectuum qualitatem (Boethius, \textit{In Periherm.} II, lib. 1, c. 1; Meiser 29.6-29.16). I am following John Magee’s analysis and translation of several terms and concepts in this passage. See Magee (1989): “Both individual words and complete statements signify things that are completely formed within the mind. Sense-perceptions and mental images (phantasms, \textit{imaginationes}), however, are akin to the first sketches (\textit{primae figurae}) that painters put down before adding color. They arise \textit{naturaliter in animae perceptione}, and are ‘spread out’ as background for the \textit{plenior intellectus} which unravels or completes (\textit{explicit}) the picture. They are closely connected with the \textit{primus (simplicis) intellectus}. It is therefore completeness that distinguishes \textit{intellectus} from \textit{imaginatio}. Signification must produce a state of rest, a ‘stop-point,’ in the attention of both the listener and speaker, and that state of rest is associated with the filling in of the confused and imprecise mental images. This is a cardinal tenet of Boethius’ theory of \textit{significatio}” (p. 98).

\textsuperscript{63} Ipsa quidem secundum se dicta verba nomina sunt et significant aliquid—constituit enim qui det intellectum, et qui audist quiescit—sed si est vel non est nondum significat (Aristotle, \textit{Peri hermeneias}, c. 3, 16b20-23; Minio-Paluello 7). See the Introduction, pp. 15-16.

\textsuperscript{64} See pp. 48-49.
on this point that the entire defense of proper names in this context hinges. As we saw above, Roger Bacon claimed that our acts of understanding could be taken broadly to include imaginative acts and other sub-intellectual acts, on the basis of which he thought proper naming was possible. As we will see, several other defenders of proper names developed responses that were similar in approach. But the argument from the animals’ lack of naming clinches the central issue: the sorts of cognitive activities that we share in common with the nonrational animals (assuming those to be imagination and sensation) are not such as to give us “complete” knowledge of particulars qua particulars. So how can proper names be genuinely possible?

2.b. Intellect and Imagination

Jennyanydots by this point has received a number of answers to the question of whether she can give names to the three gerbils. The first answer is that she can’t, because she can’t have the right information about their existence or non-existence. The second answer is that she can, because she can name any individual insofar as she knows it for the individual it is. But the third answer is that she can’t, because “knowing an individual for the individual it is” is intellectually impossible. Only the senses and imagination can grasp the individual in that way; and meanwhile the intellect, which is the faculty that both knows and gives names, cannot grasp the individual as individuals at all.

What is Jennyanydots to do? One strategy is to shift the focus of discussion. Up to now, we have been talking about the senses, imagination, and intellect as if they were completely separate modules performing entirely distinct operations. But we can look at them another way: as cooperating modules that are all part of a unified knowing subject. Indeed, this seems to be the move we find in philosophers wishing to defend proper names particularly against the sense/intellect objections of the previous section. These philosophers did not deny that the intellect must be involved with naming, in at least some way. But they quickly qualified its involvement by stipulating that it must work with the imagination and lower senses. Usually the qualifications have to do with introducing the imaginative powers as an aid to the intellect in knowing individuals; or, conversely, of making the imagination primary in naming individuals, while insisting that it have the help of the intellect. In either case, we find philosophers attempting to work out ways in which the intellect and imagination together manage to do what neither of them (by the philosophers’ own admission) could do separately.
The problem faced by these philosophers is similar to the one faced by Aquinas somewhat later in the century. Aquinas famously synthesized a number of differing views on the senses, imagination, and intellect in order to produce a systematic account of human cognition in the 1260’s and 1270’s. Though the intellectual side of the account focused primarily on the knowledge of universals or common natures, Aquinas indicated in several places that the intellect could “turn back” towards the lower faculties in order to cognize individuals. Aquinas himself, however, never related these remarks to an account of how we name individuals. Prior to Aquinas, we find varying accounts of how the intellect and imagination might cooperate to cognize particulars and impose names on them. The accounts we will focus on here specifically address not only the problem of individual cognition, but more specifically the issue of which stage(s) in the cognitive process must be involved with giving proper names. Pseudo-Kilwardby, Adam of Buckfield, and Geoffrey of Aspall all provide accounts of what they believe to occur in the cognitive faculties that enables the imposition of proper names. We will begin with Pseudo-Kilwardby’s account and end with Adam and Geoffrey.

In his commentary on the Priscianus Maior, Pseudo-Kilwardby faces a pair of questions on the scope of our ability to name things: Can we name non-beings, and can we name any kind

65 Aquinas’s remarks are not without their problems. See King (2015), pp. 108-111. It is questionable whether Aquinas himself meant to present an actual account of singular cognition, or whether he only meant to indicate that such an account was possible in his overall cognitive theory. It is also questionable how best to interpret Aquinas’s cognitive theory in general. Two models are currently popular: Fodor-style models in which subpersonal modules operate on representations in a bottom-up way (from senses to intellect), and Gestalt-style models in which the total knowing subject cognizes an object in a top-down way. For discussions of the success of Aquinas’s remarks on singular cognition in the context of the first kind of model, see King (2015) and a response by Adam Wood (2011), “Transduction and Singular Cognition in Thomas Aquinas,” Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics 9, pp. 11-24. For discussions of singular cognition in a Gestalt-style model, see Daniel De Haan (2014), “Perception and the Viis Cognitiva: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectional Percepts,” American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 88.3, pp. 397-437; and Leo White (1997), The Experience of Individual Objects in Aquinas, PhD diss., The Catholic University of America (Ann Arbor: UMI Microforms).

66 The idea that proper names involve the imagination may have been an older idea deriving from the end of the twelfth century. The logical treatise Tractatus de proprietate sermonum, which de Rijk dates to the years around 1200, indicates that proper names signify “to the imagination” precisely because they involve the cognition of individual sensible qualities. “It seems that all proper names signify to the imagination. For a proper name names a sensible thing under the collection of its sensible properties. But the universal names of genera and species seem to signify to the intellect, namely insofar as they are apprehended in an intelligible power. Thus, the names ‘man’ and ‘animal’ do not determine any particular sensible accidents by virtue of their utterance. And this is why certain names signify to the intellect, others to the imagination.” Videtur autem omnia propria nominia significare imaginationi. Nomen enim proprium nominat rem sensibilem sub collectione proprietatum sensitivum. Nomen autem universalia generum et specierum, ut ‘bono’, ‘animal’, et consimilia, videtur significare intellectui, hoc est prout apprehensa sunt in virtute intelligibili. Ita enim nominia ‘bono’, ‘animal’ non determinant aliqua accidentia sensitivilia vi sue prolationis. Et ita quaedam nominia significant intellectui, quaedam imaginationi (Anonymous, Tractatus de proprietate sermonum; ed. de Rijk (1967), Logica Modernorum II.2, Assen: van Gorcum, pp. 709-710).
of being. Both questions are pertinent to Jennyanydots’ question about the gerbils, because in both cases Pseudo-Kilwardby invokes the role of imagination in the giving of names. This is especially important insofar as Pseudo-Kilwardby is working within a Boethian framework, in which words primarily signify concepts of the mind and, through them, things themselves. The Boethian view is certainly not uncommon in the thirteenth century, but we have already seen that the Boethian view could plausibly lead to the conclusion that we cannot name individuals. If words primarily signify concepts, and if concepts are the means by which words secondarily signify things, then a lack of concepts for certain things will mean that we won’t be able to make signs for those things. If, for instance, we have no singular concepts in the mind, then we will not be able to make signs for the particular things whose concepts we cannot have.

How does Pseudo-Kilwardby handle this potential problem? Granting that words signify the “understanding of the mind” (intellectus mentis), Pseudo-Kilwardby invokes the principle that the mind is a higher power than sense. Since it is a higher power, the mind can

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67 See CPM 2.1.7 and 2.1.8; Fredborg 67-71.
68 For more on Boethius and primary/secondary signification, see the Introduction, pp. 12-14. As Boethius puts it, “Though words signify things and concepts, they principally signify concepts, but secondarily they signify the things which the intellect itself grasps through the mediation of concepts. For the intellect is not without certain passions which arrive at the soul from things.” Nam cum ea quae sunt in voce res intellectusque significent, principaliter quidem intellectus, res vero quas ipsa intelliget comprehendit secundaria significatione per intellectum medietatem, intellectus ipsi non sine quibusdam passionibus sunt, quae in animam ex subjectis veniunt relub (In Periherm. II, lib. 1, c. 1; Meiser 33.27-34). Boethius argues extensively that Aristotle’s reference to “passions in the soul” should be interpreted as concepts and not images or bodily affections. See In Periherm. II, lib. 1, pr., Meiser 11.13-13.24 (against passions) and c. 1, 26.21-29.16 (against images).
69 Dicendum quod vox instituitur ad significandum primo et per se intellectum mentis et mediante illo rem (Pseudo-Kilwardby, CPM 2.1.7; Fredborg 67)
70 This maxim was often credited to Boethius (see Philosophiae consolatio book V, prosa 6; CSL vol. 94, p. 104 and PL vol. 63, p. 862), and we find it invoked in Geoffrey’s sed contras, in Pseudo-Kilwardby, and even in Aquinas’s discussion of singular cognition. Cf. Geoffrey, “A higher power can do more than an lower power. But intellect is a higher power than sense, so if the sense comprehends a particular, the intellect should apprehend both the universal and the particular. Otherwise it would not be able to do more.” Item plus potest virtus superior quam virtus inferior. Sed intellectus est virtus superior quam sensus, et <si> sensus comprehendat particular, ergo intellectus apprehenderet et universale et particulare, quia alterum non posset in plus, quare ets. (Qq. super Metaphysicam VII, q. 43, se contra 2-6; Brumberg-Chaumont 101). Cf. Aquinas (recording the following objection): “Moreover, according to Boethius in The Consolation of Philosophy book 5, whatever a lower power can do, a higher power can do. But as he himself says in the same place, the intellect is higher than imagination, and imagination than sense. Therefore, because the sense cognizes the individual, our intellect also will be able to cognize the individual.” Praeterea, secundum Boethium in V de Consolatione Philosophiae, quidquid potest virtus inferior, potest superior. Sed, ut ipsi ibidem dicit, intellectus est supra imaginationem, et imaginatio supra sensum. Ergo, cum sensus singularis cognoscat, et intellectus noster singularis cognosceri potebit (Qq. disputatae de veritate, q. 2, a. 6, obj. 4; Spiazzi 42). Aquinas himself does not think this argument will work, and he argues instead that the intellect knows individuals not individually but in a “nobler” way: “To the fourth objection, I say that what a lower power can do, a higher power can do—not in the same way, but in a nobler one. Thus the intellect knows the very same thing which the senses know, but in a nobler way because [it knows them] immaterially. And so it does not follow that the intellect knows just as the sense knows the singular.” Ad quartum dicendum, quod illud quod potest virtus inferior, potest etiam superior; non tamen eodem modo, sed nobiliori; unde eamdem rem quam cognoscit sensus, cognoscit et intellectus, nobiliori modo tamen, quia immaterialiter, et sic non sequitur, sicut sensus singularis cognoscat, quod intellectus cognoscat (ibid, ad 4; Spiazzi 42).
know whatever the senses know, including individuals. Because the intellect knows individuals, it can also name them. But how can the intellect know individuals? That is the question that the critics of proper names thought could not be adequately answered. Pseudo-Kilwardby himself grants that the intellect knows the individual in a way “different” from how the sense knows the individual. But he also states (in the form of a sed contra argument which he later grants), that the names of sensible things may be given based on the “passions” they leave in the soul. Pseudo-Kilwardby may be thinking of Boethius’ translation of Aristotle’s Perihermeneias 16a3-4: “What is spoken is a sign of the passions which are in the soul.” But Pseudo-Kilwardby does not go in quite the same direction as Boethius. Boethius had argued that the “passions of the soul” should be understood as concepts, but Pseudo-Kilwardby specifically identifies the passions in the soul as “imagination.” The identification with the imagination is important because, in a response to a somewhat unrelated objection, Pseudo-Kilwardby also observes that “every particular falls in some way under the imagination, whether through being positioned there (as those particulars that have species in matter), or through their effects, or

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71 “Whatever an inferior power can do when cognizing, a higher power can do, but in a loftier way. And thus particulars can be signified by the intellect through an utterance that is significative through institution. And the authoritative quotation from Boethius about the universal, etc., should not be understood in such a way that only the universal is understood and only the individual is sensed. Rather, the power properly apprehending the universal is the intellect, and the power apprehending the individual primarily and per se is the sense, but either [can be apprehended] in either way even though the mode is different.” Quidquid potest virtus inferior in cognoscendo potest superior, ut dicit Boethius, sed modo altiori. Et ideo singularia possunt significari ab intellectu per vocem significativam ex institutione. Et auctoritas Boethii quae est quod universale etc. non est intelligenda sic quod universale tantum intelligatur et singularis tantum sentiat, sed quantum proprium comprehendens universale est intellectus, et comprehendens primo et per se singularis est sensus, sed utrumque ab utroque modo lamen differenti (Pseudo-Kilwardby, CPM 2.1.8, ad 1; Fredborg 70).

72 “The power properly apprehending the universal is the intellect, and the power apprehending the individual primarily and per se is the sense, but either [can be apprehended] in either way even though the mode is different.” Virtus proprie comprehendens universale est intellectus, et comprehendens primo et per se singularis est sensus, sed utrumque ab utroque modo lamen differenti (Pseudo-Kilwardby, CPM 2.1.8, ad 1; Fredborg 70).

73 “Words are signs of the passions that are in the soul. But these are generated in [the soul] by the senses. Therefore words are signs of the passions which are left behind in the soul from the senses. But those passions are signs or imaginations of sensible things. Therefore words are primarily signs of sensible things.” Voces sunt signa passionum quae sunt in anima. Sed hae generantur in ea a sensibus. Ergo voces sunt signa passionum quae dereliquuntur in anima a sensibus. Sed illae passiones sunt signa vel imaginaciones sensibilium. Ergo a primo voces sunt signa sensibilium (Pseudo-Kilwardby, CPM 2.1.8, sed contra; Fredborg 69).

74 Sunt ergo ea quae sunt in voce earum quae sunt in anima passionum notae (trans. Boethius, Peri hermeneias c. 1, 16a3-4; Minio-Paluello 5).

75 Boethius argues against the “passions of the soul” being only sensory information or images (see Meiser 26.21-29.16). He does, however, consistently acknowledge that our concepts derive from images and the external senses (see, e.g., the description of images as “rough sketches” at 29.6-29.16, discussed above on pp. 104-105). Pseudo-Kilwardby may simply be capitalizing on the latter point rather than the former.
through privation.” So if names signify imaginative content, and if our grasp of particulars is imaginative, it looks as if names will be able to signify particulars.

These two references to the imagination become more interesting in light of what Pseudo-Kilwardby says about imagination in the question on whether we can name non-beings. Chimeras, goatstags, and other figments of the imagination have no instances in reality, and considered on their own (absolute), Pseudo-Kilwardby says they can only be signified by privation. But insofar as they “fall under the imagination of some being,” they can be signified positively by an instituted word. Pseudo-Kilwardby thinks that we can give names to all these entities even though they are not grasped by the intellect, and the only requirement for naming them seems to be that they “fall under the imagination”:

It ought to be said that an utterance is instituted primarily and essentially to signify an understanding of the mind and, by its mediation, a thing.... A chimera and goat-stag and other figments whose parts are something in nature, have the imagination of some being. And such non-beings can be signified through a significative utterance by institution; for the significative utterance is essentially of the thing understood as it falls under the imagination of a being.

Pseudo-Kilwardby therefore seems to think that something can be named, not insofar as it is an intellectual object, but insofar as it is simply imagined. Just as chimeras and goatstags fall into this category in the earlier passage, individuals fall into this category in the later one.

Something in the way of an explanation of this phenomenon occurs still earlier in the commentary. Pseudo-Kilwardby sets up his discussion of spoken language at the beginning by contrasting human and animal utterances. Both kinds of utterances are constituted by the conjunction of appetite and imagination. And this happens both among animals and among men.”

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76 Ad secundum dicendum quod omne singulare cadit aliquo modo sub imaginatione vel per positionem sicut ea quae habent speciem in materia, vel per effectum, vel per privationem (CPM 2.1.8, ad 2; Fredborg 70).

77 Ad objectum dicendum quod non-ens dupliciter potest considerari: uno modo absolute, alio modo in quantum cadit sub imaginatione entis alicuius. Primo modo non est significatum per vocem nisi privative tantum, ut dictum est. Secundo modo est significabile per vocem ex institutione (CPM 2.1.7, ad 1; Fredborg 68).

78 Dicendum quod vox instituitur ad significandum primo et per se intellectum mentis et mediante illo rem.... Chimæra et hircocervus et alia figura quorum partes sunt aliquid in natura, imaginationem habent alicuius entis. Et talia non-entia significari possunt per vocem significativam ex institutione; voc enim significativa est per se intellectus ut cadit sub imaginatione entis (CPM 2.1.7; Fredborg 67).

79 “An utterance has being in the soul as in an efficient principle... and it has being there through appetite and imagination. These two powers contribute to the formation of an utterance, as Aristotle says. And this happens both among animals and among men.” Habet etiam voc esse in anima ut in principio efficiente; voc enim est per accio aere ab anima, ut scribuntur secundo De anima; et tunc habet esse in ea per appetitum et imaginationem. Hae enim duas virtutes concurrent ad formationem voles, ut dicit Philosophus, et hoc tam in brutis quam in hominibus (CPM 2.1.1b-4b; Fredborg 57). Pseudo-Kilwardby’s comments here echo Averroes (see note60).
Among animals, the appetitive and imaginative powers are, as it were, blended and indistinct in many ways, even in [their] natural mode. That is why animals do not deliberate or take counsel, because that is proper to reason. But they are directed by nature more than imagination... On account of this, the utterances of irrational animals signify what they signify naturally. For they do not take counsel or inquire into their doings, as Damascene says.\footnote{Sed in brutis vis appetitiva et imaginativa sunt ut in pluribus indistincte et confuse etiam per modum naturae eiusdem. Unde non consiliantur bruta nec deliberant, hoc enim est rationis proprium, sed natura agentur postu quam imaginat. Unde dicit Damascenus quod irrationalibus irrationalis est appetitus, et a naturali appetitus agentur, quem appetitus appellat Avicenna naturalem instinctum, propter quod voce brutorum animalium significat per modum naturae illud quod significat. Non enim faciunt consilia nec inquisitiones operum suorum, ut Damascenus dicit (CPM 2.1.1b-4b; Fredborg 57-58).}

The fact that animal utterances only signify “naturally” means that their utterances cannot constitute a genuine language. Natural signs are involuntary signs, as a red sky in the east is a sign of dawn. Imagination enables an animal to produce sounds, but the merely animal imagination is not clear enough to enable an animal to make precise distinctions or consider what is going on when it makes utterances. The animal imagination therefore contrasts significantly with the human imagination.

The story about human imagination is quite different. Pseudo-Kilwardby thinks that the presence of reason alters the usefulness of imagination to linguistic discourse. Specifically, a being endowed with reason is capable of sorting through all the “affections” and “intentions” in the soul—including the imaginative ones—in an effort to distinguish them, and it can deliberate and consider the proper use of vocal utterances for signifying them. The great diversity in our “affections” is therefore actually the cause of the great diversity in our “kinds of speech” (\textit{distincte vocandi}):\footnote{In hominibus vero est multitudo atque diversitas affectionum et cogitationum per distinctionem, et quia multitudo affectionum cum voluntate exprimendi causa est vocandi—nam ad hoc est sermo, ut dicit Plato, ut praesto sint mutuae voluntatis indicia—necesse est quod multitudo affectionum et cogitationum distinctarum sit causa distincte vocandi. Cum igitur aput animam sint vocum intentiones et imaginaciones et similitur rerum similitudo, aput eam est communiter cogitatio; cogitatio enim aput se quem intellectum per quam vocem debeat significari, “est enim cognitionis intentio permanens et figurans animam ad illud quod intelligatur...” (CPM 2.1.1b-41; Fredborg 58). Fredborg notes that Pseudo-Kilwardby’s concluding quotation is from Damascene, \textit{De fide orthodoxa} II, c. 22.}

Among humans there is a multitude of diverse affections and thoughts that are distinct. And since a multitude of affections plus the desire to express them is the cause of speech—for as Plato says, discourse arises from the expression of mutual willing—then it follows that the multitude of affections and distinct thoughts are the cause of distinct kinds of speech. For when imaginations and the similitude of things and the intentions to speak exist in the soul, thought arises among them; for the soul thinks to itself about which understanding ought to be signified by which utterance. For “thought is an intention enduring in the soul and conforming it to that which is understood” [as Damascene says].
By “distinct kinds of speech,” Pseudo-Kilwardby presumably does not mean merely that our cognitive contents are the cause of the different parts of speech, which are numerable at eight and are therefore hardly a “multitude.” He must have in mind all the various kinds of sensations, passions, images, and concepts to which we apply a variety of (distinct kinds of) names and verbs. This “multitude” would include affections of everything from beings to non-beings, chimeras, goat-stags, and (one assumes) individuals. Thus, Pseudo-Kilwardby’s claim is not that we name these entities by grasping them intellectually per se, but that we name them as the intellect sorts through the input from the lower faculties and distinguishes the various affections. In virtue of our intellecitive souls, therefore, we can apply names to what is imagined or sensed in addition to what is strictly conceptualized.

When we turn to Adam of Buckfield and Geoffrey of Aspall, we find a similar attempt to relate the imagination and intellect in a way that will enable proper naming. Adam and Geoffrey both think that the power to name individuals is primarily an imaginative power. This exposes them to the criticism that naming does not therefore involve intellection necessarily, and that at least some non-human animals ought to be capable of bestowing proper names. To circumvent these objections, both Adam and Geoffrey specify that, though naming takes place on the basis

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82 The phrase distincte vocandi presents some difficulty. On one hand, the point may be merely that humans utter distinct or articulate sounds, which other animals do not or cannot. Pseudo-Kilwardby may therefore be echoing Boethius’ observation that an utterance must be “veritable” in order to be fit for becoming a word (see note 59 above, and In Perihorm. II, lib. 1, pr.; Meiser 5.22ff). However, if that is Pseudo-Kilwardby’s point, it is not clear why he would connect the articulate nature of human speech with distinct “passions” or “thoughts” in the soul, rather than (say) a more highly developed larynx or vocal range. For Pseudo-Kilwardby, it is specifically the multiplicity of “passions” that makes the vocandi distinct. This connection has motivated scholars like Laurent Cesalli and Stephan Meier-Oeser to take distincte vocandi to be not so much about “distinct vocalizations,” but rather “distinct sorts of speech” or “distinct words” with distinct semantic content. See, e.g., Laurent Cesalli and Claudio Majolino (2014), “Making Sense. On the Cluster significatio-intentio in Medieval and ‘Austrian’ Philosophies,” Methodus 14, 172-173; and Stephan Meier-Oeser (1997), Die Spur des Zeichens: das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der Philosophie des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 70-71. Here it is worth noting that even terms like articulatio in the language arts tradition could denote not only distinctness in vocalization but distinctness in sentence functions or meanings. Priscian himself had defined articulate speech as “what is produced when it is contracted, that is connected with some mental sense of the speaker’s.” Vocis autem differentiae sunt quattuor: articulata, inarticulata, literata, illiterata. Articulata est, quae coartata, hoc est copulata cum aliquo sensu mentis eius, qui loquitur, profertur (Priscian, IG, lib. I, c. 1; Keil vol. 2: 5-6). Commenting on Priscian, Pseudo-Kilwardby makes use of a three-fold notion of articulatio early in his commentary on Priscianus major, and the first two kinds of “articulation” do not have to do with making distinct utterances but with bestowing general and special modes of signification on a word (i.e., making it a part of speech and giving it further grammatical and logical properties): Similiter articulatio dicitur duobus modis: uno modo in se, alió modo in altero. Primo modo dicitur et oratio, secundo modo littera et syllaba. In se tripliciter: una est articulatio respectu congrui quae est quantum ad modos significandi generalis, aliá respectu veri et hoc est quantum ad significata specialia, alía respectu ornatis et hoc est quantum ad ordinem verborum et decentiam (Pseudo-Kilwardby, CPM 1.4.5; Fredborg 39). It therefore seems most probable that Pseudo-Kilwardby’s reference to distincte vocandi is supposed to highlight a semantic distinctness and not (merely) a gutteral one. For analysis of articulatio in Priscian and Pseudo-Kilwardby, see C. H. Kneepkens (2013), “A Note on articulatio and University Grammar,” in Fink et al (eds), Logic and Language in the Middle Ages: A Volume in Honour of Sten Ebbesen, Leiden: Brill, pp. 221-237.
of imagination, the imagination accomplishes this feat only insofar as it stands in relation to an intellect.\(^83\) The conjunction of the intellect with the imagination enables the name-giver to do what neither faculty would be able to do on its own.

But what is the relationship between the intellect and the imagination? Adam and Geoffrey cash it out differently than Pseudo-Kilwardby. Pseudo-Kilwardby speaks as if the intellect does the work of sorting through the contents of the imagination; but Adam and Geoffrey speak as though the imagination itself acquires additional abilities because of its conjunction with the intellect. Adam and Geoffrey both use the word *terminare* to express the imagination’s conjunction with the intellect in rational animals: the human imagination is ordered toward (“terminates” at) the intellect, whereas the merely animal one is not. It is this ordering that enables the imagination to impose proper names.\(^84\) In casting the relationship as one of orientation, Geoffrey and Adam are able to avoid the problem of the cognitive “gap.” This allows them to offer some explanation for how the imagination in rational animals can function both as a means of knowing particulars and as a faculty capable of imposing names.

Adam and Geoffrey give us a pair of analogies to elucidate the intellectual/imaginative relationship they have in view. In both cases, the claim is that the presence of the intellect enables the imagination to do things that it could not do on its own without the intellect. Adam’s analogy concerns the relationship between color/light on one hand and

\(^{83}\) Cf. Geoffrey of Aspall: “I say that mind extends to the intellective power and to the imaginative and fantastic power, according as the imagination and fantasy terminate at the intellect. For the imposition of some names is from the intellect, and of others from the imaginative or fantastic powers, insofar as they terminate at the intellect.” Ad primum obiectum sicut cum dicatur quod omne nomen significat mentis conceptum, dico quod ibi extenditur mens ad virtutem intellectivam et imaginativam et fantasticam, secundum quod imaginativa et fantastica terminantur ad intellectum. Quorundam enim nominum est impositio ab intellectu et quorundam <ab> imaginativa vel fantastica proot ad intellectum terminantur (Qq. super Metaphysicam VII, q. 43, exp. 3-3; Brumberg-Chaumont p. 102). On the use of *mens* here, see note 41 above.

\(^{84}\) “I do not say that this imposition [of proper names] happens from the imaginative power in an unqualified way, but insofar as it terminates at the intellective power. That is why brutes do not impose names on things.” Et non dico quod absolute fiat hoc impositio ab imaginativa virtute sed proot ipsa terminatur ad intellectivam, unde bruta non imposunt rebus nomina (Geoffrey of Aspall, Qq. super Metaphysicam VII, q. 43, exp. 3-4; Brumberg-Chaumont, p. 102). Cf. Adam of Buckfield: “It may be asked whether a given individual generally has a name. For only what is intelligible is properly nameable, and only the universal is represented to the intellect as the particular is to the sense. In answer to this, it should be understood that certain people say yes—namely, that the individual has a name in some way, and this is from the human imaginative power terminated at the intellect. For the imaginative power in humans is a more noble apprehension than in other animals. The cause of this is that the human imagination terminates at the intellect, and in other animals it does not, as is clear in the example of color.” Si autem queratur utrum universaliter aliquid singularis habeat nomen, cum solum intelligibile sit proprium nominabile et solum universale representetur intellectui, sicut particulare sensui. Ad hoc potest intelligi scandum quodam quod sit, sicut quodam singularis habet nomen et hoc est a virtute imaginativa in homine ad intellectum terminata. Virtus enim imaginativa in homine est nobilior apprehensio quam in ceteris animalibus, cuius causa est quod in hominibus est imaginatio terminata ad intellectum, in aliis autem animalibus non, sicut patet in exemplo de colore (Adam of Buckfield, Sententia super Metaphysicam, Cambridge, Gonville and Caius college, 367 (589), fol. 217va; Brumberg-Chaumont, p. 67).
imagination/intellect on the other. He points to the fact that colors may exist in an object but only be seen when light is present. If no light is present, colors are not able to affect the human eye; so the presence of light enables some things to do what they had the capability to do, but could not actually do, in the dark. Correspondingly, with no intellect present, the imagination lacks powers (or has them only potentially) which it could have in actuality if it were ordered toward an intellect. Adam thinks that this is the case in non-human animals. The contents of the merely animal imagination are not able to become intelligible. In humans, on the other hand, the light of the intellect serves to illuminate the contents of the imagination, including presumably its grasp of particular things. The imagination therefore becomes able to do what it could not have done without the intellect being present.

Insofar as [the human imagination] terminates at the intellect, which is like light in respect to the imagination, it is more noble in its being than when it is in brute animals. Therefore, the imagination that is terminated and illuminated by the intellect can impose a name on a singular thing according as [that thing] is apprehended, even though the imagination in the animals cannot do this. And on account of this, people speaking in the common way very often call the imagination “intellect.”

Notably, Adam specifies here that the imagination is the faculty responsible for naming the individual, not the intellect. That is because the imagination contains the relevant information about the individual. But Adam also observes that some people identify the imagination with the intellect. Adam’s reference to the imagination being the intellect most likely derives from Averroes, though the claim has a longer history. Aristotle’s De anima 430a24 indicates that thinking includes such functions as imagining and deliberating (intelligere is imaginari

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85 “Color, insofar as it is in the light, has a more noble being than when it is in the dark. For in the light it is able to multiply its species, but in the dark it is not. The imagination in man is similar to this.” Color enim secundum quod est in luce nobilis habet esse quam secundum quod est in tenebris, quia in luce potens est (sic) sua speciem multiplicare, in tenebris autem non. Similiter imaginatio in homine... (Sententia super Metaphysicam, Cambridge, Gonville and Caius college, 367 (589), fol. 217va; Brumberg-Chaumont, p. 67).

86 Similiter imaginatio in homine, in eo quod est terminata ad intellectum, qui est sicut lux respectu ipsius, est secundum esse nobilissimum quod secundum quod est in brevis. Imaginatio igitur ad intellectum terminata et ab ipso illuminata potest singulari secundum quod apprehenditur nominem imponere, licet imaginatio in brevis non potest boc faver, et propter hoc communiter loquentes multotiens vocant huiusmodi imaginacionem intellectum (ibid). See also Brumberg-Chaumont (2005) on Geoffrey and Adam’s use of Liber de spiritu et anima (pp. 67-68). Adam most probably lifts this analogy from Averroes’s discussion of imagination and intellect in his “Long Commentary” on Aristotle’s De anima, or from the brief reference to color in the Aristotelian passage on which Averroes is commenting. Aristotle says that “light in a way makes potential colors to be actual colors”: luce enim quoque modo etiam facti colores qui sunt in potentia colores in actu (trans. Scot, De anima 430a17; Crawford 437.5-7). On this point, Averroes elaborates: “Just as vision is moved by colors only when they are in act, which does not happen unless light is present because it draws them out from potency into act, in the same way the intentions of the imagination do not move the material intellect unless they are understood in act, which does not happen to them unless there is something present which is an intellect in act.” Quemadmodum enim visus non movetur a coloribus nisi quando fuerint in actu, quod non completur nisi ipse presente, cum ipsa sit extrahens eos de potentia in actu, ita etiam intentiones imaginatone non movet intellectum materialem nisi quando fuerint intellecte in actu, quod non perficitur eis nisi aliquo presente quod sit intellectus in actu (Averroes, “Long Commentary” on De anima, lib. 3, c. 18; Crawford 439.66-71).
and *consiliari*), and that from imagination arise “sense and opinion and science and understanding.”87 Where Aristotle speaks in *De anima* 430a24 of a “passive intellect,” the Neoplatonist commentators had discussed the possible identification of this intellect with the imagination.88 On this point, Averroes asserts clearly that Aristotle’s reference to a “passive intellect” should be interpreted as a reference to the imagination, insofar as the imagination provides and distinguishes the images necessary for intellection in the first place.89 The influence of these close associations between imagination and intellect are apparent in texts that we have already seen. Bacon thinks that *intellectus* and acts of *intelligendi* can be taken broadly to include imagination, opinion, and other cognitive acts; and Geoffrey of Aspall echoes the same sentiment.90 Like Bacon and Geoffrey, Adam of Buckfield does not identify imagination and intellect, but he indicates that the imagination stands in a special relationship to the intellect. It is a relationship in which imagination, without becoming intellect, nevertheless is actualized or intellectualized by the intellect’s influence.

So what is the difference for Adam between imagination in a rational animal and imagination in a non-rational one? Adam’s commentary on the *De anima* contains a passage that spells out the difference between animal and human imagination in terms of “determinateness” and “completion” by the intellect:

> What is prior is in potency to what is posterior, in such a way that it is able to be completed by it. And the fact that the sensitive power is in potency in respect to the intellect is evident because the imagination, which is the highest sensitive power, is a perfection that is more determinate in men than in animals. That would not be the case

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87 *Et quia intelligere alium est a sentire, et existimatur quod intelligere quoddam est ymaginari et quoddam consiliari, determinandum est prius de ymaginatione; deinde loquemur de alia intentione. Dicamus igitur quod, si ymaginatio est que fit que dicitur ymaginari non scundum similitudinem, est aliqua virtus istarum virtutum, aut dispositio, per quam innimus et dicimus verum aut falsum. Et existis est sensus et existimatio et scientia et intellectus* (trans. Scot, *De anima* 427b27-428a5; Crawford 364.24-365.10).
89 See the “Long Commentary” on *De Anima*, lib. 1, c. 66, and lib. 3, c. 5 and c. 20; Crawford 89, 409, and 449.
90 “I say that ‘mind’ extends to the intellective power, the imagination, and the fantasy, insofar as the imagination and fantasy terminate at the intellect. The imposition of some names occurs from the intellect, but of others from the imagination or fantasy, insofar as they terminate at the intellect.” *Dico quod ibi extenditur mens ad virtutem intellectivam et imaginativam et fantasticam, scundum quod imaginativa et fantastica terminatur ad intellectum. Quorumdam enim nominium est imposition ab intellecto et quorumdam <ab> imaginativa vel fantastica proot ad intellectum terminantur* (Geoffrey, *Qq. super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43, exp. 3-3; Brumberg-Chaumont, p. 102). Other contemporaneous philosophers thought that even common names could be given on the basis of imagination. Irène Rosier-Catach discusses Albert the Great’s view that language consists of a relation between a vocal utterance and a *species* in the imagination, such that a word is associated with an image. See Rosier (1994), p. 124.
The imagination in humans is more “determinate” than it is in nonhuman animals, because there is something about the imagination that can only be “completed” when it is put into conjunction with an intellect. The belief that the intellect alters, raises, or completes the imagination—or the belief that the contents of the imagination are themselves potentially intelligible, if only there is an intellect to make them actually so—is the explanation for the belief that the imaginations of rational and nonrational animals are so different. It is also the explanation for why the imagination in a rational animal can be the basis for the giving of proper names.

We find a similar notion of the intellect completing the imagination in Geoffrey of Aspall. For Geoffrey as well as for Adam, the imagination “terminates at” the intellect. Geoffrey presents us with another analogy of the cooperation between intellect and imagination: he uses the example of our ability to cognize a line while primarily cognizing the end-point of a line. Our grasp of the end-point implicitly includes a grasp of the line itself, and we know the line in a secondary fashion insofar as we know the end-point. The “line” which we grasp in this analogy is the whole process in which our senses and imagination receive the species of things.

We recall that Jennyanydots’ grasp of the three gerbils begins with their emitting species of their particular qualities, which Jennyanydots receives via her sensory organs. That is the beginning of the line. The line continues through the imagination to the intellect, as a gerbil’s particular species become departicularized in order to be cognized in abstraction by the intellect. Those various species reach an end-point when the intellect uses them to produce a concept or intellectual common likeness of something. But Geoffrey claims that if we take the intellectual production


92 See note 83 above.

93 *Secundum ergo quod hoc similidudinem communis est terminus unius fantasmatis, secundum hoc intellectus apprehendendo ipsum similidudinem per consequens apprehendit illud fantasma cuius fantasmatis intellectus est terminus, sicut apprehendendo punctum secundum quod est terminus huius linee apprehenditur hoc linea* (Geoffrey, *Qq. super Metaphysicam VII, q. 43, exp. 3-5;* Brumberg-Chaumont 102-103).

94 *Ab omnibus autem istic fantasmatibus vel speciebus abstrahit intellectus quandam similidudinem communem que in se considerata est una, per comparationem tamen et rationem ad ipsa fantasmatum quorum illa similidudo est terminus, diversificatur et est multa* (ibid, 102).
of a concept or “similitude” itself as an end-point, we will grasp it by considering it as the common terminus of the various species.

It may help to view Geoffrey’s analogy as deriving somewhat obliquely from Averroes’ “Long Commentary” on Aristotle’s De anima, particularly at 427a10, where Aristotle refers to the soul being like a single point that is both divisible and indivisible. Averroes illustrates this phenomenon of divisible-yet-indivisible by analogy with the centerpoint of a circle. The centerpoint may be variously regarded as a single point, or as the end-point of a number of different line segments intersecting inside the circle. How we view the point will depend on which line we view it in relation to. In Averroes’s case, the analogy is meant to be an explanation for how the soul itself can have many powers and yet be a single soul. But it also works as an explanation for how a single concept or “common likeness” in the intellect can function as the means by which we grasp the many particulars that produce it. If this is indeed Geoffrey’s source or inspiration, then Geoffrey’s analogy works in the following way. Because Jennyanydots’ concept “gerbil” is derived from three different gerbil-species in her imagination, it is possible for Jennyanydots to grasp the concept “gerbil” in relation to any of the three. As Geoffrey emphasizes, though the concept of “gerbil” is unitary, it can be considered as “diversified and many” in relation to the species. And insofar as Jennyanydots considers “gerbil” as the end-point of her experience of this gerbil or that one, she can grasp the various individuals.

Up to and including the stage of the imagination, of course, Jennyanydots’ grasp of the gerbils’ various species is still particular and material. And here Geoffrey emphasizes that the

95 “What is called ‘a point of one’ by some people is divisible insofar as it is two. And according as it is indivisible, the judging [power] is one, and according as it is divisible, it uses one and the same point twice. Therefore, insofar as it uses the extreme as the extreme for two things, it judges two things that are distinct, and this will be through the divisible; and insofar as it is one, through one. And in this way we determine the principle by which we say that the animal is sentient.” Sed illud quod dicitur a quibusdam punctus unius secundum quod est duo est divisibile. Et secundum quod est indivisibile, indicans est unum, et secundum quod est divisibile, utitur eodem puncto bis. Secundum igitur quod utitur extremitate pro extremis duobus, indicat duo que sunt diversa; hoc igitur erit per divisibile; et secundum quod est unum, per unum. Hoc modo igitur determinemus principium quo dicimus animal esse sentiens (trans. Scot, De anima 427a9-16; Crawford 355.1-9).

96 “That power is one and many, like the point which is the center of a circle when many lines are drawn from the center to the circumference. And this is what [Aristotle] intended when he said a point of one, namely the point which is contained by one line. Then he said: it is divisible insofar as it is two. He means that insofar as that very power is two things and many through the senses which are joined with it, in the same way the point is two and many through the ends of the lines which go out from it, and it is divisible in regard to its being affected by various sensible [objects].” Ista virtus est una et multa ut punctus qui est centrum circuli quando ab eo fuerint extracte multe lineae a centro ad circumferentiam. Est hoc igitur ut enim dicamus punctus unius, hoc est punctus qui continetur ab una linea. Deinde igitur: secundum quod est duo est divisibile. Ideat, secundum igitur quod ista virtus est duo et plures per sensum qui copulatur cum ea, quemadmodum punctus est duo et plures per extremum linearum cecuntur ab ea, est divisibile ad patiendum a sensibus diversis (Averroes, “Long Commentary” on De anima, lib. 2, c. 149; Crawford 356.16-25).

97 Blaustein (1984) discusses this analogy at length; see esp. pp. 14-17 and p. 103.

98 See note 94 above: the likeness in se considerata est una, but in comparison to the phantasms below it, diversificatur et est multa.
species existing in the imagination are the grounds of proper naming. A proper name can be given from those species insofar as the species mediate particular and material information about a thing itself:

It is said that the species of a particular thing is first multiplied in the medium and afterwards is received in the senses and then the imagination. And up to that point, it is under material conditions and is particular. And from that species itself, existing there, a name can be imposed on the particular thing from the imaginative power itself, and that very species existing there is the thing through the mediation of which the imposition from the imaginative power occurs.99

Jennyanydots is therefore able to give a gerbil a proper name on the basis of that gerbil’s species, before the species is universalized in the intellect. Geoffrey insists that the name-giving does not happen on the part of the intellect, but rather on the part of the imagination.100 This is the case even though the imagination on its own would not be able to serve as the basis for the name. In order for the naming to occur, the intellect must “descend” to the imaginative power and “elevate” it, without disturbing the particularity of the species therein. When the imagination is “elevated” by the intellect, it can serve as the basis for giving a proper name to an individual.

I do not say that this imposition [of proper names] happens from the imaginative power in an unqualified way, but insofar as it terminates at the intellective power. That is why brutes do not impose names on things.... It is clear in answer to the objection that not every imposition occurs on the part of the intellect, but some of them occur from the “elevated imagination” (imaginativa sublimata); and this happens when the intellect descends to the imaginative power and the imaginative power is elevated.101

Geoffrey’s analogy thus works out to be very similar to Adam’s analogy. In both cases, the human imagination is “elevated” or “ennobled” by the intellect, and the intellect enables it to do things it could not otherwise have done. Adam focuses on the powers which the imagination acquires, whereas Geoffrey focuses on what happens to the mechanisms and the content of the powers. On the issue of content, Geoffrey is more explicit and precise. The imagination is

99 Dicitur enim quod species rei particularis primo multiplicatur in medio et postea recipitur in sensu et consequenter in imaginativa et adhuc est sub conditionibus materialibus, et est particularis. Et ab ipsa specie ibi existente potest nomen imponi rei particulari ab ipsa virtute imaginativa, et illa species ibi existens est illud mediante quo fit bec impositio ab imaginativa virtute (Geoffrey of Aspall, Qq. super Metaphysicam VII, q. 43, exp. 3-4; Brumberg-Chaumont 102).
100 Even earlier in the discussion, Geoffrey had stipulated that both intellect and imagination are capable of serving as the basis for the imposition of names: “The imposition of some names occurs from the intellect, but of others from the imagination or fantasy, insofar as they terminate at the intellect.” Quorumdam enim nominum est impositio ab intellectu et quorumdam <ab> imaginativa vel fantastica prout ad intellectum terminantur (ibid, exp. 3-3; Brumberg-Chaumont 102).
101 Et non dico quod absolute fiat bec impositio ab imaginativa virtute sed [sed] prout ipsa terminatur ad intellectivum, unde bruta non imponunt rebus nomina. Sed quando intellectus condescendit ad virtutem imaginativam et tunc sublimatur imaginativa (ibid, exp. 3-4; Brumberg-Chaumont 102).
“elevated” in the sense that its content takes part in a linear trajectory that ends in the production of a universal. The universal is properly intellectual and is the end-point of abstraction. But since the linear trajectory has no gaps, the intellectual grasp of the universal also involves a grasp of the imaginative *species* by which the universal came about. Thus the imagination is “elevated” insofar as it provides the intellect with a secondary knowledge of individuals. This occurs in the way that we might apprehend an entire line by apprehending the end-point:

Just as the common likeness is the terminus of one phantasm, the intellect also, by apprehending that likeness, also secondarily apprehends that phantasm of which the intellect is the terminus—just as by apprehending a point insofar as it is the terminus of a line, the line also is apprehended. And in this way the intellect much more apprehends secondarily the particular thing of which the phantasm is a phantasm, and of which the common likeness is the terminus.  

So just as we cannot grasp the end-point of a line without a grasp of the line itself, so Jennyanydots cannot grasp “gerbilhood” without some grasp either of this gerbil or its *species* in her imagination. The *species* existing in the imagination is the ground of proper naming, insofar as it provides secondary access for the intellect to cognize the particular as such.

If this is indeed what Geoffrey has in mind, then it opens up an intriguing perspective on what he (and perhaps Adam) implicitly think is the sort of knowledge we need for naming individuals. Mere sensation of an individual, or mere image-making on the level of nonhuman imaginative activity, are not enough. The naming of individuals requires that the individuals not only be sensed, but that they be known at a higher level through a conjunction between imagination and intellection. If the imagination operates alone, it has images without adequately distinguishing them; and if the intellect operates alone, it recognizes only commonalities and not individual traits. Together, the two faculties are capable of doing what neither could do alone. They apprehend an individual jointly, and proper naming requires just such a joint apprehension.

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102 Secundum ergo quod hoc similitudo communis est terminus unius fantasmatis, secundum hoc intellectus apprehendendo ipsum similitudinem per consequens apprehendit illud fantasma cuius fantasmatis intellectus est terminus, sicut apprehendendo punctum un secundum quod est terminus huic lineae apprehenditur hoc lineae, et adhuc magis per consequens apprehendit intellectus rem singularum cuius est ipsum fantasma cuius fantasmatis hoc similitudo communis est terminus. Et est hoc cognosco siue comprehendere per collationem scilicet comprehendendo ipsum speciem siue similitudinem in intellectu ad fantasma cuius est terminus et fantasma ad rem singularum cuius est fantasma (ibid, exp. 3-5; Brumberg-Chaumont 102-103).
3. Remarks

Jennyanydots now has a concluding positive answer to her question. She can name the gerbils. That is because she is a rational animal whose imagination assists her intellect in cognizing individuals, and whose intellect assists her imagination in bestowing proper names.

In all the answers that Jennyanydots has received to her question in this chapter, the role of understanding has been paramount. The understanding required for naming must be determinate and in some sense complete in itself; and in the case of proper names, it must be of this individual in such a way that it is not of that one. Both the defenders and the critics of proper names agree that these are the criteria for proper naming. Where they differ is on whether a determinate or complete understanding is possible in the case of individuals as such.

The arguments we have looked at predominantly concern the powers of the imagination and the intellect, including their cognitive content. But so far we have not looked at what this “cognitive content” is content of. Imagination and intellect are powers that receive information from individuals, but we have not examined what that information consists in. And here we face the core of the matter. Every pro-proper-name argument in this chapter has assumed that individuals are capable of providing information to the cognitive faculties of rational animals. They assume that the individual gerbils are informative on their own, whether by providing species of their individual characteristics or by some other means. But we have not looked at the grounds for making this assumption. In fact, it is not completely clear that such an assumption is warranted. What “information” exactly do individuals provide about themselves? Do they in fact have genuinely individual “content” which is at all transmissible in the first place? To discover the answer to these questions, we must take our investigation to its next and last stage: the material and formal constitution of individuals as such.
Chapter 4
Form, Matter, and the Matter with Names:
Four Metaphysical Arguments Against Proper Names

Nomina are words that convey information. They do this, according to the Boethian analysis, by causing a well-delimited thought of what they signify. As we saw in the previous chapter, if proper names are possible then they too should cause well-delimited thoughts of the very individuals which they name. This requires that we be capable of having thoughts of individuals as such. And that, in turn, requires that individuals in themselves be capable of providing the information which is necessary for thought-formation. So in order for there to be proper names, it’s not just that words must be informative; things must be informative. Individuals must be capable of transmitting the relevant information about themselves qua particulars to the relevant receptive powers in our cognitive set-up.

Are individuals themselves informative as individuals? That is the main question of this chapter, and the answer to it depends at least partially on what we think an individual is composed of, metaphysically speaking. As we will see, the thirteenth-century critics of proper names presented at least four reasons to think that individuals were not informative as such, and that they could not therefore be named. Those reasons all depended on individuals being analyzed as metaphysical compounds of matter and form. The reasons were the following: (1) individuals are composed of too many distinct metaphysical parts, and they cannot provide information about themselves as individuals rather than aggregates; (2) the forms of individuals are common, and therefore they provide information that is strictly common or universal in nature; (3) even if the forms of individuals aren’t common, getting information about an individual would involve getting information about its matter, which is by definition uninformative; and (4) the “informativeness” of individuals is such that we can’t know any given individual without knowing all individuals, but that is impossible (for us, at least in this life).

Some of these considerations seem obviously counter-intuitive. I will motivate them in more detail in the respective sections of this chapter. Before turning to the arguments, however, it is necessary to say a few more words about the connection between “form” and “information,” as I have already begun using these terms. The question of this chapter is whether individuals can “provide information” about themselves, in the sense of passing on well-delimited content. But, you might say, that is a question that depends primarily on whether individuals have something about themselves that is already well-delimited. Such “delimitations”
in contemporary philosophy often go by the name of “properties,” but in the thirteenth-century they went by the name of “forms.” That was because thirteenth-century philosophers thought of all individual material things as composites of matter and form—i.e., composites of a propertyless substratum and the determinations that were added to that substratum.

Take, for example, Macavity the Mystery Cat. He is a master of disguise and can change in a twinkling from the big ginger-colored cat he is to the slender black-haired cat that commits the crime. The color of Macavity’s fur, as well as his slenderness and size, are changeable formal determinations or qualities. What they determine and qualify is something else that underlies them, in this case Macavity himself as an individual cat. But our analysis of Macavity can go deeper. While Macavity can take on or lose any number of forms as he changes his disguises, it is also the case that Macavity himself has a form that he does not lose as long as he lives—namely, the cat-form. The cat-form itself is a determination on something else that underlies it. In this case, that “something else” is a set of material parts (such as flesh, blood, and bones) which the cat-form arranges and determines in cat sorts of ways, in order to make Macavity a cat. So Macavity is composed of the cat-form plus certain material parts. Moreover, those particular material parts can themselves be analyzed as composites of matter and form: they have flesh-forms, blood-forms, and bone-forms, which variously qualify some yet further underlying stuff. And so the analysis goes on, until eventually we come to a basic stuff that is not itself made up of anything qualified or determined. It is, as we would say, a propertyless substratum, which underlies all other molecule-forms and flesh-forms and cat-forms and color-forms that could possibly accrue to it. The propertyless substratum is what the thirteenth-century philosophers called prime matter or sometimes simply just “matter.”

From the way that the form/matter analysis is set up, it is clear that the forms or qualities in question all provide the determinations on a thing. The “well-delimited structures” that make something a well-delimited thing, or that make it intelligible in a well-delimited sort of way, are all provided by forms. Forms do all the work of qualifying and determining. Forms

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are what impose limits and therefore qualities; matter is what is ready to receive those qualifications and limits, but lacks them on its own. The chief problem is therefore that the matter does no work in qualifying or determining. It is simply posited to be the underlying substratum that remains when all the forms are stripped away. That means that matter, considered in itself without any formal determinations, is simply uninformative. There is nothing we can know about it in itself, except negatively (as what-remains-in-the-absense-of-forms) or perhaps by analogy (as the-stuff-that-underlies-everything-the-way-flesh-underlies-the-cat-form). ²

This fact has wide-ranging implications for theories of name-giving. As we saw in the previous chapter, names (like definitions) must be given by reference to what we can know of a thing. ³ As it turns out, “what we can know” is strictly provided by forms rather than by matter. We even find philosophers explicitly stipulating that naming is done in reference to forms. Averroes himself adopts a strong version of this principle: Any name given to a material composite primarily names its form, and it only secondarily names the whole composite with the matter included. ⁴ So when we call Macavity a cat, the name “cat” does not primarily signify the composite of soul and body that is Macavity or any other individual cat. Rather, “cat” is primarily a name for the form of catthood, and only secondarily does it name composites of cat-form and cat-matter.

The principle that “a name is primarily a name of a form” is somewhat controversial among the early thirteenth-century scholastics. Roger Bacon, for instance, argues against it vociferously. ⁵ But whether or not philosophers invoke the strong principle that names are

² Aristotle’s Physics 191a9-12 indicates that matter can be known only by analogy (e.g., to the bronze in a statue or the wood in a bed), although elsewhere Aristotle states that matter is definable as the primary substratum of each thing (192a30-35). In Metaphysics VII.3 he states that matter is neither “something” nor anything by which a thing could be made definite (1029a20-6).

³ See Chapter 3, pp. 85-87.

⁴ “And [Aristotle] means that this name ‘animal’ is said principally of the form, and secondarily of the composite of form and matter, but just insofar as it is said of the form. For a name does not signify a thing except insofar as it is in act: and the cause of actuality in a composite is the form. And where there are two things, one of which is the cause of the other, the cause better deserves the name.” Et intendebat [Aristoteles] quod hoc nomen animal dicitur principaliter de forma, et dicitur de congrugato ex materia et forma secundario, sicut quis dicitur de forma. Nomen enim non significat rem, nisi secundum quod est in actu: et causa actus in composito est forma. Et, cum duo fuerint, quorum alterum est causa reliqui, illud, quod est causa, dignius habebit nomen (Averroes, “Long Commentary” on the Metaphysics; Iunctas VIII.4, f. 215K; see G-K for the contrast between the case of “animal” and the case of “house”).

⁵ See Bacon’s DS III.5.127 and Compendium Studii Philosophiae II.3.76. Both Robert Kilwardby and Richard Rufus appear to have accepted Averroes’ view that names primarily name forms. See Kilwardby, Notulae super librum Porphyrii, lectio 5: Nota quod hoc nomen, ‘homo’, sicut quodlibet nomen, primo significat formam, secundo aggregatum, per Aristotelem in VII Metaphysicae (Conti [2013] 70 n. 14). See also Rufus, De ideis 16: Ut enim vult Philosophus, nomen principaliter non significat nisi formam, secundario aggregatum (E84rb/PR36rb).
names of forms, we find them asserting almost ubiquitously that names must be given “from” forms.\(^6\) We almost never find an explanation of what it means to name something “from” its form, but it is not hard to guess the motivation. Forms are what we know of an individual, and on a very practical level, there is often a close relationship between form and shape.\(^7\) We say that something is a gerbil because it has the shape of a gerbil, and that is how we know to apply the name “gerbil.” Of course, shape on its own is not always a reliable guide: there can be gerbils with three legs or two heads, gerbils that look like Polynesian rats and brush-furred mice that look like gerbils, and so on. So we need a grasp of something deeper, some structural feature or principle that accounts for the possible shapes or other features which a thing might

\(^6\) See e.g. Aquinas: “In any name, two things must be considered: that from which the name is imposed, which is called the ‘quality’ of the name, and that on which the name is imposed, which is called the ‘substance’ of the name. And a name, properly speaking, is said to signify the form or quality from which the name is imposed; but it is said to supposit for the thing on which it is imposed.” *In quolibet nomine est duo consideranda: sicut id a quo imponitur nomen, quod dicitur qualitas nominis; et id cui imponitur, quod dicitur substantia nominis. Et nomen, proprie loquendo, dicitur significare formam sive qualitatem, a qua imponitur nomen; dicitur vero suppositur pro eo cui imponitur* (*Scriptum super Sententiarum*, lib. 3, d. 6, q. 1, a. 3; ed Moos [1933], *Scriptum super Sententias*, Vol. 3, Paris: Lethielleux, p. 232). Cf. Richard of Clive: “Aristotle does not understand by ‘name’ anything other than the sign of a thing, imposed on that thing from a single form.” *Unde Aristoteles non intelligit ibi per ‘nomen’ aliquod aliquid nisi signum rei ipsi rei impositum ab aliqua forma una* (*Qg. metaphysicae VII, q. 49; Worcester, Cathedral and Chapter Library, MS Q.13, f. 150ra [hereafter “W”]*). Cf. Robert Kilwardby: “Every naming of this kind is from a form, and every form is common.” *Omnis huissumodi nominato sit a forma, et quilibet forma sit communis* (*Notulae super librum Porphyrii*, lectio 6; Conti [2013] 89 n. 63). Cf. Richard Rufus of Cornwall: “So because the form is the principle of understanding the thing, the name must be imposed on the thing from the form and not from the matter.” *Unde cum forma sit principium intelligendi rem, propterea a forma imponitur nomen rei scilicet, et non a materia* (*Rufus, Metaphysic VII*, q. 13; E49ra). The language about names being given “from” forms may derive from twelfth-century logical and grammatical literature. See e.g. the *Logica* *Cum sit nostra*: “It ought to be said that not every name which pertains to many things is a common name, but only that which is imposed from a common form, and which is apt both by its nature and by its modus signiﬁcandi to pertain to many. And ‘Socrates’ is not a common name in this way. The other case is that of a name imposed from a concrete and discrete form. And ‘Socrates’ does pertain to many in this way.” *Dicendum quod non omne nomen quod convenit pluribus est nomen commune, sed talum id quod imponitur a forma communni et de cui natura et de modo signiﬁcandi auctum naturam est convenire pluribus. Et sic ‘Socrates’ non est nomen commune. Alid est quod imponitur a forma concreta et discreta; et sic ‘Socrates’ convenit pluribus* (*De Rijk, Logica Modernorum* vol. 3, p. 421, lines 31-35). See also Petrus Helias: “Every name is given from the form, just as the name ‘human’ is given from ‘humanity,’ which is its substantial form.... Therefore, because a substance unites these forms to itself, it also unites to itself the names given from the forms. For it draws the names along with the forms.” *Nam omne nomen datum est ex forma, ut hoc nomen ‘bonum’ datum est ab ‘humanitate’, que est forma substantialis.... Cum ergo substantia unit sibi haec formas, unit eam sibi nomina data ex formis. Cum formas enim trahit nomina* (*Petrus Helias, Summa super Priscianum*, “De constructione,” pr. 17; ed. Leo Reilly [1993], Vol. 2, Toronto: PIMS, p. 925).

\(^7\) Form is often explained by analogy to shape in the philosophical tradition: see for instance the famous statue analogy in Aristotle’s *Physica* I, ch. 7, 191a8-12, repeated e.g. in Boethius’ *De divisione* 888b (ed. Magee, p. 40). See also passages like the following, which exploit the analogy while repeatedly referring to how things are “said” to be, thus invoking the role of language: “All being is from a form (ex forma). For a statue [of an animal] is not said to be such in respect to the bronze which is its matter, but in respect to the form in which the image of an animal is stamped onto it. And bronze itself is not said to be such in respect of the earth which is its matter, but in respect of the figure of bronze. And earth itself is not said to be such insofar as it is the ‘apoion hulen,’ but in regard to dryness and heavyness, which are forms. Nothing therefore is said to be according to its matter but according to its proper form.” *Omne nuncque esse ex forma est. Statua enim non secundum aet, quod est materia, sed secundum formam, qua in eo insignita est, effigies animalis diciitur, ipsamque aet non secundum terram, quod eius materia, sed dicitur secundum aeris figuram. Terra quoque ipsa non ’kata ten hulen’ diciitur, sed secundum siccitatem gravitatemque, quae sunt formas. Nihil igitur secundum materiam esse diciitur, sed secundum propriam formam* (*Boethius, De trinitate* 2.83-91; ed. Moreschini 169-170).
take. That “something deeper” is the form. On the basis of our acquaintance with the relevant forms we can accurately call an animal “gerbil” as opposed to “mouse” or “Polynesian rat.”

In the following sections, we will look at four arguments surrounding proper names that turn on the role of form in naming. Unlike their twentieth-century counterparts, our thirteenth-century philosophers thought that the tight link between names and forms created problems for naming material individuals on a number of grounds. In the first section we will revisit an argument from Richard of Clive regarding the matter and form of bronze circles and how they are distinct entities than cannot be captured under one formal expression or name. In the second section we will see an argument from Robert Kilwardby to the effect that all forms are common, and that therefore any name given from a form must be a common name. In the third section we will look at a very nuanced argument by Richard Rufus of Cornwall claiming that, even if forms could be individual, individuals are still unnameable because of their material components. And finally, we will conclude in the fourth section by looking at another (and later) of Rufus’ arguments against proper names, this time reevaluating the unintelligibility of individuals in themselves.

1. One Form, One Name: Richard of Clive and the Bronze Circle

As we saw above, Macavity the Mystery Cat has a number of forms. He has not only a cat-form but color-forms and size-forms, and his parts have flesh-forms and blood-forms and so on. At the most fundamental level, those forms are determinations on the underlying substratum of matter. With all this discussion of multiple levels of forms, we might reasonably ask “What makes Macavity to be one thing?” And if it turns out that Macavity is not one thing, but many things, we might reasonably ask whether any name we give him actually names just one individual. Assuming that proper names are the sorts of utterances that name just one individual, it may look as if “Macavity” is not really a proper name.

This is the cluster of questions we find Richard of Clive asking in his *Quaestiones metaphysicae*, book VII, q. 49. The questions take their cue directly from Aristotle’s observation in 1036b1-3 that “particulars cannot have a proper name”—an observation which, as it turns out, Richard takes quite literally. Richard thinks that a material particular cannot have a name (one name) but many “names.” That is because any material particular is a composite of different things (res) that cannot be brought under the umbrella of a unitary proper name. In explicating this view, I’ll look first at what Richard says about the relationship between names
and material composites, then at what it means for a composite to lack formal unity. We'll conclude with two particular scenarios in which Richard thinks that a composite can fail to have formal unity.

What is the relationship between names and material composites? Richard thinks that material composites receive names exclusively on the basis of their forms. In spelling out the relationship between forms and names, Richard invokes both of the naming principles that I brought attention to above: names must be imposed on forms, and they must be imposed from forms. In both cases, Richard thinks that these principles require a one-to-one correspondence between forms and the names that are imposed on/from them. As Richard tells us:

Aristotle does not understand by “name” anything other than the sign of a thing, imposed on that thing from a single form, which form is intelligible in itself. But if we take a sign of a thing that is not imposed either on one form or from one form, then it will not be a name but “names.”

Why just one form per name? It seems that Richard thinks that what distinguishes names from each other is just the information they provide. This consequence falls naturally out of the principle that names must be given “from” forms. Since the intelligibility of a name depends on the intelligibility of the form to which it is connected, then a diversity of forms will result in a diversity of names. We can see Richard’s point most intuitively in the case of common names like “bank,” where a word’s ability to stand for two quite different things—a financial institution and a geographical structure—renders it equivocal. Richard would explain the equivocality in terms of a diversity of forms. The structural principles that make something a financial institution are quite different from those that make a geographical structure; and on account of the formal diversity, “bank” is an equivocal word.

Usually we think of equivocality pertaining when a word is used of two entirely distinct things. But suppose there is a case where a single thing has multiple forms which do not share a unity. Richard’s argument against proper names is unique for focusing on the disunity of such forms within a single material individual. And Richard thinks that such a disunity does obtain. Richard gives us two scenarios in which he thinks an individual material composite fails to have formal unity:

Everything that includes an accident in its nature is like this, such that one name cannot be imposed on that thing by signification, nor does it have a name. Or when the thing

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8 Unde Aristoteles non intelligit ibi per ‘nomen’ aliquod alium nisi signum rei ipsi rei impositum ab aliqua forma una; quae forma secundum se sit intelligibilis. Si accipiatur aliquod signum rei et non imponitur uni formae vel ab una forma, tunc non erit nomen unum sed nomina (Richard of Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49 corpus; W 150ra).
combines in itself things of diverse genera, it is not “one” except by accident, and the name would be equivocal.\(^9\)

The first scenario occurs when we consider a thing and one of its accidents together. The second scenario, which Richard addresses at more length, arises when we consider a thing which is itself composed of diverse things in different “genera.” Neither of these scenarios is completely clear, so we will examine them each in turn.

In the first scenario, a thing combines both a substance and one of its accidents in a non-unified way. Richard does not elaborate on why this is problematic, but it is easy to think of commonly-discussed examples such as “musical Socrates” or “white Socrates” and so on.\(^10\) Richard’s point is that no single name can capture both the thing and its accident. So far, so good; the claim seems intuitive, since fabricating a name for “musical Socrates” or “mysterious Macavity” would indeed be unusual and semantically deviant. But what about just “Macavity”? Richard’s argument seems to have overlooked the most obvious fact of all. When we name material individuals, we precisely don’t mean to include whatever musical accidents they have at the moment. We just mean to name the individuals themselves. So what’s the problem?

What Richard almost certainly has in mind, at least in order for this argument to work, is the view that sometimes individuals not only happen to have certain accidents, but that they are at least partially constituted by those accidents at some fundamental level. Richard gives us a hint that he might have such a view. He says that the individuals which cannot be named “from one form” are precisely those which “include an accident in their nature.”\(^11\) Some individuals are therefore accidental by nature or have natures that involve accidents constitutively. Richard provides us with the example of a bronze circle, saying that we can only impose a label on it only by appealing to the circle’s accident of bronze, in addition to its circle-nature.\(^12\) Perhaps the geometrical example does the most to illuminate Richard’s meaning. Circularity may not contain any accidents of length or weight on its own; but once we begin drawing individual circles, or crafting them out of bronze, we are building certain crucial accidents into the individuals. What

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\(^9\) *Talis est omnis res quae in sua natura accidens includit ut significatione illi rei non potest unum nomen imponi, nec habet nomen; nec cum res aggreget in se res diversorum generum, nec est res una nisi secundum accident, esse nomen aerquiroum* (ibid).


\(^11\) *Si accipiar aliquid signum rei et non imponitur uni formae vel ab una forma, tunc non erit nomen unum sed nomina. Talis est omnis res quae in sua natura accidens includit* (Richard of Clive, *Qq. metaphysicae* VII, q. 49 corpus; W 150ra).

\(^12\) *Nomen accidentaliter potest habere vel actus sit ut circulus aeneus potest vocari A. A unum tantum cum imponitur proprium ut subiecto, non imponitur a forma sed a quidditate et accidentibus ut rei totalis cum septem proprietatibus in Porphyrio dictis* (ibid).
it is for this bronze circle to be different from that circle surely involves the fact that this one is
two meters in diameter, made out of bronze, while that one is three meters in diameter and
made out of stone. “Having a bronze perimeter” is an accident that does not pertain to
circularity itself, but it does enter into the material constitution of individual circles as such, and
at a fairly fundamental level. Any given individual circle must have a perimeter that is made out
of something or other. So it seems that Richard is directing us to think of cases where the
nature or constitution of a thing itself requires us to include accidents in our grasp of the
individual.

But here we face another obvious objection. Isn’t it the case that all material individuals
contain certain crucial accidents that help to constitute them? If Richard is right that the
involvement of accidents renders names non-unitary, then it should follow that all our attempts
to name individuals will result in “names” (plural) rather than a single unitary proper name.
Even if the name itself is not compound, it will pick out diverse elements that certainly are.
“Socrates” may not name “musical Socrates,” but it will name “son-of-Sophroniscus-Socrates”
or whatever other accidents are central enough to Socrates being the individual that he is. If that
is the case, can we really succeed in naming any individual as a formal unity? This is a question
Richard does not explicitly address, but I will return to it in a moment.

In the meantime, we should look at the second scenario in which an individual might fail
to have formal unity. Richard tells us that a single utterance cannot function as a name for a
thing that combines in itself “things of diverse genera,” such that the thing at stake is only “one
accidentally.” At first, this scenario may look like another way of describing the “musical
Socrates” scenario, since substantial forms and accidental forms do indeed belong to the distinct
Aristotelian categories of substance and accident. However, Richard has a somewhat different
problem in mind. Still using Aristotle’s example of the bronze circle, he makes an argument
about the diversity of its form and matter. The bronze circle combines within itself, not only a
substance and an accident, but a formal element and a material element that belong to distinct
metaphysical kinds:

A bronze circle does not have one name but many names. For geometrical individuals
are twofold, such as this circle with its natural matter or this bronze circle. For in either
case, diverse things are aggregated, since “circle” abstracts from matter, but “bronze”
includes matter. Therefore there will not be one name, however much the vocal

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13 Nec cum res aggreget in se res diversorum generum, nec est res una nisi secundum accidens, esset nomen aequivocum (Richard of
Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49 corpus; W 150ra).
utterance may be one, since a name is an utterance that is significative and is a sign of [one] thing.\textsuperscript{14}

Richard takes the complete distinction between the bronze circle’s matter and form very seriously. He tells us that these two entities are opposed to each other’s very notions, since the materiality of the bronze is the opposite of the abstract immateriality of the circle.\textsuperscript{15} More than this, the materiality of the bronze and the immateriality of the circle are not unified in any deep way. They do not constitute a single unified thing but an aggregate. That is why, when we say “bronze circle,” we say two different things. Because “bronze” and “circle” signify opposed and incompatible entities, we will not be able to invent a single word to include them both. The disunity at stake is even greater than that involved with substances and their accidents, and even greater than the composition involved in words like “sandcastle.” Because the material element invoked by “bronze” is the opposite of the immaterial form invoked by “circle,” the sort of name that tried to capture both would be more like “whitishblack” or “coldheat.” Bestowing a unified, unequivocal name on such contradictory things would be impossible.

This argument turns on the claim that matter and form are distinct entities, in the same way that the previous argument turned on the claim that substance and accident are distinct formally. Both arguments seem to make sense for cases of bronze circles. But what about other kinds of individuals? Richard of Clive clearly intends his argument to demonstrate that artificial material objects like manmade circles do not have proper names; but does he intend his argument to hold of other sorts of material composites—for example, natural substances like Socrates or Macavity?

I argue that Richard does not intend this; or, if he did intend it, the argument nevertheless leaves a clear loophole for the case of living things. The reason for this is that, on the standard Aristotelian picture of natural substances, living things are not aggregates or accidental unions of form and matter. Although they are constituted by matter and form as distinguishable metaphysical principles, living things are supposed to have forms that substantially unify the parts of the composite, including the matter, together into non-accidental wholes. Form and matter in natural substances are therefore not “things” in themselves, but the principles that constitute things. That is because the substantial form of a natural thing gives it

\textsuperscript{14} Unde circulus aeneus non habet nomen unum sed plurum. Singulairia mathematica tamen sunt duo, ut hic circulus vel cum materia naturali, vel circulus aeneus. Et utroque modo aggregantur res diversae: quia circulus abstrahit, aeneus vero materiam concernit. Unde non est nomen unum, quamvis voc sit una, quia nomen est voc significativa et signum rei (ibid).

\textsuperscript{15} Cum dico ‘circulus aeneus’ duo dico. Quorum unum est contra rationem alterius; cum dico ‘circulus’ excludo materiam; cum dico ‘aeneus’ intelligo materiam. Et sic opposita simpliciter singulairia per determinationem datam non habent nomen (ibid).
genuine unity. Meanwhile, non-living substances or material artifacts (such as bronze circles) lack a substantial form and therefore lack genuine unity between their matter and form, or their accidents. They are merely aggregates.\(^\text{16}\)

The distinction between living things and material artifacts is a staple of Aristotelian metaphysics; and it is also occasionally brought to bear on the signification of names. In his “Long Commentary” on the De anima, for instance, Averroes explicitly states that the names of natural things primarily name their forms, while the names of non-natural aggregates primarily name their matter.\(^\text{17}\) The status of an object as natural or non-natural therefore influences the semantic content of the name used to speak about it. The name of a material artifact cannot function as the name of its form, presumably because it does not have a form— that is, an artifact does not have one single substantial form that unifies its matter and makes it to be the object it is. Thus, the name of an artifact primarily signifies its matter.

While it is not clear that Richard of Clive has quite this Averroistic train of thought in mind, it is clear that his argument leaves room for it. Richard specifically states that the individual material composites under discussion are composites of diverse entities, “forms with accidents” or “aggregates” with “diverse genera” or “diverse natures.”\(^\text{18}\) Central to Richard’s argument is the special case of the bronze circle. More clearly than in other artificial objects, we can see that a bronze circle does indeed contain a purely formal geometrical element that is entirely independent of bronze or of wood, but at the same time the bronze circle contains bronze as a material medium in which the geometrical form is manifested. The bronze circle therefore manages to accidentally unify a completely different set of metaphysical principles, and that is why Richard thinks there is no single proper name that can capture both contrary parts as a unity. Hence, it seems clear that if Richard wished to demonstrate that living things also could not have proper names, he would have to use a different argument. A natural individual like


\(^{17}\) Et hoc just quia nomen dicitur in rebus naturalibus primo de forma et secundo de congregato; in rebus autem artificialibus contrario, scilicet quia primo de materia, secundo de congregato. In rebus igitur artificialibus demonstrat individuum substantie secundum suam primam significationem quia signifcat materiam; et in rebus individuis substantie naturalibus demonstrat ipsum secundum suam primam significationem quoniam signifcat formam. Hoc enim individuum non est hoc nisi per suam formam, non per suam materiam (Averroes, “Long Commentary” on De anima, lib. II, c. 8; Crawford 142.88 – 143.97).

\(^{18}\) Dicendum ad argumentum quod si voc imponitur rei quae non aggregat in se diversas naturas, ei competit nomen; si vero res aggregat in se diversas naturas, competit ei vociv vocatio et non nomen essentialiter (Richard of Clive, Qq. metaphysicae VII, q. 49 ad 1; W 150ra).
Socrates or Macavity would have a genuine unity, would not contain parts whose principles were incompatible with one another, and would presumably be nameable by a genuine proper name.

2. The Form-Matter Dilemma: Robert Kilwardby

From Richard of Clive’s argument we can begin to see how much metaphysics is involved in the claim that particulars cannot have proper names. Most important is the rule that names can only be imposed on/from forms. Richard combines this rule with the observation that material artifacts do not have the right kind of form, and he thereby generates the conclusion that material artifacts do not have proper names. But it is possible to combine this rule with more universalizable metaphysical principles in order to produce the conclusion that no individual, natural or otherwise, could have a genuine proper name. So even if Macavity the Mystery Cat is a living, natural unity, he will still fail to have a genuine proper name.

One way of arguing for this is to say that all forms are common. If all names must be given from forms, then all names will be given from common forms and will be common names. Conversely, if one wishes to circumvent this scenario, one could say that the names of individuals must be given not “from forms” but from what makes them individual. What makes things individual is not form but matter; so names must be imposed from matter if they are to be proper names. Robert Kilwardby uses the first tactic to argue that individuals cannot have proper names, and Richard Rufus of Cornwall uses the second. Because Rufus’ argument is considerably more nuanced than Kilwardby’s, we will examine Kilwardby’s views first.

Consider again the Mystery Cat, Macavity. He is a tall, thin ginger cat with shabby fur and uncombed whiskers, his eyes are sunken in, he enjoys doing complicated long division sums, etc. It makes sense to say that these are the qualities by which we might recognize a cat as being Macavity and know to apply the proper name “Macavity” to it. The problem is that each of these qualities turns up in other cats as well. Mungojerrie is as tall as Macavity, Growltiger is shabby, and Skimbleshanks is adept at doing long division. Given that each of Macavity’s qualities can turn up in other cats, there is not even any good reason that they might not all turn up together in a single other cat that will end up looking, grooming, and ciphering exactly like Macavity. So if names are given “from forms” in the sense of deriving from qualitative determinations, and if the same qualitative determinations can show up in multiple individuals, then it appears that any attempt to name an individual will be an attempt to name it “from” something which is actually common to many other things.
This is the gist of the argument we find in Kilwardby’s commentary on the *Isagoge*. It is elegantly simple. Kilwardby tells us that (1) all names are imposed from forms, and (2) all forms are common. This means that (3) all names are imposed from common forms. But according to longstanding grammatical and logical conventions, names imposed from common forms are common names. To have a proper name, one would presumably have to impose a name from a proper form. So, since all names are imposed from common forms, all names will be common names.19

Kilwardby was not the only scholastic to employ this argument, since we find a very similar one recorded in Geoffrey of Aspall’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43.20 Geoffrey’s version of the argument begins with the rule that every name must be primarily imposed on a form, whereas Kilwardby’s version invokes the rule that every act of naming is from a form.21 But both arguments converge at the same conclusion: because forms are common, no act of naming can successfully get at the individual as such.

This argument involves considerable metaphysical presuppositions about form and matter in the individuation of material substances. Why, for example, must we think that all forms are common or universal? Roger Bacon deploys the inverse of this argument in an early *Metaphysics* commentary and says that because individuals have their own forms, individuals can

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19 “For [an individual] does not have a name that names its substance individually; for every such name would be a common name, because every naming of this kind is from a form, and every form is common.” *Non enim habet nomen quod nominet suam substantiam individualiter; tale enim nomen esse commune nomen, cum omnis huiusmodi nominatio sit a forma, et quilibet forma sit communis* (Kilwardby, *Notulae super librum Porphyrii*, lectio 6; Conti [2013] 89 n. 63). See Conti (2013) for a detailed discussion of Kilwardby’s views on meaning, truth, the categories, universals, individuation, and the status of accidents.

20 “Every name primarily signifies a form and secondarily signifies an aggregate. But every form considered in itself is common; therefore, every name primarily signifies something common. In this way a particular name primarily signifies something common, and that is why particulars do not have names.” *Item omne nomen primo significat formam secundo aggregatum, sed omnis forma per se considerata est communis, ergo omne nomen primo significat communem, et ita nomen particulare primo significat communem quare particularia non habent nomina* (Geoffrey of Aspall, *Qq. super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43 obj. 6; Brumberg-Chaumont 101). Geoffrey also records a parallel argument that does not speak explicitly of forms but of names being “explained” in common terms: “What a name signifies is that through which it is explained. But a proper name is explained only through something common. Therefore, something common is what is signified through a proper name, and thus a particular thing is not signified through a particular or proper name, and in this way a particular thing does not have a name. The minor premise is clear through the explanation of these names, Iohannes and Petrus. For Iohannes is explained by ‘grace of God,’ and Petrus ‘firm in faith.’ And Robert, ‘bearer of a thing’...” *Item illud per quod nomen exponitur illud per nomen significatur, sed nomen proprium exponitur per commune, ergo commune per nomen proprium significatur, quare res particularis non significatur per nomen particularis vel proprium, et ita particularia non habet nomen. Minor patet per expositionem huiusmodi nominium Iohannes, Petrus. Iohannes exponitur in gratia dei et Petrus firmus in fide. Robertus quia res ferens...* (Geoffrey, *Qq. super Metaphysicam*, VII q. 43, obj. 5; Brumberg-Chaumont 100-101). Unfortunately, this argument breaks off with a lacuna. But the main thrust of the objection is fairly clear: any given proper name can be explained as a combination of common terms.

21 Kilwardby does elsewhere endorse Averroes’s view that names primarily signify forms and secondarily aggregates (see note 5 above).
Such a position was eminently possible. Alternatively, why can’t we think that the names of individuals might be imposed from their matter rather than their forms? It is significant that Kilwardby addresses both these issues in the immediate context of his argument against proper names, making it clear that his argument derives from his prior commitments regarding matter and form. But he also makes it clear that these two issues work in tandem. In fact, it is even possible to say that a commitment to the universality of forms and the unintelligibility of matter results in a sort of dilemma for proper names.

Why must we think that the forms of material substances are common or universal?

Kilwardby’s reasoning on this point is somewhat complex. On the one hand, he thinks that the real universality of forms outside the mind is necessary for scientific knowledge of the world. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* book VII, particularly chapter 15, is in the background here: knowledge of a thing is not knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of an individual but knowledge of the characteristics of a kind. On the other hand, although Kilwardby thinks that forms must be universal for the sake of our knowledge, he also holds that forms can be individuated by matter. So at least in some sense, forms can be made individual by something outside themselves. Kilwardby emphasizes repeatedly that forms in themselves are not a particularizing force or an individuating cause. Rather, a form multiplied in matter continues to be a universal principle “by which” the particular things are what they are. As Alessandro Conti has pointed out, Kilwardby seems to think that the universality of a form is to be understood in relational terms. Kilwardby uses two examples to get his point across. One is the example of a broken

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22 Contra: *propter formam et a forma rei fit impositio nominis; set individua habent veram formam, ergo debent habere veram nominationem* (Bacon, QMet8; Steele 235.33-36).

23 *Dubitatur tertio an sint universalia vel non. Quod sint probatur: omnis scientia est de universalibus; nulla scientia est de non ente; igitur universalia sunt* (lectio 2; Conti [2013] 84 n. 20).

24 In his Parisian period, Kilwardby holds that individuation occurs by matter; though later in his career he advocates individuation by both matter and form. See Conti (2013), pp. 87–90.

25 *Neque potest substantia forma esse huiusmodi causa; forma enim quaedam de se nata est esse in multis et de multis, et sic non erit a quo particulare est particolare* (Kilwardby, *Notulae super librum Porphyrii*, lectio 6; Conti [2013] 88 n. 63).

26 “[The opposing argument] makes this assumption, that a universal is what-is, and this is false; for [the universal] is that-by which it is, and this is the quiddity and essence and form of the individual. It is not numerically one in any individual, as the Adamites thought, but it is one in the way in which a form considered in itself is called “one,” namely through agreement or through the simplicity of its essence.” *Subent enim hanc assumptio, universale est id quod est, et hanc est falsa; est enim quo est, et quidditas et essentia et forma individui; nec est unum numero in quidlibet singulari, ut posuerunt Adamitas, sed est unum per modum secundum quem forma per se considerata dicitur una, scilicet per conventionem vel per simplicitatem suae essentiae* (Notulae super librum Porphyrii, lectio 2; Conti [2013] 84 n. 53).

27 As Conti writes, “[Kilwardby] thinks of a universal as a pure form having a modal unity based on an agreement in essence for all individuals of the same type. This agreement in essence can be considered either according to its concreteness (the existence the universal has in many individual things at once) or according to its abstract being (as a construct in our mind). Taken in the first way, the universal form, despite its essential unity, has an existence that differs according to the different matter of the numerically distinct individuals, like the many images of one thing in
mirror: an image in a whole mirror becomes many images in many mirror fragments, not because the image itself is many, but because the fragments of the mirror (the “matter”) are many. In this sense a form multiplied in matter can be considered many, even if the form itself is still universal. The other example is that of the relationship between a man and many women. Kilwardby states that form is related to distinct pieces of matter as their principle of filling or completion, and thus the form may stand in relation to many things at once.

These examples provide important information for Kilwardby’s position, since they show that Kilwardby’s argument works not only with extreme realism but even with moderate forms of realism. As the mirror and the man demonstrate, we don’t have to think that a given form or quality is actually common to many individuals. It is sufficient if we think a given form or quality might be potentially common or (in contemporary lingo) “multiply instantiable.” Think again of all the forms or qualitative determinations we associate with Macavity—his tallness, shabbiness, and so on. We do not have to claim that Macavity’s own tallness (exactly 12 inches) is shared by Mungojerrie. It is enough to think that “tallness” itself, or “12 inches,” is the sort of thing which might be exemplified or instantiated in both Macavity and Mungojerrie. Similarly, we don’t have to think that “shabbiness” is something that Macavity and Growltiger actually possess in common simultaneously, like a ship’s plank or a spot of moonlight. But they might very well both be related to shabbiness as they relate to the moon from different angles. So if names are given “from forms,” and if forms are the sorts of things that relate to multiple individuals simultaneously, then it seems that there is no form we can choose which will not relate to some individual other than the very individual we wish to name.

This is problematic. As it turns out, naming an individual “from” its forms will capture only those features that could just as well exist in other individuals. We will therefore fail to generate a name that captures anything peculiar to that individual. Kilwardby’s argument

the fragments of a splintered mirror. Taken in the second way, the form most properly has the status of a universal, that is, something common shared as a whole by a multiplicity of singular items” (Conti [2013] 84-85).

28 Sicut enim uidetur obiectum in speculo integro unam facere formam vel similitudinem, si autem frangatur speculum multiplicatur illa forma in alias formas per multiplicationem fractionis, sic et de ipsa specie videmus quod, cum sit una forma et essentia completa in se, numeratur tamen in materialibus sive in particularibus (Kilwardby, Notulæ super librum Porphyrii, lectio 5; Conti [2013] 85 n. 54).

29 Universale autem non est per hunc modum in singulari, sed est in singulari per relationem tantum, quia forma cui accedit universalitas (universale mss.) est relata ad multas materias quas nata est replere, sicut vir unus multas potest replere mulieres (lectio 2; Conti [2013] 84 n. 51). This example unfortunately involves a problem. Kilwardby presumably wants to say that form can fill many matters simultaneously; but taken strictly, the analogy of the male as a completion principle for several females suggests only that form can fill many matters successively.

30 “[An individual] does not have a name which names its substance in an individual fashion; for such a name would be a common name, since every nomination of this kind is from a form and every form is common.” Non enim habet
applies across the board to any realist system in which forms or qualities are at least potentially repeatable.

There is one obvious way around this problem. Why not give up the claim that proper names must be given “from forms”? Why not say that naming an individual requires naming it “from” whatever is peculiar to it as an individual—its matter, for example? Kilwardby’s metaphysics certainly includes matter as an individuating principle, but Kilwardby denies that matter can play a role in naming an individual. The problem with naming an individual “from” its matter is that matter itself is not nameable or predicable:

Since [an individual] is particular, it adds matter over and above the universal. And matter is not predicated of anything, nor is it named, according to Aristotle. Therefore a particular is neither named nor predicated. 31

Kilwardby links the unnameability of an individual to the unnameability of its matter; and he links the unnameability of both to their impredicability. The reference to predication is brief but valuable. It is crucial to keep in mind that Kilwardby is commenting on Porphyry’s Isagoge, just at the point where Porphyry has laid out a few general rules governing predication. To say that matter or individuals “are not predicated” is to say that they cannot obey those rules. The relevant rule in the context is that a predicate must be either superior to or equal to whatever it is predicated of. Thus, we can say “a horse is an animal” or “a cat is an animal,” because “animal” is a superior genus predicated of the species below it. We can also say things like “horses are hinnible” and “cats are purrible” because the predicates “hinnible” and “purrible” capture specific differences that are “equal” to the species horse and cat. 32

Incidentally, Porphyry leaves it famously unclear whether these rules of predication presume that

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nomen quod nominet suam substantiam individualiter; tale enim nomen esset commune nomen, cum omnis huiusmodi nominatio sit a forma, et quilibet forma sit communis (Kilwardby, Notulae super librum Porphyrii, lectio 6; Conti [2013] 89 n. 63).

31 Ex hoc etiam est quod individuum non praedicatur de aliquo; quia enim est particularis, addit materia supra universale, et materia de nullo praedicatur, nec est nominata, secundum Aristotelem; ideo etiam particularis nec nominatur nec praedicatur (Kilwardby, Notulae super librum Porphyrii, lectio 6; Conti [2013] 89 n. 63).

32 Adsignato autem genere et specie quid est utrumque, cunctum sit genus unum, species vero plurimae (semper enim in plurae species divisio generis est), genus quidem semper de specie praedicatur et omnis superiore de inferioribus, species autem neque de procohmo sibi generi neque de superioribus (neque enim convertitur); oportet autem acuea de acquis praedicari ut hinnibile de equo, aut maioria de minoribus ut animal de homine; minoria vero de maioribus minime (neque enim animal dicit esse hominem quemadmodum hominem dicis esse animal). De quibus autem species praedicatur, de his necessario et species genus praedicabitur et genera genus usque ad generalissimum; si enim verum est Socratem hominem dicere, hominem autem animal, animal vero substantiam, verum est hominem animal dicere atque substantiam. Semper enim superioribus de inferioribus praedicitatis species quidem de individuis praedicabitur, genus autem et de species et de individuo, generalissimum autem et de genere (et de generis si plura sint media et subalternam) et de specie et de individuo. Dictur enim generalissimum quidem de omnibus sub se generibus speciebusque et de individuis, genus autem quod ante specialissimum est de omnibus specialissimis et de individuis, solus autem species de omnibus individuis, individuum autem de uno solo particulari (individuum autem dicitur Socrates et hoc album et hic veniens, ut Sophronisci filius, si solus et sit Socrates filius) (Isagoge 7.1-7.21; Minio-Paluello, pp. 12-13).
predicates are things or concepts or mere words. But by any interpretation, it is easy to see that there will be at least a superficial problem with attempting to use individuals (or the names of individuals) as predicates. In the utterance “Macavity is Macavity,” the grammatical predicate noun “Macavity” is neither a genus nor a species, nor can it play the role of a specific difference in the way that “hinnible” is a specific difference of “animal.” The propositions “Macavity is Macavity” or “This is Macavity” do not do what “This is a purrible animal” does. Either as a name or a thing, “Macavity” does not look as if it fits the pattern of genuine predication.  

But this is only to identify a superficial problem with the rules of predication as Porphyry has laid them out. Is there a deeper rationale preventing “Macavity” from functioning as a genuine predicate? Here we need to take a closer look at the metaphysics behind the logic. As Kilwardby explains, the precise problem with individuals being predicates is that they “add matter” over and above the universal. Matter, then, is the central problem: its impredicability is what makes individuals impredicable and therefore unnameable. Kilwardby is here assuming that his readers are familiar with the rationale behind Porphyry’s division of predicates in the Isagoge, and familiar moreover with the roots of the whole enterprise in Aristotle’s Metaphysics book VII. Since several Aristotelian insights are at work in the background here, I will take a moment to sketch out what I think are the salient points for Kilwardby’s argument.

What we glean from the Isagoge and from Aristotle’s Metaphysics book VII are two fundamental principles: to analyze predicates is to analyze definitions, and definitions are comprised of only formal elements and not material ones. The link from predication to definition to forms (and the exclusion of matter) might be spelled out in the following way. Predicates, whether they are genera or species or differentia, are ways of expressing the formal determinations that constitute or qualify the subjects that the predicates are used of. This is especially clear in the case of definitions. Say that the essence of Cat is expressed by the

Kilwardby does not mention that Porphyry himself does speak of individuals being predicated in a sense. But there is an ambiguity in Porphyry’s comments. He tells us that “An individual is predicated of one particular alone, for Socrates is called an individual, and this white thing, and this approaching thing, such as the son of Sophroniscus, if Socrates is his only son.” Individuum autem de uno solo particulari (individuum autem dicitur Socrates et hinc album et hic veniens, ut Sophronisci filius, si solus et sit Socrates filius) (Isagoge 7.1-7.21; Minio-Paluello, pp. 12-13). The ambiguity surrounds the fact that “individual” itself may be taken as a general term, in the sense that Socrates is an individual and Plato is an individual too. Roughly the same ambiguity pertains to “this white thing” and “this approaching thing.” Of course, Porphyry could also mean that the very individual itself (such as Socrates) could be predicated, insofar as it is predicable of just one thing. Aristotle himself sometimes indicates that a singular expression is predicated of just one individual, while in other places he argues that individuals (or individual terms) simply cannot be predicated at all (see Prior Analytics 1.27, 43a25-33). For a discussion of individual predication that casts the problem in terms of “natural” vs. “unnatural” predication, or as accidental vs. per se predication, see Allan Bäck (2000), Aristotle’s Theory of Predication, Leiden: Brill, pp. 172-195.
compound predicate “most rational purrible animal,” which is made up of the simple predicate “animal” (a genus) and the differentiae “most rational” and “purrible.” “Animal” can then be analyzed further. To be an animal is to be a sensitive, locomotive living body; and to be a body is to be a corporeal substance. So we can analyze the definition of animal into “sensitive, locomotive, living corporeal substance.” The compound expression is just a string of the relevant differentiae that pertain to the most general genus “substance” in the definition of “animal.” In order to get the species Cat, we simply add the further differentiae “most rational” and “purrible.” Indeed, for any essence, the predicates used to express the definition of the essence can ultimately be reduced to a single genus plus a string of differentiae.\textsuperscript{34}

This is where we see the importance of form. The relevant predicates which express the definition of anything in a genus are expressions of formal determinations on that genus. “Purrible,” “locomotive,” and “living” all indicate forms that determine or qualify the substance in question. Predicates are formal expressions and not material ones.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, it is difficult to think of an instance in which our attempt to define a thing will involve the predication of something purely material. Someone pointing at a cat asks “What is that?”, to which the appropriate answer might be “a pet” or “a fiend in feline form” or “a most rational purrible animal,” but not simply “furry stuff.” Even if we don’t know what cats are and are forced to fall back on predicking “furry stuff,” we will mean “furry” as something already formally specific, something whose matter is structured differently than rough stuff or slippery stuff. In no case will we define the cat by simply uttering “chunk of matter.” Such an utterance would be tantamount to the admission that we do not know what the thing is and cannot define it.

It appears, then, that matter is impredicable. But why does matter’s impredicability result in an individual’s unnameability? The answer must be that Kilwardby is thinking of all names as predicates or as potential predicates. In the case of common names or natural kind terms, this potentiality is obvious. One might even say that the potential to function as a predicate is a direct consequence of the view that names must be given “from” forms. If names

\textsuperscript{34} For Aristotle on definitions and differentiae, see *Metaphysics* VII.12, especially 1037b29-1038a35.

\textsuperscript{35} Aristotle’s argument against matter in definitions occurs in *Metaphysics* VII.11. There is the difficulty, which both Aristotle and the medieval commentators acknowledge, that the definitions of material composites seem to require some reference to their matter. We can’t define “animal” without reference to an animate body, and we can’t have free-floating beings that fall under the definition of “animal” without being material. One way around this problem is to specify that the “matter” in question is always pre-formed: to have a body is to have matter that has already received the formal determination of corporeality, etc. For the present discussion, I ignore these problems; but for further information, see Michael Ferejohn (1994), “Matter, Definition and Generation in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 10: 35–58.
are always given from forms, and if forms are precisely those generic or differentiating features which are captured by predicates in definitions, then predication and nameability will imply each other. So the claim that names must be given “from” forms goes hand-in-glove with the view that names be able to function as predicates. If it turns out that there are entities that cannot be described in terms of genus, differentiae, and so on, then those entities will also be unnameable. Specifically, if there are entities that are what they are in virtue of matter, such that their forms alone do not convey information about what they are in themselves, then those entities will not be predicatable or nameable in themselves—only in regard to their species or other general formal determinations.

If this is the general train of thought that Kilwardby has in mind, then the impredicability of matter results in the following consequence. If there are entities that are what they are in virtue of matter, rather than form, those entities will be no more definable or predicatable in themselves than matter is. We will simply be unable to give a genus and a string of differentiae that capture what they are in themselves, *qua* material things. What entities might fit this description? Individuals are such entities, at least on Kilwardby’s view. Individuals are individual because of their matter. Matter is the only thing that makes them individual, because without the matter, there would be nothing but potentially repeatable forms. This means that if we wish to define or predicate the individual, analyzing it into its genus and differentiae will not be enough—we will have to find some way of including its matter in the predication. But matter is indefinable and unanalyzable on its own without forms. If we take the forms of the genus and differentiae without the matter, we will have a definition or predicate that is common to all individuals of a species; while if we take the individual’s matter, we will have something that cannot be included in a definition or predicate.

At this point, we might say that individuals present Kilwardby with a metaphysical-semantic dilemma. To name an individual, we must name it “from” either the form or the matter. We cannot name it “from” the form, because Kilwardby thinks that all forms are potentially common. On the other hand, we cannot name an individual “from” its matter, because even though matter is what makes a particular to be particular, matter as such can neither be named nor predicated. The result is that no principle at our disposal, whether form or matter, will enable us to name the individual as such.
3. Knowing the Matter: Richard Rufus and the *Metaphysics*

Robert Kilwardby’s train of thought connecting matter, impredicability, and nameability creates a dilemma. The way out of the dilemma, naturally, is to abandon either the principle that forms must be common or the principle that matter is impredicable/undefinable. There were indeed philosophers in the twelfth and thirteenth century who thought that forms could be individual, and we sometimes find this fact used to explain how proper names work. Especially pervasive was the old notion from Priscian that a name signifies “substance with quality,” and that a proper name therefore signifies a particular substance with a proper quality (qualities being forms). One instance of this line of thought appears at the head of Geoffrey’s *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam*, q. 43:

On the opposing side: Names are divided into common names and proper names. For just as a common name signifies something common, a proper name signifies something proper. But quality is twofold, i.e. common and proper. Therefore, just as a common name is imposed from a common quality, so too a proper name is impose from a quality that is proper or particular. And that is why a particular has a name.  

So it was not impossible for a philosopher to dismiss the controversial premise about forms being common. One could simply claim that forms could be proper, thereby ridding oneself of the troublesome consequence that particulars could not have proper names.

But would such a move work? As easy as this move seems, it is in fact not so easy to square with the metaphysics at stake. For what does it really mean to say that an individual’s form is “proper” and “particular” to it? A genuinely proper form would have to be something over and above an individual’s specific or generic forms. It could not be just a form of the species that had been multiplied to make the individual, since then it presumably would still be a common form “in itself,” as Kilwardby would say. Rather, a proper form would have to be radically unique to the individual. But do individuals really have such forms? Are proper forms required or even pertinent to an account of what makes individuals the individuals they are?

These are precisely the sorts of worries through which we find Richard Rufus navigating in an early *Metaphysics* commentary. Rufus is not prepared to say with Kilwardby that all forms

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36 Oppositum: nomen dividitur per nomen commune et nomen proprium. Sicut ergo nomen commune est illud quod significat commune, sic nomen proprium est illud quod significat proprium. Sed est qualitas dupliciter, scilicet communis et propria; sicut ergo nomen commune imponitur a qualitate communi sic nomen proprium a qualitate propria sive particulari, quare particulari habet nomen (Geoffrey of Aspall, *Qq. super Metaphysicam* VII, q. 43, sed contra 2-1; Brumberg-Chaumont, p. 101).

37 See also Roger Bacon, *QMet8*; ed. Steele, p. 235 (note 22 above).

38 If Rufus’ *Metaphysics* is indeed to be dated to 1238, as Wood argues, then Rufus may not be citing the argument above from Kilwardby himself, who is thought to have lectured on Aristotle as an arts master at the earliest around 1237, and at the latest around 1250. It is noteworthy, however, that the argument in Kilwardby is so similar to the
are common. He seems prepared to grant to Geoffrey’s objector in q. 43 that individuals might have proper forms. But Rufus also does not think that positing proper forms enables us to give individuals their own names. Rufus’ approach to this problem is extraordinarily nuanced, and the evidence suggests that he deals with it twice in two different ways: once in his early *Metaphysics* commentary, and once later in a text known as *De ideis*. Because these texts are very different, we will look at the *Metaphysics* in the present section and the *De ideis* in the next section.  

In his early *Metaphysics* commentary, Rufus comes at the issue of proper names via a discussion about individuals and individuation. In a passage on individuals that spans qq. 10-15 of his comments on book VII, we find him asking “whether individuals have a name?” (q. 13). Rufus opens the discussion with a nod to the problem of proper forms, and he cites an objection that looks very much like the argument we just saw in Kilwardby: “An individual does not have its own form, and the imposition of a name is from the form.” But Rufus himself does not commit himself to this view, and in fact the rest of his discussion of individuation neither supports nor critiques this argument. Rather, Rufus apparently intends the Kilwardby-

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39 A detailed study of Rufus’ semantic and metaphysical views in the early *Metaphysics* and the *De ideis* has already appeared in Karger (1998). My interpretation of Rufus differs somewhat from Karger’s, in that I am less convinced that Rufus rejects the possibility of completely individual forms in the early *Metaphysics* commentary. However, as I attempt to show in this section, neither an acceptance nor a rejection of individual forms is necessary to Rufus’ argument against proper names. The argument is *sui generis*. In the following section on the *De ideis*, I will build on Karger’s interpretation of Rufus’ new views in the *De ideis* to highlight Rufus’ intriguing relational analysis of names.

40 *Quaeritur consequenter utrum individuum habeat nomen. Et videtur quod non, per hoc quod individuum non habet formam proprian, et impositio nominis est a forma* (Rufus, *Metaphysics* VII, q. 13; E49ra).

41 There has been some speculation that Rufus’s citation of the Kilwardby-style argument indicates that he himself rejects the notion of individual forms (see e.g. Karger [1998], p. 58). But it is not clear to me that Rufus himself says anything in q. 13 to suggest that there are no proper forms. If Rufus had rejected proper forms, presumably his argument against proper names would have resembled Kilwardby’s and therefore would have been much simpler. Moreover, in an earlier question Rufus indicates that he thinks individuals have their own individual essences superadded to the essence of their species: “It should be said that an individual has its own essence superadded to the essence of the species, but that superadded essence is not a predicable nature. And therefore the individual does not have a predicable nature, except through the nature of the species. But because what is knowable is only what is predicable, the individual is not known except through the nature of the species. Indeed, the nature of the individual which it has beyond the nature of the species is not predicable, and that is why it is not known through a definition.” *Dicendum quod individuum habet proprian essentiam superadditam esse speciei, sed illa essentia superaddita non est natura praedicabilis, et propria individuum non habet naturam praedicabilim nisi per naturam speciei. Et quia solum istud quod est praedicabile est cognoscibile, propria non cognoscitur individuum nisi per naturam speciei; natura vero individui quam habet praeter naturam speciei non est praedicabilis, et ideo non cognoscitur definitione* (Rufus, *Metaphysics* VII, q. 12; E49ra). Here Rufus does not say anything about individual forms explicitly (except in an objection which he never answers), but where there is an individual *essence*, one is tempted to think there could be an individual *form* as well, above the form of the species. So it seems to me that Rufus at least leaves open the possibility of forms being
style argument to stand merely as a possible or permissible view, and he proceeds to address the problem of proper names on quite different grounds.

Rufus’ own argument against proper names in the Metaphysics commentary needs some expository work to uncover and clarify. Rufus himself does not lay out the argument in order but scatters the various premises over qq. 11-15. But taken together, the premises form a strong argument. As I will argue, Rufus’s actual argument against proper names runs as follows:

(1) A name must be taken from an intelligible principle.
(2) A name must be taken from what “perfects” a thing.
(3) Matter is what perfects an individual thing.
(4) Therefore, a name of an individual must be taken from its matter. (from 2 and 3)
(5) But matter is an unintelligible principle.
(6) Therefore, a name of an individual must be taken from an unintelligible principle. (from 4 and 5)
(7) Contradiction: 6 contradicts 1.

What leads to a contradiction in this argument is specifically the junction of premise (1) and premise (2). They present competing criteria for what a name is taken “from,” such that no name of an individual can fulfill both 1 and 2. But if no individual’s name can fulfill those criteria, there can be no proper names.

Each of these premises needs some digging to excavate from Rufus’ text. I will proceed to give some textual justification for each in order of difficulty. We get premises (1) and (5) most easily from q. 13. What Rufus actually states in q. 13 is that names must be given a forma, “from” the form. But this principle does not seem to function in so fundamental a way for him as it does for Richard of Clive and Robert Kilwardby. Rather, the fundamental issue for Rufus seems to be intelligibility. Whatever makes a thing intelligible is what the name should be imposed from. As it so happens, forms are what make things intelligible, and therefore names must be imposed from forms. But if matter were intelligible, matter could be a principle of understanding and names could be given from matter as well. Rufus even tells us so explicitly:

It should be said that if matter were intelligible in itself, then it would be nameable in itself; and then a name could truly be imposed from the matter in the same way that it is now imposed from the form. But things are not like that. For everything which exists is understood through its form, and it is named through the form and not through the matter.... So because the form is the principle of understanding the thing, the name must be imposed on the thing from the form and not from the matter.42

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42 Dixendum quod si materia per se esset intelligibilis, per se esset nominabilis, et tunc posset adeo vere nomen imponi a materia, sicut nunc imponitur a forma. Sed non est sic, sed omne quod est per suam formam intelligitur, et per formam nominatur et non per materiam.
Since Rufus grants that matter could function as a ground for naming if it were intelligible, it is clear that the fundamental criterion for naming is not simply that a thing have a form. Rather, the ground for naming must be intelligibility. This gives us premise (1). However, it happens to be the case that matter is unintelligible on its own (“things are not like that,” as Rufus says). So premise (5) stands as a counterpoint to premise (1), with the implied inference that forms give intelligibility and not matter.

In addition to the intelligibility criterion, Rufus also seems to think that a name must be given from whatever “perfects” a thing. He follows up his argument in q. 13 with a remark that seems to require this assumption. Rufus tells us that “because the individual is perfected through matter, and because matter does not have a name, an individual does not have a name.”43 The unspoken assumption is that the name of a thing somehow derives from what “perfects” it. As I will argue below, the unclear language about “perfecting” should be understood as language about making a thing to be fully what it is. Thus, when Rufus claims that an individual is “perfected through matter,” we should understand him to be saying that an individual is made to be fully individual through matter. But this interpretation of Rufus requires a look at an earlier passage in q. 11, where Rufus discusses what exactly makes individuals to be individual.

Rufus’ q. 11 is somewhat perplexing. It concerns whether matter or form is the cause of individuation, and Rufus’ enumeration of the causes of individuation is unfortunately not straightforward. In the course of two paragraphs, Rufus says there are four causes of individuation, then three, then two. However, the claim Rufus seems to consistently advocate is that matter, more than other cause of individuation, makes an individual to be individual. I will emphasize this aspect of Rufus’ discussion because I believe that this is what he has in the back of his mind when he writes that individuals are perfected by matter in q. 13. However, before we arrive at that claim, we must take stock of Rufus’ whole discussion of individuation. I have given the crucial text as a long quote below, so as to highlight the shifting number of causes of individuation which we must keep track of:

It ought to be said that three things are required for individuation according to the common opinion, and I add a fourth over and above. One is on the part of matter,

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43 Et ideo cum individuum perficiatur per materiam, et materia nomen non habet, ideo individuum nomen proprie non habet (ibid).
namely that it be the recipient of an individuated form. The second is a certain power existing in the matter, disposing the matter itself to receive the individuated form. The third is some external agent, since although a power disposes, it does not suffice for acting, as is clear in the case of a fallen seed. For there we see matter in receptive potency and a disposing power, but beyond this there is a certain producing agent that helps the disposing power, since the power on its own does not suffice for acting. And so it is clear that three things are required for individuation: an agent, matter, and a disposing power. And this power is posited as something intermediate between substance and accident, since it is not completely a substance nor completely an accident. And according to this position, it should be said that matter is required for individuation, but it is not the efficient principle of individuation. The efficient principle is the power existing in the matter, and this power is made signate in a way, insofar as it is under some such power—a power, I say, that is aided by the external agent. 44

Many things about this passage are unclear, not the least of which is the identity of the “four” different causes that Rufus thinks are involved in individuation. Clearly we can count (1) the matter, (2) the disposing power in the matter, and (3) the external agent. Rufus does not actually state the fourth cause, but it is tempting to assume that it must be the individuated form itself, which is received by the matter that has been properly disposed to receive it. But even if that is the case, it is hard to say which of the four causes is the one that Rufus thinks is peculiar to his own account—the one that “I add” over and above the common opinion. More importantly, it is hard to say whether the “disposing power” in matter actually accounts for the individuation of the form, or whether it merely enables matter to receive a form that has already been individuated. 45

Despite these uncertainties, however, there is one fact which I believe can be extracted clearly from the passage: the cause(s) of individuation are predominantly on the side of matter rather than of form. This is because the most fundamental cause of individuation—what Rufus

44 Dicendum quod tria requiruntur ad individuationem secundum communem opinionem, et quartum superaddam: Unum est a parte materiae quod sit recipiens formam individuatam. Alind est virtus quaedam existens in materia, adaptans ipsum materiam ad recipiendum formam individuatam. Tertium est quoddam agens extrinsecum, quia virtus licet disponat, non tamen sufficit ad agendum—quod plane patet in semine deciso, quia ideo est materia quae est in potentia receptiva et virtus disponens et praeter hoc est quidquid agensProduces coaduinans virtutem disponentem, quia virtus de se non sufficit ad agendum. Et sic patens est quod ad individuationem requiruntur tria: [agens], materia et virtus disponens. Et istor virtus ponatur medium inter substantiam et accidentem, quia neque est complete substantia neque complete accidentem. Et secundum hanc positionem dicendum quod materia coeigatur ad individuationem, non tamen est principium efficiens individuationis. Sed principium efficiens individuationis est ipsa virtus existens in materia, et haec virtus signata est quodammodo, secundum quod est sub virtute tal—virtute, dico, adiuta per agens extra (Rufus, Metaphysics VII, q. 11; E48vb-E49ra).

45 Karger (1998) explains the disposing power in matter as what individuates the matter itself, prior to the reception of the form (p. 59). Silvia Donati interprets Rufus’ virtus quaedam existens in materia as the active potency of matter so commonly ascribed to by early thirteenth-century commentators on Aristotle; see Donati (2005), “The Anonymous Commentary on the Physic in Erfurt, Cod. Amplon. Q. 312 and Richard Rufus of Cornwall,” Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales 72, pp. 291-296. Whatever the virtus is, my reconstruction of Rufus’ argument requires only that it be decidedly material, and that individuation occur predominantly through material causes, whatever the precise nature of those causes may be.
calls the “efficient principle”—is a disposing power *in matter*. Even if this power is not identical
to the matter itself, it is a material power and not a formal one. The importance of this fact
becomes clearer in the second part of Rufus’ solution to q. 11, immediately following the
passage cited above. Here we find Rufus mentioning his individuating principles again, this time
only giving form and matter. Of these two, Rufus emphasizes explicitly that matter contributes
more than form to the individuation of a particular:

Two things are required for individuation, namely that a form be apt to be numbered
and multiplied in diverse things, and that the matter be apt such that the received form
may be made signate through it. And thus something is required for individuation both
on the part of matter and on the part of form. **However, matter contributes much
more to individuation.** That is why I concede all the arguments [in the objections] that
show that matter is the cause, even though it is not the precise cause.46

Rufus is perhaps here intentionally simplifying his view, since he apparently collapses the
“disposing power” of matter into matter itself. But the preeminent role of matter is
unmistakable. In fact, Rufus indicates that matter actually does the individuating: matter is “apt
such that the received form may be made signate through it.” If this is the case, then it seems
that the disposing power in the first paragraph does not dispose matter merely to receive an
already individual form, but the power disposes the matter to individuate the form. Matter thus
accounts for the individuality of the form, and for this reason Rufus tells us that we may
acceptably speak of matter simply as “the cause of individuation,” even though matter is not the
precise cause. (Presumably, Rufus thinks that the precise cause is the disposing power.)

The conclusion I wish to derive from q. 11 is that matter (with its disposing power) is
responsible much more than the form for making an individual to be the individual it is. Matter
“contributes” (*confert*) more to individuation, and it is the principle effecting (*efficiens*)
individuation. Now, Rufus does not use the term “perfect” in q. 11 or tell us precisely what he
means by “individuation.” But when Rufus says that matter “perfects” the individual in q. 13,
it’s reasonable to assume that this statement should be read within the context of his beliefs in q.
11. The difference between matter causing individuation and “perfecting” the individual *qua*
individual should be slight: to perfect the individual as such would just be to make it fully
individual, to completely individuate it. “Individuation” of course might involve an ambiguity:

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46 Similiter potest dici sic quod individuum erit compositum ex duoibus principiis: ex definitione, id est ex forma, et materia, sicut dicit in littera. Duo igitur requiruntur ad individuationem, scilicet quod forma nata sit in diversis numerari et multiplicari et quod materia nata sit et per ipsam forma recepta posuit signari. Et iva requiritur aliquid a parte materiae et aliquid a parte formae ad individuationem, tamen materia multo magis confert ad individuationem. Unde omnes rationes quae ostendunt quod materia est causa concedo, non tamen est precissa causa (Rufus, *Metaphysics* VII, q. 11; E49ra).
it could mean “making an individual to be individual,” or it could mean “making an individual to be this individual, the very individual it is.” But this ambiguity is acceptable, since in either case the individuality of the individual is due to the matter. Matter most makes the individual to be completely individual and to be the individual it is.

This interpretation which I am advancing faces one significant textual problem. At one point somewhat later in q. 15, Rufus explicitly says that form is “naturally apt to be multiplied and to perfect many matters.” Form is said to perfect. So if form perfects matter, then is it not the case that form also perfects individuals and brings about their completeness as such?

In response to this problem, I am going to insist on Rufus’ precise language. Form perfects matter (in q. 15), but matter perfects individuals or individuation (q. 11). It is not so hard reconcile these competing claims. In q. 15, a form is an entity which can be universal and which can nevertheless complement many different pieces of matter (pluras materias). Insofar as matter is never actually found without form, it therefore makes sense to say that a form “perfects” the matter it informs. But that on its own doesn’t tell us anything about the formation or completion of the individual in itself. Form may be what completes matter, but what makes an individual to be the very individual it is turns out to be matter and not form. Matter therefore “perfects” the individual as such, as Rufus argues in q. 11.

If my interpretation is correct, then we have established the three most important premises in Rufus’ argument against proper names, and we are in a position to see how his conclusion follows. Recall that Rufus’ first and most fundamental assumption is that (1) a thing must be named from what makes it intelligible. To this premise we can now add two further premises: (2) an individual must be named from what “perfects” it as an individual, and (3) what perfects it is just the matter. So an individual must be named from its matter. But the matter alone is not enough—an individual must be named both from matter and from what makes it intelligible. As we saw from q. 13, (5) matter is unintelligible. So premise (5) is incompatible with the requirement in premise (1), effectively resulting in the conclusion that no name of an individual as such will be able to meet both criterion (1) and criterion (2).

Rufus’ argument against proper names in q. 13 therefore helps itself to the metaphysics of q. 11. If we start with the twin principles that a name must be given from whatever makes a

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47 Notari potest quod forma universalis de se apta nata est multiplicari et plures materias perficere, ut patet de luce. Unde in forma quae individuatur reperitur duplex natura: una quae apta nata est multiplicari et sic habet naturam universalis, et alia quae est apta signari (Metaphysics VII, q. 15; E49ra).

48 See note 47 above.
thing to be what it is, and must be given from what makes a thing intelligible, then we will have
two respective criteria which matter and form seem to meet individually, but which cannot be
met by both in the case of individuals. Matter is not intelligible, and form does not make
individuals to be what they are quia individuals. Rufus does not go into the details of other
applications of these principles, such as the convenient results they might offer for common
names. For instance, since forms make individuals to be what they are in terms of genus and
species, then generic and specific names must be imposed from generic and specific forms,
respectively. And it happily turns out that generic and specific forms are intelligible; so forms
are quite suitable on both counts for the giving of common names.

The rule “a name must be given from what makes something to be what it is,” and the
rule “a name must be giving from what makes something intelligible,” therefore look more
powerful and less arbitrary than the rule that “names must be given to/from forms.” They also
leave a notable loophole for the possibility of individuals having genuine proper names. If
matter were intelligible, then—since matter makes an individual to be what it is—an individual
could have a proper name. Or if individuals were perfected by something other than matter—
perhaps by forms—then they could have proper names. What Rufus does not seem to allow for
in his early Metaphysics commentary is that whatever makes individuals to be individual might be
intelligible to beings other than us. What if our individuating principles were fully intelligible to,
say, God or the angels? What difference would that make for an account of proper names?

It is precisely this concern that we find Rufus addressing in a text thought to be written
only a few years after his early Metaphysics commentary. In a substantial collection of questions
on cognitive psychology and individuation, we find Rufus raising the question of whether
individuals can be understood in themselves.49 Unsurprisingly, along with asking whether
individuals can be understood, Rufus also asks whether they can be named, either by us or by
God. Because Rufus’ approach to this question is markedly different from the approach of the
early Metaphysics commentary, we should examine his claims in the De ideis independently.

49 Rega Wood has kindly provided me with a draft of the relevant material from the De ideis. The text is preserved
in two manuscripts: Erfurt, Bibl. univ., Amploniana, Q.312, f.81va-85ra (henceforth “E”); and Prague, Archiv
Prazskeho Hradu, Ms. 80, fol. 33ra-36vb (henceforth “PR”). Preliminary discussions of the De ideis, its companion
treatise the De causa individuationis, and the attribution of these texts to Rufus have appeared in Noone (1987), An
Edition and Study of the Scriptum super Metaphysicam, bk. 12, dist. 2, PhD diss., University of Toronto, pp. 224 and
229; Wood (1996a), “Richard Rufus and the English Scholastic Discussion of Individuation,” in Marenbon (ed),
Aristotle in Britain during the Middle Ages, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 117-143; Wood (1996b), “Individual Forms: Richard
251-272; and Karger (1998).
4. Knowing the Difference: Richard Rufus and the *De ideis*

In the *De ideis*, both Rufus’ metaphysical commitments and the scope of his conclusion about proper names have changed. The metaphysical commitments are different insofar as Rufus seems to have abandoned the view that matter plays a primary role in individuation. Instead, he indicates that what makes individuals individual is a form superadded to their species.\(^{50}\) Meanwhile, the scope of Rufus’ conclusions about naming is narrower. He adopts the view that names must be explicitly imposed from forms, not just from what makes an individual generally intelligible.\(^{51}\) His conclusion in the *De ideis* is that individuals cannot be named *by us*. They can be named, however, by any being that is capable of understanding the various individuating components that make the various individuals of a species to be the individuals they are.

In this section we will first look briefly at the new relationship Rufus charts for us between matter, form, and naming. Then we will proceed to the details of Rufus’ argument that we cannot know the individuating component of individuals, and to his caveat that perhaps individuals can be known and named by God. I will conclude by raising two obvious objections to Rufus’ new style of argument and outlining his attempt to respond to them.

Rufus begins his discussion of proper names in the *De ideis* with the very general assumption that an individual requires something over and above its species and genera to make it an individual. The individual needs some added feature or metaphysical part—Rufus at first leaves the character of this *additum* vague—to account for the fact that the individual is this individual of the species rather than that one. It seems certain that this *additum* is a form, rather than a material constituent, though Rufus’ language in the *De ideis* is noncommittal. Toward the

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50 If it is the case (as Wood argues) that the *De ideis* and *De causa individuationis* are two parts of the same text, then Rufus certainly no longer holds a theory of individuation by matter in the *De ideis*. Instead, he thinks that individuation is caused by forms, with matter playing a role only as a *sine qua non* cause. As we will see, even if we look at the *De ideis* in isolation, Rufus’ account of individuals in the *De ideis* focuses on the formal determinations that divide genera into species; and it seems most likely that Rufus thinks that the *additum* which makes an individual is just another formal determination. See Wood (1996a), p. 121; Karger (1998), pp. 58-62; and Donati (2005), pp. 310-311.

51 “Whatever doesn’t have a form is not signifiable by a name, but by some other part of speech, for instance through a pronoun. And that is what Aristotle means when he says that a name primarily signifies nothing but the form, and secondarily the aggregate. And for that reason the substratum of matter is not signifiable by a name except under something else—namely, under a form.” *Eo enim quod forma non est, nomine significabilis non est, alia tamen parte orationis significabilis, atque per pronomen. Ut enim vult Philosophus, nomen principaliter non significat nisi formam, secundario aggregatum. Et sic sola substantia materiae nomine significabilis non est nisi sub alio, hoc est sub forma* (*De ideis* 16, ad q. 1, E84va/PR36rb).
end of the *De ideis*, Rufus considers whether the *addita* of individuals might be forms or matter, noting that if the *additum* is matter, then it will make individuals unnameable:

If Aristotle thought that what is added to the form of the species is nothing but that very substratum of prime matter, which (as I said before) is not signifiable with a name, then what follows except that (as Aristotle himself suggests) an individual cannot have a name but can only be signified by a discourse composed of the name of a species and a pronoun? For by a pronoun even the substratum of matter is signifiable. 52

This admission is interesting insofar as it appears to grant the train of thought that we saw in the *Metaphysics* commentary. Anyone holding that matter individuates a species into its individuals will be forced to acknowledge that individuals cannot have their own proper names. That is because matter itself cannot be named. To avoid this conclusion, one presumably needs a different theory of individuation. As we will see shortly, Rufus thinks that individuals are nameable by God. So if individuals are nameable by God, then it seems that Rufus cannot think that the *additum* is pure matter. Rufus has adopted a different theory of individuation, and apparently thinks that the *additum* is a form.

However, for various reasons, Rufus thinks that this *additum* cannot be known to us in this life. Rufus offers us an argument designed to show that we can neither know the *addita* of individuals nor give them names, even though God can do both. Unlike the early *Metaphysics* commentary, Rufus does not focus on matter and form as the constituents of individuals, but rather on the breadth of knowledge that is required to know which individuals are which. Rufus divides his general argument into two scenarios, one in which the number of individuals in the world is infinite, and one in which the number is finite. In each case he argues that we are incapable of knowing the *addita* that make each individual unique. The reason is not that the *addita* are unknowable in principle, but that in either case, there are simply too many *addita* for us to know.

For if [individuals] are infinite, as the philosophers seem to want, then the thing added above and beyond the form of the species, which makes this individual with this matter, cannot truly and absolutely be cognized and known, unless another thing added over and above the same form of the species, making another individual with another proper matter, is also known—and thus with every one of all the infinite number of *addita*, with

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52 *Si autem Aristoteles putavit quod illud additum super formam speciei nihil alium est quam ipsa substantia materiae primae, quae ut praedictum est nomine significabilis non est, quid remanet, nisi quod (ut ipse Aristoteles ponat) individuum nomen habere non posse, sed solum significari oratione composita ex nomine speciei et pronomine quo pronomeque et ipsa substantia materiae significabilis erat* (*De ideis* 16; E84vb / P36va).
every one of the infinite number of matters, making every one of the infinite number of individuals.\footnote{Quod si infinita sicut videntur velle philosophi, et non posit additum super formam speciei efficiens hoc individuum cum hac materia vere et simpliciter cognosci et scri, nisi et sciatur aliud additum super eandem formam speciei efficiens aliud individuum cum alia materia propria—et ita de aliis additis singulis infinitis cum aliis materiebus singulis infinitis alia individua singula efficientibus (Rufus, De ideis 16, ad q. 1, E84va / PR35rb-36va).}

If individuals are produced metaphysically by adding something over and beyond the form of their species, then to get Macavity or Mungojerrie, we would need not only the form of the species “cat” but also something to add to that form to make it belong determinately to Macavity or Mungojerrie. Whatever the additional individuating component is, we encounter a problem, for there must be the same number of individuating components as there are individuals in the world. Now this is problematic because, in order to know Macavity or Mungojerrie, Rufus claims that we need to know not only the *addita* producing Macavity and Mungojerrie but the *addita* producing every single other individual in existence. If we follow “the philosophers” in claiming that the number of individuals is infinite, then in order to name any given individual, we will need to know an infinity of such individuating components. That would be an awkward state of affairs—possible for God, but hardly possible for us. On the other hand, even if the number of individuals is finite, we would still need to cognize a mind-boggling number of *addita* in order to know which individual exactly was which one.\footnote{“And even if You have perhaps not ordained things this way, but rather in a more fitting way such that there is a determinate number of individuals, the case remains the same to us as before. For in such a multitude, we known neither the number nor consequently the distinguishing causes producing each and every one. And thus we are unable to impose a name with a proper quality on any of them.” Et si tu forte non sic ordinasti, sed forte decentius, scilicet quod sint numero certo individua determinata, idem apud nos redivinire quod prius. In tanta enim multitudine sunt quod nec numerum illum, nec per consequens causas distinguentes illa, singulara et efficientes novimus. Unde neque uni illorum nos nomen propria qualitate imponere possimus (Rufus, De ideis 16, ad q. 1, E84va / PR35rb-36va).}

All of this is a problem for naming individuals. Presumably, in order to name Macavity and Mungojerrie, we have to know them and be able to distinguish them from each other. But this is precisely what Rufus thinks we cannot do:

For I say that if things are like that, namely that the proper constituents of each individual cannot be known unless the proper constituents of all the other infinite individuals are known—while an infinite number cannot be known by our intellect—it remains that the constituents of no individual will be known by us. And that is why they are also not signifiable with a name by us,... and thus we are unable to impose a name with a proper quality on any of them.\footnote{Cum, inquam, sic sit, scilicet quod non possint sciri vel intelligi propria constituenlia hoc individuum quin et sint scita propria constituenlia alia individua omnia infinita—sed a nostro intellectu non sunt scita infinita—redivinire quod nullius individui constituenlia a nobis sint scita; quare nec a nobis nomine significabilia... Unde neque uni illorum nos nomen propria qualitate imponere possimus (Rufus, De ideis 16, ad q. 1, E84va / PR35rb-36va).}
So because we do not know all individuals, we will not know any given individual; and because we do not know any given individual, we will be unable to name it.

Throughout this argument, Rufus’s emphasis seems to be on the number of individuating constituents we would have to know, rather than on anything intrinsic to the *additum* that would make it unknowable on its own. He does not seem to think that the individuating component is unknowable in principle, but that to adequately know how this individual differs from all others, we would have to know the individuating components for all individuals. Such knowledge would be too broad for our intellects. However, precisely this emphasis on the number of *addita* rather than the (un)intelligible nature of the *addita* opens up the possibility that other minds might be able to cognize them. The obvious case of a mind capable of understanding an infinity of individuals is God. Rufus goes out of his way to remark, while addressing God, that “I do not see why, if You please, they [individuals] should not be signifiable with a name by You, to whom infinite things are finite.” The problem with naming individuals is clearly not a problem on the side of individuals themselves. God can both know them and name them, which means that whatever their metaphysical constituents are, they cannot be such as to be in principle unknowable. Moreover, the difference between God’s knowledge and our knowledge is simply a matter of how many individuals we can know, not a matter of specialized cognitive access into mysterious *addita* which are ungraspable by human minds.

Two obvious questions present themselves when we attempt to interpret Rufus’ general line of attack in this argument. First and most importantly, why does Rufus think that we or God would have to know all the *addita* of all individuals in order to know any of the *addita*? It seems quite unproblematic to think that we can know Macavity without knowing Mungojerrie and in fact without knowing anything about the other individuals in the world. Secondly, if Rufus can show that knowing any of the *addita* requires knowing all of the *addita*, what will prevent this argument from becoming much more universal than presumably Rufus intends it to be? For instance, why wouldn’t the argument show that we have to know all species of animal in order to know any species of animal, or all things in general in order to know any thing in particular?

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56 *A te autem cui infinita sunt finita non video quare, si tibi placet, non sint nomine significabilia. Et si tu forte non sic ordinasti, sed forte decentius, scilicet quod sint numero certo individua determinata, idem apud nos relinquitur quod prius. In tanta enim multitudine sunt quod nec numero illum, nec per consequent causas distinguentes illa, singula et efficiens novimus. Unde neque uni illorum nos nomen propria qualitate imponere possimus* (Rufus, De ideis 16, ad q. 1, E84va / PR35rb-36va).
In answer to the first question, Rufus seems to think that it is “crystal clear” (liquide claret) that knowing any individual’s *additum* entails knowing all individuals’ *addita*. His key claim is that genuinely knowing an individual’s *additum* would entail knowing precisely how that individual differs from all other individuals:

If this *additum* constituting this individual were known and understood, then the difference and distinction between it and that *additum* constituting that individual would be known and understood. So that the other *additum* constituting that other individual in itself would also be known and understood in itself. And thus for all the others, whether they are of a finite or infinite number. But since they are not understood or known by us, then they do not appear to be signifiable by us with a name. However, I do not see anything preventing them from being nameable by You.  

The notion of adequately distinguishing between individuals is crucial to this argument. Rufus seems to think that a fail-proof knowledge of which individual is Individual A is not possible as long as we do not have fail-proof knowledge of exactly how it is distinct from Individual B.

This requirement seems quite stringent, but it is possible to construct a justification for it. For instance, it is not immediately apparent that a knowledge of Individual A alone will guarantee that we will not occasionally mistake other individuals for A, as long as those individuals look sufficiently similar to A. Suppose for instance that the fashionable cat-about-town, Bustopher Jones, is going to a party which Macavity the Mystery Cat plans to crash. Also suppose that Bustopher Jones’s *additum* is “bcat” whereas Macavity’s *additum* is “mcat.” We can grant that we know Bustopher Jones’s “bcat” as accurately as we like. But if we do not thoroughly understand Macavity’s “mcat” as well, then Macavity could show up looking like “bcat” instead of “mcat,” and we will mistake him for Bustopher Jones. (This is, no doubt, how Macavity brings off many of his crimes.) The possibility of this mistake is troubling because it means we are capable of confusing Macavity and Bustopher Jones, not based on a failure to know good old Bustopher, but based on a failure to know Macavity’s difference from him. The problem can be brought into sharper focus by setting Bustopher Jones’s “bcat” and Macavity’s “mcat” side by side in the same room. Regardless of whether we know Bustopher, a failure to

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57 “What I said previously—that what is added to the matter and form of the most specific species, properly constituting this individual, cannot be understood or known unless all the other things which are added to the form of the species to make anything else are understood—is crystal clear, as you will see.” *Quod autem prius dixi non posse intelligi vel sciri additum super formam speciei specialissimae et materiam propria hoc individuum constitutentia, nisi et intelligantur omnia alia quae adica super eandem formam speciei, aliqaud iam efficientia liquide claret, ut videtur* (ibid, PR36va/E84va).

58 *Si enim fuerit scitum et intellectum hoc additum constitutens hoc individuum, scitur et intelligitur discretio eius et distinctio ab illo addito illud individuum constitutens. Quare et illud aliud additum aliud individuum constitutens in se, secundum se ipsum, et scitum et intellectum, et ida de aliis quae omnia (sive sint finita sive infinita individua), quia a nobis non sunt intellecta vel scita, a nobis non videntur nomine significationalia, cum a te nihil obstare videam quin sint nominabilia* (ibid, PR36va/E84va).
grasp “mcat” as “mcat” rather than as “bcat” will result in a failure to tell Bustopher apart from Macavity. The individuals will be indistinguishable to us.

The intriguing idea here is that knowledge of an individual is actually knowledge of a set of relations. One knows not just the thing itself, but the relations of difference that obtain between it and all other individuals of the same kind. Such knowledge entails knowing the foundations of those difference-relations in the *addita* of all the various individuals. So, Rufus reasons, if we do not know all the various *addita* of all the (possibly infinite number of) individuals, we can never be guaranteed that we’ve grasped the difference relations for any two individuals correctly. That means that we do not know the individuals as such, and therefore we cannot name them.

Given Rufus’ key insight into what it means to know individuals, we face a second and more challenging question. What prevents Rufus’ train of thought from proving much more than he would like? For instance, it seems as if this same argument would prove that we do not genuinely know *anything* in this life. Take animal species. To know the species “cat,” we would presumably have to know what distinguishes cats from gerbils and dogs and horses, and so on for all animal species. But that would require that we know all animal species; otherwise, there could be a species which we could confuse with cats under the right conditions. But no philosopher can claim to have exhaustive knowledge of each and every animal species. So it seems that no philosopher, including Rufus, can claim to know what a cat is.  

Rufus, as far as I can make out, takes the cat by the ears and claims that philosophers do in fact have knowledge of every animal species. He thus preserves his original principle—an entity can be known only if its differences from all other relevant entities can be known—while insisting that we do have this knowledge in the case of species, but not in the case of individuals. Rufus establishes the claim that we know all animal species by appealing to the methodology of division in the natural sciences (and in Aristotelian philosophy more broadly). The method of the natural philosopher is to divide genera and species into exhaustive and mutually-exclusive subgroups. For instance, we can be assured that we know all animal species in some sense,

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59 “The querulous raise the concern that, according to the account already given for individuals, we will also not be able to know or name even one of the species of animals—since unless they are all cognized, none of them is cognized. Therefore, not one of them would be nameable.” *Sed mox insurget sollicitudo garramenti et dict quod secundum rationem prius postulam de individuis, neque a nobis erit scita, neque nominata una de speciebus animalis, quia nisi fuerint cognitae omnes neque una. Ergo neque una nominabilis* (ibid, PR36va/E84va).
because we know that all animals divide into rational and irrational, or into terrestrial and aquatic and aerial; and we know what it means for any given animal to fall into one of those groups.

Have You not taught me to reply that for any things divided with a primary division, it is necessary both that one [member of the division] be known and that all other [members] be known? For when one member of a division is cognized, the other members are also cognized at minimum with a cognition saying what they are, which is expressed through their names.... We see a clear example of this in the division of “animal” into “rational” and “irrational.” Again, some animals are terrestrial and some aquatic and some aerial. Again, some are bipeds, some multipeds.60

The philosophical method of division works by giving us general knowledge of kinds, not by giving us particularized knowledge of each individual. But the knowledge it gives us is also knowledge of particular individuals insofar as they belong to kinds. So it is true (in a sense) to say that the method of division gives us knowledge of “all” animals, insofar as it gives us an exhaustive way of classifying any particular animal.61 By this means the method of division guarantees our knowledge of each possible animal-kind down to the lowest genus and species. Only at the level of the most-special species does Rufus think our intellects run into trouble. A most-special species such as “cat” or “gerbil” cannot be divided into further sub-species, and must instead be divided into individuals. The principles effecting the division are just the addita of the individuals. If we knew the addita or had a fail-proof way of classifying them, we would have an accurate grasp of the individuals in the same way that we have an accurate grasp of the difference between rational and irrational animals. But since our minds cannot know a sufficiently large number of addita, we are not able to grasp the necessary divisions at work, and thus we cannot know the individuals.62

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60 Nonne doces hic respondere quod quaecumque prima divisione a se ipsius dividantur necesse est cognito uno et alia omnia cognossi. Cognito enim uno membro minus divisionis, cognoscuntur et alia membra, ad minus cognitione disente quid est, quod dicitur per nomina. Si autem sub aliquo illius divisionis membro continantur plura, non necesse est illa plura secundum hoc quod sunt in se ipsius cognossi, sed solum inquantum participant intentionem communem illius membris. Exemplum patet in divisione animalis per rationale et irrationale. Iterum animalium alium terrestre alium aquaticum alium aerenum. Iterum, alium bipes, alium multipes. De divisione vero speciei specialissimae iva est quod omnia, sive sint finita sive infinita, immediate contra se prima divisione proveniunt (ibid, PR36va/E84va).

61 As Rufus remarks, “But if many things are contained under some member of that division, it is not necessary that the many be cognized in themselves, but only insofar as they participate in the common intention of that member.” Si autem sub aliquo illius divisionis membro continantur plura, non necesse est illa plura secundum hoc quod sunt in se ipsius cognossi, sed solum inquantum participant intentionem communem illius membris (ibid, PR36va/E84va).

62 “And therefore we see undisputably that when one additum constituting an individual is understood, then all such additum will be understood. But because this is not the case with us in this state, it remains that we are not able to impose names on them, even though those things taken in themselves can be signified with a name.” Et ideo in his indubitanter videtur quod intellecto uno addito unum individuum constituisse, intelligantur et omnia alia addita. Quod quia nobis in loco statu non est, remanet ut eis nomina nequeamus imponere, ipsa tamen de se ipsius quantum est de se nomine significari (ibid, PR36va/E84va).
This fact is important because it brings us back to the starting point of this chapter: the tight link between *nomina* and the definitions or formulas that express what things are. In *Metaphysics* VII, Aristotle tells us that a definition gives us information about a thing’s formal components instead of its matter. A definition tells us the genus of a thing and its differentiae, those features that make it different from other things of the same kind. It is easy to sense this framework behind Rufus’ comments in the *De ideis*. The philosophical method of “division” to which he appeals just is a method for working out definitions. If we know the general divisions that will give us the genus and differentiae of a thing, then we have *de facto* the ability to define the thing. Rufus himself emphasizes this fact: the division of a genus into its species is what gives us the “minimum” cognition necessary for saying what a thing is. 63 That minimum cognition in turn is precisely what we express through a thing’s (common) name. If however we do not know the relevant divisions for saying what a thing is, then we have neither a definition for the thing nor (as Rufus insists) a name for it.

5. Remarks

With Rufus’ *De ideis*, we have come full circle back to the relationship between naming and defining. If naming implies defining, then the giving of proper names requires us to work out a formal account of the individual as such. But as the four extended arguments in this chapter have shown, it is not clear that such an account is possible. Whether we appeal to an individual’s forms, its matter, or its (potentially accidental) combination of the two, it seems there are good grounds for thinking that our accounts will fail to grasp the individual in its unity or uniqueness.

If these arguments are sound, then Macavity the Mystery Cat is in trouble. Contrary to our hopes at the end of Chapter 3, it turns out that Macavity is incapable of providing the right sort of formal content to our cognitive faculties to allow us to grasp him as such. The problem, of course, is not that Macavity is not formally well-structured. He is a master at acquiring forms. But it is not clear that he can take on any form which will, of itself, give us information exclusively and exhaustively about Macavity. This means that, however well our senses and intellect may function, Macavity will not be able to provide us with information about himself as

63 Cogito enim uno membro unius divisionis, cognoscuntur et alia membra, ad minus cognitione dicente quid est, quod dicitur per nomina (De ideis 16, ad q. 1, E84va/PR36va).
an individual. And this, it seems, problematizes our ability to know and to name Macavity at the deepest level.
Conclusion

Between Jennyanydots’ gerbils and Macavity’s exploits of disguise, this study has at last hit bedrock in understanding the motivations for saying that individuals cannot have proper names. On the metaphysical level, Macavity and his feline friends are composites of matter and form. The matter is unknowable, and the forms may be either unknowable or multiply-instantiable. Because the forms and the matter both fail to provide information about Macavity and his friends as individuals, there is no way that we have intelligible access to them as such. That is why, on the epistemological level, our senses and imagination and intellect never receive the right sorts of information to allow us to generate individual concepts or well-delimited mental content about those individuals. And without well-delimited thoughts of these individuals-as-such, we lack the resources to give them genuine proper names.

As it turns out, the failure of individuals to provide us with “well-delimited” mental content is the crux of the issue. All the concerns we have seen from the critics of proper names can be reduced to this worry. If we cannot have well-delimited thoughts of individuals, we cannot work out definitions or predicates that capture them, and we cannot meet the Boethian criteria that would allow us to constitute genuine signs for them. The right sorts of thoughts or mental content are the very things that make an utterance a genuine *nomen* instead of a lookalike utterance that is merely a grammatical noun. Of course, no philosopher in our study has suggested that words like “Macavity” or “Bombalurina” are not parts of speech, or that they cannot function usefully as verbal tags. The critics of proper names admit readily that proper names can appelle or call out individuals, or function as “names of speech” without a problem. But those critics consistently claim that such utterances must be taken *merely* as grammatical nouns. However much energy we put into vocalizing the word “Macavity,” we will never turn it into a genuine sign of an individual. That is because it fails to bring anything definite about an individual to mind and therefore fails to be a real “proper name” in the medieval analysis of language.

How reasonable are the views of the critics of proper names on this point? On one hand, the epistemological and metaphysical commitments that drive the arguments against proper names are no longer widespread, and any number of twenty-first century readers reviewing the evidence here will most likely be unconvinced. But “reasonableness” in the history of philosophy is a moving target. As this study has endeavored to show, the critics of
proper names derived their criticisms from no views on language, cognitive theory, or metaphysics that were not widely shared by their colleagues in the thirteenth century. We can see the agreement right at the outset, when we find the critics of proper names appealing to the standard Boethian claim that a sign must cause a thought of a thing. Both the critics and the defenders of proper names agree on this point. To say that it is impossible in principle to have the relevant thoughts is to admit that it is impossible to bestow a name. Utterances like *garalus* and “non-cat” are cases in point. Words that bring nothing to mind, or that bring too many things to mind in too indefinite a manner, cannot function as genuine signs of anything.

Where the critics and defenders of proper names disagree is whether we can have the right thoughts about individuals in the first place. Even here, we see that the critics of proper names appeal to widely-accepted tenets of the cognitive theories of their day. Everyone in the thirteenth century acknowledged that the intellect is a universalizing power; and everyone acknowledged that the senses cognize particulars. Likewise, everyone granted the proofs against the intelligibility and definibility of particulars from *Metaphysics*, book VII, and about their perishability and lack of persistence in the cognitive organs. In metaphysics itself, it was almost a truism to say that matter is unknowable, or that forms are multiply-instantiable. The critics of proper names did not construct new doctrines out of thin air. They took the philosophical presuppositions, arguments, and systems already at hand and put them together in what seemed (to them) the most logical fashion.

On the other hand, how can much be said for the defenders of proper names? The counter-arguments they developed relied on the claim that we can have the right thoughts of individuals; and that claim, in turn, relied on the view that intellect and imagination can work together to grasp individuals as such. But the nature of the cooperation between intellect and imagination never becomes entirely clear, at least insofar as it relates to the individual’s ability to give or use proper names. Moreover, even the conjunction of intellect and imagination seems to allow for certain scenarios of the kind we saw in Chapter 4, where sufficiently similar particulars can be mistaken for each other. We can grant Geoffrey of Aspall or Adam Buckfield everything about the intellect “completing” our imagination and transforming our sensory grasp of an individual into an intellectual grasp. But if our sensory grasp of an individual starts by being indistinguishable from our sensory grasp of a different individual, then neither the imagination nor the intellect (or both together) will have a de re cognition of the individual as such. The reason is that the incoming information will be the same. If Macavity’s disguise is good enough,
he will present our cognitive faculties with forms that appear in Bustopher Jones as well as himself, and our imaginations/intellects will confuse Macavity with Bustopher and misapply their proper names.

Here it is perhaps important to note that the critics and defenders of proper names may be worried about two different things. The defenders of proper names seem to be most defensive about our human ability to grasp individuals at discrete moments in time, arguing that this ability grounds the giving of names to entities that we cognize more or less directly. Granted that a ginger cat is before me, they insist that my imagination and intellect will cooperate sufficiently well to enable me to grasp this cat in the present and successfully apply a label to the cat itself (as opposed to its cathood). The critics of proper names, however, consistently seem to be worried about what we might call cross-temporal application conditions. They worry over our ability to identify the same cat over time and to use the same verbal label to talk about it in all the possibly relevant circumstances. We might say that the difference between the critics and defenders of proper names is over this question: Does an utterance count as a name when it just happens to label an individual in the present, or must we have mastered the application conditions for its continued use?

This understanding of the difference between the critics and defenders of proper names fits very well with several features we have examined at length in the proper-name dispute. It fits with the fact that the critics of proper names consistently describe proper names as if they were given “by chance” or held “accidentally.” It also fits with the claim that proper names may be nouns in the grammatical sense but not genuine nomina in the philosophical sense. And the difference in concerns between the critics and defenders of proper names may partially explain why not many responses to the critics of proper names have survived (or were perhaps attempted in the first place). If the defenders of proper names thought the debate was only about discrete acts of naming in the presence of the named particular, then it may very well have been difficult to see a problem. Of course we can look at a ginger cat and say “Macavity.” The problem that the critics of proper names are concerned about is a much deeper problem.

On the whole, therefore, the position taken by the critics of proper names is stronger than that of the defenders. The critics recognize a more vexing semantic and conceptual puzzle than the defenders give them credit for. In wrestling with the application conditions for proper names, they illustrate just how systematically the criteria for application (or “signification,” viewed as constituting an understanding of a thing) arise from the basic tenets of Aristotelian
metaphysics and epistemology. It is not the case, *pace* Bacon, that the critics of proper names had been “deceived” by a bad translation of Aristotle, or that they were “destroying the intelligibility of both grammar and logic.”\(^{64}\) Quite the contrary. Richard Rufus, Richard of Clive, and the rest of the critics recorded by Bacon and Geoffrey paid very close attention to Aristotle. They worked out careful and consistent accounts of what we must know in order to identify individuals and give them proper names. It is not their fault if their research resulted in conclusions which were surprising to their colleagues, or to historians of philosophy living 750 years later.

In conclusion, however, it is time for a caveat. One crucial topic that we have not examined in this study is the issue of self-knowledge. The question of whether an individual can be known by some *other* intellect is different from the question of whether an individual can know itself. It seems to me that, if any of our philosophers thought that individuals can have self-knowledge, they should have granted that individuals can give themselves proper names. Moreover, if only the individual knows itself *qua* individual, then only the individual will be able to give itself a name. So we return to T. S. Eliot’s observations on the names of cats, which I quoted at the beginning of this study:

> But above and beyond there’s still one name left over,  
> And that is the name that you never will guess;  
> The name that no human research can discover —  
> But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.  
> When you notice a cat in profound meditation,  
> The reason, I tell you, is always the same:  
> His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation  
> Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:  
> His ineffable effable  
> Effanineffable  
> Deep and inscrutable singular Name.

If self-knowledge is possible, it seems to me that our thirteenth-century philosophers would have to agree with Eliot. The cat can name himself. And as far as proper names are concerned, that conclusion is encouraging both for cats and for everyone else.

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\(^{64}\) *DS* II.2.24, Fredborg 90; see Chapter 1, p. 19.
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